

Indigenous Television for the Majority: Analyzing NRK Sápmi's *Muitte Mu* (Remember Me)

Introduction

Imagine this scene: we are in the small Sámi village Karasjok, located in Finnmark, the northernmost county in Norway. Here, in the middle of Finnmarksvidda, the largest plateau in the country, the locals are dressed in their traditional costumes, or *gákti*, and they sit in a Sámi hut, or *gamme*. They are listening to the Swedish-Norwegian artist Elisabeth Andreassen, who is performing a *joik*, or traditional Sámi form of music, in honour of her husband. She wears a *liidni*, a Sámi kerchief. Her husband and their two daughters are also present.

Andreassen was the first artist to participate in the entertainment television series *Muitte mu*, which was produced by NRK Sápmi, the Sámi indigenous division of the Norwegian public service broadcaster NRK, in 2017. *Muitte mu* means *remember me*, and refers to *joik* as a way of remembering a person. In the series, six well-known Norwegian artists try to learn how to *joik*, a distinctive form of music which represents a powerful marker of identity for the Sámi. The series was criticised for commercialising *joik* and not paying adequate respect to Sámi culture or professional Sámi *joikers*.

This article uses the series and the ensuing criticism to explore the following dilemma: How can NRK Sápmi fulfil its obligations towards the Sámi population and simultaneously position itself in relation to the majority population? The following discussion addresses cultural appropriation and commercialisation, as well as traditionalist versus pragmatic views of indigenous cultural expressions. NRK Sápmi's main mission is to provide programming for the Sámi people, and the broadcaster is obligated to present a wide range of programs and services which maintain and strengthen a feeling of Sámi nationhood, including the Sámi language, culture and identity. However, the broadcaster also wants the country's general population to acquire a greater knowledge of Sámi culture and society.¹ Last but not least, of

course, NRK Sápmi must adapt to the pragmatic realities of a competitive and market-oriented media environment.

Media research on indigenous people generally focuses on either how they are presented in the media by the majority non-indigenous people or how indigenous people present themselves (McCallum and Waller 2013; Ginsburg 1991). The latter focus involves counter-narratives—that is, how the indigenous media institutions want to tell their own stories on their own terms (Hanusch 2013). Several researchers have begun to problematise the majority's apparent disinterest in media content (Lang 2015, Meadows 2005, Skogerbø 2001), and this article contributes to the field of indigenous media studies by exploring the measures taken by NRK Sápmi to reach the majority and the dilemmas raised by this strategy. In it, I argue that *Muitte mu* is in fact a ground-breaking interethnic series, and the result of productive dialogue between indigenous and non-indigenous populations. To attract the latter, however, NRK Sápmi relies upon Sámi iconography and celebrities as a kind of incentive. The criticism of the series finds this tactic representative of commercialisation and cultural appropriation of Sámi culture and thus seeing it as counter to the broadcaster's main goal of serving the Sámi themselves.

In the first part of the article, I will place *Muitte mu* in a public service broadcasting context, and then I will introduce the *joik* as a cultural expression with a problematic past, and, in turn, as television entertainment. In the second part, I will analyse the series, the criticism of it and the dilemmas which the series raises.

NRK: uniting the nation

NRK is a state-owned radio and television broadcaster, and the Norwegian Parliament has assigned NRK's mandate and owner role to the Ministry of Culture. NRK is financed by a license fee, meaning that it does not depend on private advertising money, nor do advertisers

determine its content. As a public-service broadcaster, of course, NRK has certain obligations. The NRK placard, introduced in 2007, articulates the state's demands and expectations in regard to NRK's activity. According to this narrative, NRK should strengthen democracy, language, identity and culture in Norway (Ministry of Culture 2014). It should also mirror Norway's geographical diversity and convey knowledge about different people and groups in Norwegian society.

Though NRK is a non-commercial broadcaster, it is aware of ratings and faces fierce competition from commercial television channels, not to mention streaming channels such as Netflix and HBO. In the monopoly era from 1960 until 1981, NRK was the only national television channel in Norway, and competition did not impact television scheduling in the same way. Public opinion at that time was critical of the passive consumption of television content, and audience enlightenment was considered an important aspect of programming (Syvertsen 1992).

During the 1980s, Norwegians received access to cable and satellite television. With the introduction of the commercial television channels TV3 in 1987, TV Norge in 1988 and TV2 in 1992, new scheduling principles arrived in Norway as well (Ihlebak, Syvertsen and Ytreberg 2011). The commercial channels focus entirely upon their target audiences, which generally consist of younger viewers. To keep up, NRK now consists of four television channels, each of which has its own specific target audience. *Mutte mu* was broadcast on NRK1, which aims to reach a broad audience, young and old, and 'build common references' for the people (Fordal 2017). According to Ihlebak, Syvertsen and Ytreberg (2011), NRK1's prime-time programs have changed since the monopoly era, and NRK1 now focuses more on entertainment.

NRK Sápmi: serving the Sámi people

Paragraph 14 of the NRK placard explicitly states that NRK should strengthen Sámi language, identity and culture, and that NRK should broadcast programs for the Sámi population on a daily basis. NRK Sámi Radio, which later changed its name to NRK Sápmi, is the indigenous division of NRK. It was established in 1976, and its main office is located in Karasjok in northern Norway. According to NRK Sápmi's webpage, the first radio program on NRK Sápmi was broadcast in 1946 (NRK Sápmi 2008). The next year, public-service broadcaster YLE in Finland started broadcasting its first Sámi radio program as well, and in 1965 the public-service radio broadcaster Swedish Radio followed suit as well. Since 2001, the Sámi television news program *Oddasat* has been broadcast nationwide in Norway, Sweden and Finland on weekdays, with subtitles in the majority language. The program is produced through a collaboration between Sámi journalists from NRK Sápmi, YLE Sápmi and SVT Sápmi.

NRK Sápmi is financed and owned by the state, and the parliament and Ministry of Culture therefore influence its work. The number of Sámi media institutions in the Sámi-speaking areas in Norway, Sweden, Finland and Russia is limited, as mentioned above, and NRK Sápmi is the largest of them (NRK 2013).² As Torkel Rasmussen (2018, 88) notes, it is a challenge to get information about Sámi media in these four countries, because this data is not systematically gathered or included in national-level statistics. NRK Sápmi offers content on television, radio and online which is intended for the Sámi people—a wide range of programs and services which are supposed to maintain and strengthen Sámi nationbuilding, including the Sámi language, culture and identity. NRK Sápmi's website announces, 'NRK Sápmi will through its programming contribute to all Sami can and will want to remain Sami, and that the country's general population acquire a greater knowledge of Sami and the Sami culture and society' (NRK Sápmi 2013). It adds that NRK Sápmi shall publish content in

Sámi languages, tell Sámi stories, be the glue in Sámi society, and represent a Sámi arena for news, culture, entertainment and content for children and young people.

According to Shayna Plaut (2014, 81), Sámi media is generally acknowledged to be both a right of *and* a service for the Sámi people. In fact, the indigenous media is often described as a manifestation of self-determination, self-expression, and the drive to offer alternative representations and perspectives which are often disregarded by other media (Pietikäinen 2008,177). This aligns with a more sprawling perspective whereby all Sámi political, economic, cultural and social rights are gathered under the rubric of self-determination (Plaut 2014, 93). According to Plaut (2014) and Sari Pietikäinen (2008), Sámi journalists feel a responsibility to their people in terms of preserving and presenting Sámi language, stories and news.

Nevertheless, NRK Sápmi must also produce content for the majority population to ensure its viability as a broadcaster, and this aim can be at odds with its Sámi priorities. Aslak Paltto, a Sámi journalist on the Finnish side of Sápmi and a former president of the Sámi Journalism Association, articulates this challenge: “When you want to make the news for your people and the whole country, you have two totally different cases (stories)” (Plaut 2014, 89). Making things even more complicated, NRK Sápmi is financed by *one* nation-state (Norway) but seeks to simultaneously contribute to Sámi nationbuilding in three others as well (Sweden, Finland and Russia). This can be challenging when the broadcaster finds itself constrained by national borders, the institutional framework of its parent company, Norway’s public service remits and the resources available to it (Skogerbø, Josefsen and Fjellström 2018).

Joik: from shame to a vital expression of Sámi culture

Sámi content in Norwegian mainstream media is scarce and often consists of stereotypical images such as reindeers and traditional Sámi costumes or negative representations with a focus on conflict (Eira 2015, Simonsen 2007). *Joik* is one example of a Sámi cultural expression which has seldom been seen by a large Norwegian audience on national television. It is a vocal genre characterised by distinctive vocal techniques, in which the performer *joiks* someone or something rather than *joiks about* something. One can also *joik* the landscape, nature or animals. A *joik*'s melody and sounds can express opinions, feelings or characteristics or capture memories about an object, place or person. A *joik* can be performed alone or with others at social gatherings, in formal or informal settings. It has been said that *joik* performance reflects a complex mingling of language, music, environment and people (Ramnarine 2009, 189).

In pre-Christian Scandinavia, *joik* was often associated with shamanism and sorcery and therefore prohibited. 'Researchers in the early twentieth century believed that *joiking* was a disappearing tradition, a view strengthened by *joik* performance prohibitions and the negative perceptions towards *joik* held by Sámi themselves' (Ramnarine 2009, 197). In the sixteenth century, the Norwegian state prohibited *joik*, and those who broke the law were punished (Hætta 1994, 72). As recently as the 1970s, *joiking* in Finland was forbidden in some schools, and even into the 1990s *joiking* was prohibited in certain areas of Norway (Somby 1995)—until 1989, for example, one was not allowed to *joik* in the primary school in the Sámi village Kautokeino in Finnmark (Graff 2016). Harald Gaski (2011) shows how the history of the *joik* is a story of politics, connected to the 'Norwegianisation' process and the tension between assimilation and resistance.

According to Ramnarine (2009), *joik* is now experiencing a renaissance in popularity reflected by, for example, the fame of the Sámi artist Mari Boine. She *joiked* at the Norwegian crown prince and princess's wedding in 2001 and has performed around the

world. *Joik* performance was a vital part of Sámi political activism in the 1970s, and it has become an important symbol of the Sámi indigenous political movement today. *Joik* performers have brought considerable attention to the ways in which commercial recordings, media technologies and global music markets have been used to promote indigenous politics and shape global indigenous sensibilities.

Joik is first and foremost a cultural product of the Sámi, and its musical meaning, tone painting and referentiality, and linguistic frames are not easy to translate or even explain to outsiders (Ramnarine 2009). Gaski (1999) calls it a ‘secretive text’ and points to specific Sámi interpretations of the practice, which is deeply rooted within this culture, which may be elusive to people from other cultures: “On the other hand, no one is disputing the worthwhile and the interesting challenge of attempting to communicate between—or coping on the borderline between—an insider and outsider’s view of these issues” (Gaski 1999, 10–11). What happens (on either side) when someone tries to cross this borderline and understand something so culturally evocative? How can media vehicles serve as settings for this kind of dialogue between the indigenous and the majority? The following discussion shows that the NRK Sápmi series *Muitte mu* constitutes an attempt to cross this borderline.

***Muitte mu*: Introducing “the unknown world of *joik*”**

The television series *Muitte mu* was broadcast on NRK1 for the first time in 2017, on Saturdays at 22.25 pm. Saturday evenings are called ‘lördagsunderholdning’ [Saturday evening entertainment] on NRK1 and it is an important time slot where NRK try to reach the whole family and a broad audience in general. In the television series, six famous non-Sámi Norwegian artists were flown to Finnmark, the northernmost county in Norway. Each episode features a different artist’s response to the same two tasks. First, the artist was to practice Sámi vocal technique and learn to *joik* in just three days with an experienced Sámi *joiker*—

each program introduced a new *joik* teacher as well. Second, the artist needed to create a *joik* to honour a special person of his or her choice and perform it in front of that person and a local audience in the Sámi village of Karasjok.

A comprehensible introduction to a different culture

As a genre, *Muitte mu* was described as a ‘music program’ by the Norwegian national newspaper VG, though it might be better labelled an entertainment series. Each program followed the same structure and dramaturgy, starting with an introductory sequence during which a Norwegian voiceover summed up the series as images of the different artists, *joik* teachers and locations appeared on screen.

In each episode, following the introduction, the artist arrives at the airport in Lakselv, Finnmark, and viewers accompany him or her for the car ride to Karasjok. We hear the artist’s first impressions of Finnmark as the tundra passes by, as well as thoughts about the upcoming task. The first episode introduces majority Norwegian artist and singer/songwriter Elisabeth Andreassen and her *joiking* teacher, Sara Marielle Gaup Beaska from the duo Ádjágas, who speaks Sámi when she explains her connection to *joik*. All of the *joikers* who speak Sámi use the language when they are interviewed; only teachers Frode Fjellheim and Maxida Mårak do not speak Sámi.

Elisabeth sees a road sign where it says both Karasjok (the Norwegian name of the village) and Kárásjok (the Sámi name). She says, “First time in Karasjok”, then tries to pronounce the word in Sámi.³The first meeting between Elisabeth and Sara Marielle occurs outside, and we never actually see where any of the *joik* teachers live. Dressed in Sámi clothes, Sara Marielle sits by a fire near some old, rustic wood houses. She uses a Sámi knife to lift a coffee pot from the fire, and to cut off some dried reindeer meet, which she serves to

Elisabeth later on. They sit on reindeer rugs and drink the *bålkaffe*, or traditional coffee which has been brewed over a fire.

The *joik* lessons take place at an arranged location—a room filled with Sámi objects which have no particular connection to one another except their Sámi origin. There are Sámi articles, spread around more or less randomly, including a carpet and various *duodji* (handicrafts). There are also musical instruments and pieces of equipment, including a guitar and a gramophone. Taken together, these objects give a certain impression of Sámi culture as sort of familiar, or at least unthreatening and even comprehensible, to the outsider (Høydalsnes 2003). The objects serve as readily recognisable Sámi signifiers for the greater Norwegian audience.

Eli Høydalsnes (2003) has shown how early geographic-ethnographic descriptions of the Sámi produced a matrix of Sámi exoticism and Sámi iconography, such as cross-country-skiing Sámi, reindeers with sleighs, and the shaman as a wizard. According to Høydalsnes (2003:107), when various ordinarily distinct situations and images are put together in one frame without any logic other than a Sámi identification, they are understood or interpreted as something else—metonymies or allegories, even. In *Muitte mu*, the settings—both the initial outside meeting between the Norwegian musicians and Sámi *joikers* and the indoor setting of the lessons themselves—are staged and arranged by NRK Sápmi to serve as an introduction to Sámi culture which does not challenge existing stereotypes but instead exploits them for the benefit of the majority viewer.

The majority's gaze

The target audience of this series, as mentioned above, is the non-Sámi majority: the voiceover is in Norwegian, and all of the participants speak Norwegian to each other. When they are interviewed alone, some of the Sámi *joik* teachers speak Sámi, but these sequences

are short and do not disrupt the program's general inclination. *Muitte mu* also tries to fulfil its obligation towards the Sámi population by setting its action in a Sámi village, exploring a Sámi theme (*joik*), and introducing Sámi teachers. Still, the well-known Norwegian artists—popular celebrities who most Norwegians know—tend to steal the show. They are also ciphers for the target audience, whose members are supposed to identify with the celebrities as they are introduced to this new culture. On January 21, 2017, Margaret Berger, one of the Norwegian artists, wrote on her blog “I really recommend this program, not just because I'm part of it but because it is important that we relate to Sámi culture more often. They have so much to teach us.” To this way of thinking, the majority should learn from the minority, a position which has been explored by several kinds of television programs, such as travel programs where Western people visit some distant land. One example of this is the Norwegian series *Den store reisen* (based on the international television format *Ticket to the Tribes*, owned by the Dutch production company Eyeworks), in which three Norwegian families visit three different indigenous groups. It was broadcast on NRK in 2008 (season 1) and 2010 (season 2). This series was criticised for presenting indigenous peoples in a primitive way and reinforcing stereotypical notions of modern versus traditional cultures. *Muitte mu* has not received any of this kind of criticism, and although this program also involves a meeting between indigenous and non-indigenous people, *Muitte mu* focuses more on the learning process than on the differences between majority and minority.

As NRK Sápmi's editor-in-chief Ole Rune Hætta himself describes it, the target audience follows the celebrities into the ‘unknown’. The Norwegian artists are clearly positioned as the centre of attention—in the introductory sequence, the voiceover explains that the six artists have had only three days to conquer the unknown landscape of the *joik*”. While this assumes no familiarity with the practice on the part of majority Norwegian viewers, it seems to imply that all Sámi would know about it. While some might not have a

deep knowledge of *joik*, it remains part of the Sámi school curriculum and, according to Gaski (2011), has a special cultural status because of its function as an identity marker. In addition, the use of celebrities is a means of attracting majority viewers. While the *joik* teachers might be celebrities among the Sámi, they are not familiar to the Norwegian audience writ large. Celebrity coverage is of course omnipresent in contemporary media culture, and celebrity journalism attracts a wide range of people. The use of celebrities points to the commercial aspect of this television series as well—its emphasis on attracting a broad audience in keeping with its primetime Saturday slot. Although NRK is a non-commercial public broadcaster, it is also part of a competitive, market-oriented environment and, in order to justify the use of license money, it needs to be watched and to reach its intended audiences successfully.

The reactions

After *Muitte mu* premiered in January 2017, one of the biggest newspapers in Norway, VG, published a review which read, in part,

Here is a prejudice on behalf of my own part of the country: the function of the *joik* as an exotic performance every time one needs something “authentic” at the Olympic final ceremony, the European song contest and children’s television still makes this expression beautiful, but incomprehensible for us in the southern parts. What the content of it really is, is something most people do not care about (Bøe 2017).

The reviewer concluded that the program contributed to enlightening the Norwegian population without being pedantic.

With the series, NRK Sápmi made television history, since it was the first time a television program produced by NRK Sápmi was broadcast as a primetime program on Saturdays on NRK1, the main channel of NRK. A total of 402 000 people watched the premiere, and during spring 2017 the series commanded a market share of 23 per cent, while

the most popular program on Saturday primetime that spring, *Lindmo*, commanded a market share of 45 per cent (Kantar Media 2017). NRK Sápmi described the series as a success.

Although the series received many positive comments on social media platforms, not everyone was happy. Two months after the first program was broadcast, NRK Finnmark, one of the regional divisions of NRK, addressed the negative comments in a radio debate on 14 March which involved Håkon Isak Vars, a member of a *joik* association from the Sámi village of Kautokeino in Finnmark, and Ole Rune Hætta, editor-in-chief of *Muitte mu*, NRK Sápmi (NRK Finnmark 2017). The host asks Vars how he thinks *joik* is presented in the program. Vars responds that the program does not treat *joik* in a respectful way; it feels commercialised, and “one can almost say that it prostitutes Sámi culture just to get a moment of pleasure, or fame.” He problematises the conceit that a public-service broadcaster can shape a program for a majority audience in which non-Sámi people, “who have no clue when it comes to *joik*” learn to perform it, or, in reality, simply to make some related sounds. The host asks whether non-Sámi can learn how to *joik*, and Vars states that they may learn how to make the sounds, but *joik* has a long tradition which makes it impossible to learn in just three days: “I have not seen in any of the programs that they tell the history of the *joik*, or the background. I think it is a shallow way of making a Saturday entertainment program, at the cost of Sámi culture”.

Ole Rune Hætta counters by stating that the program contributes to the demystification of *joik*, making it more accessible for all people. “We have the same goal as Vars and his companions—namely, to make the *joik* more visible”. He goes on to insist that what the Norwegian artists do on the program is not so different from what Sámi artists have been doing for the last thirty years—that is, mixing music and *joik*. Vars agrees that it is good to see *joik* become more well known, but he wishes NRK would introduce a distinction between what it is showing and what Vars describes as “original *joik*”, Sámi people who *joik* from

entirely *within* their own culture. Vars accuses *Muitte mu* of implying that Sámi culture is not acceptable, in the eyes of NRK Sápmi, until majority Norwegians have taken it on board:

“Evidently, it is not enough that the Sámi regard *joik* as their own precious culture, a culture treasure— someone else needs to approve it before it can be accepted and respected as Sámi culture.”

The host then wonders whether NRK could have used Sámi *joikers* as the stars of the show, rather than Norwegian artists. Hætta responds that the target audience for this program was majority Norwegian, and that the goal was to introduce *joik* to more people for the benefit of all. One way to do this was to use a known quantity, a Norwegian celebrity, to stand in for the average member of the target audience and in this way engage with the unknown quantity, or *joik*. Hætta says he thinks it would be difficult to make the program the way Vars suggests, and he does not agree with him in any case: “I mean that *joik* is for everyone, and everyone should be allowed to learn how to *joik*”. Vars notes that if everyone could learn how to *joik*, then it would be difficult to categorise what is *joik* and what is not. Vars compares *joik* with *duodji*, or Sámi traditional handicraft, and says that people who do not know how to *joik* may try to make money from it. He prefers that *joik* remain “real Sámi culture” because there is a difference between “real stuff” and fake.

Cultural appropriation of the *joik*?

As we see in the exchanges above, the NRK producer advocates for the importance of introducing *joik* to the majority population and generally making Sámi culture more visible. This is a noble end, especially since the majority seldom sees Sámi content in Saturday primetime, and because the series represents a positive approach to it. The question becomes the following: How well has NRK done with this mandate?

While the Sámi *joiker* supports the idea of making his art more visible, he argues that non-Sámi should not be the focus of the series which does so. His argument has two components. First, he thinks non-Sámi people are not able to *joik*. This point of view evokes what Gaski (1999) describes as *exclusive communication*—that is, *joik* is not something which an outsider can readily understand, because it is connected to an exclusive, even hidden cultural context involving aspects of language, cultural opposition, assimilation and colonialism. Second, he questions why the series did not use the Sámi themselves as the main characters, even though *joik* is a Sámi form of music. This criticism touches upon cultural appropriation, or “the use of a culture’s symbols, artefacts, genres, rituals, or technologies by members of another culture” (Rogers 2006, 474).

A negative form of cultural appropriation is cultural exploitation, which involves elements of stealing, or taking, as well as commodification. When the *joik* enters the world of entertainment television, it is no longer the user value and original context which matters—the *joik* becomes a commodity. *Joik* can therefore be described as a turbulent indigenous object (Kramvig and Flemmen 2018) which raises tensions in the public concerning its respectful use, and ownership: “Commodification, by abstracting the value of a cultural element, necessarily removes that element from its native context, changing its meaning and function and raising concerns about cultural degradation” (Rogers 2006, 488). Also inherent to this discussion of commodification are the issues of sameness and cultureless identities (Perry 2001)—if everyone is free to *joik*, then *joik* is no longer something specifically Sámi. Linda Tuhiwai-Smith, a Māori professor of indigenous education, argues that colonisation involved not only the annexation of land but also an intrusion upon the indigenous mind: “It appals us that the West can desire, extract and claim ownership of our ways of knowing, our imagery, the things we create and produce” (Smith 1999, 1).

The issues of cultural appropriation and colonisation of the indigenous mind are present in other arenas as well. In an article about indigenous language revitalisation policy in New Zealand and Norway, Nathan John Albury (2015) shows that New Zealand described its Māori language policy as contributing to a contemporary *interethnic* New Zealand identity—a bicultural perspective reflecting ‘culture as created as people live together in a society, making their history, language, and customs as they go’ (Rata 2007, 80). Norway, on the other hand, defines Sámi language as a matter of *Sámi* rights for Sámi people. In Norway, then, language remains strongly connected to ethnicity. Thanks to this exclusion of the majority from the language revitalisation process, Sámi languages and policy stay territorialised and therefore invisible to majority Norwegians (Albury 2015, 1). Linking this aspect of language to the ongoing discussion here about *joik*, I would argue that *Muitte mu* in fact breaks new ground, crossing over the border between what is exclusively Sámi and what is not by trying to connect the *joik* to an interethnic national identity.

***Joik* as authentic versus “fake”**

Yet the series remains challenging in a number of ways. The Norwegian artists’ performance of *joik* begs fundamental question concerning the authenticity of the practice: What is real *joik*, and what is fake? Does the practice lose its value when it changes hands? These questions, of course, are not limited to *joik* but apply to many musical or cultural expressions, indigenous and majority. Should an art form stay “pure” or be allowed to develop, even to the extent that it comes to accommodate other art forms and perhaps even become a new art form along the way? Vars displays what Lena and Paterson (2008) describe as a traditionalist approach to *joik*, which advocates for the preservation of a genre’s musical heritage, techniques, history and rituals and can mean that the “performers’ race, class, educational attainment, and regional origins are often used as markers of authenticity” (2008, 706).

Countering the traditionalist or purist view is the pragmatic view—as Gaski (1999) points out, the *joik* has kept its original character in the hands of certain “traditionalists” or purists, but changed with other “innovators”. These innovators are moved by external but also internal creative forces.

Ultimately, of course, any discussion of a traditionalist versus a pragmatic view of *joik* needs to address issues of identity and historical context. As discussed, *joik* is a special form of music, in the sense that it is a profound symbol and identity marker of Sámi culture. Any development of *joik* as a musical expression is therefore automatically freighted with questions of ethnicity, ownership and cultural heritage.

NRK Sápmi’s dilemma: how to please all

The dilemma for NRK Sápmi, then, is how to represent Sámi culture in a way that attracts the majority viewer while simultaneously satisfying expectations “inside”, from the Sámi themselves. According to Mathisen (2004, 17), the Sámi have suffered from the hegemonic representations assigned to them. While the majority generally prefers to view indigenous cultures as natural, authentic, noble and creative, this perspective’s origins are illegitimate: “It is problematic that this positive image of indigenous cultures is so deeply rooted in how the majority populations have represented them”. The Sámi’s reputation as a nature-loving people has deep historical roots and must be understood in the context of the imbalance of power between majority and minority cultures. Furthermore, issues of importance to the Sámi themselves rarely reach the mainstream media (Skogerbø 2001), meaning that a counterbalance to the majority representation of this culture rarely exists.

Could NRK Sápmi have chosen to make a program about *joik* exclusively with Sámi artists? A search of NRK’s webpages reveals that NRK did produce a program about *joik* with Sámi performers and a Sámi host—in 1983 (NRK n.d.). During the monopoly era, NRK was

not vulnerable to competition and could therefore broadcast programs without the fear of losing viewers. Since that time, television scheduling has become increasingly delicate and sensitive to competition; though NRK1 has a more diverse profile than purely commercial broadcasters, the number of its entertainment programs tripled in the period 1988–2008 (Ihlebak, Syvertsen and Ytreberg, 2011). The Sámi-exclusive program about joik probably would not attract that many viewers today, as Ole Rune Hætta admits. Certainly, NRK has a clear focus on its target audiences and genres, which, for *Muitte mu*, were the majority and entertainment.

That is, NRK Sápmi was not trying to broadcast an informational program about *joik* as the exclusive purview of the Sámi *joikers*. Though the majority Norwegian celebrities in *Muitte mu* are very open, interested and respectful towards joik and their indigenous teachers, they were given only three days to learn and then practice the art form. Enlightening the audience therefore appears to be more of a bonus than a goal. *Muitte mu* captures the inherent tension between information and entertainment, whereby the latter implies commercialisation and an interest in pleasing, rather than challenging, the audience (Fairclough 1995).

The year in which *Muitte mu* premiered, *joik* appeared in another entertainment series as well. In October 2017, each of the artists in the Norwegian entertainment series *Stjernekamp* [Battle of the stars] performed a *joik*. This series, broadcast on NRK1 on Saturday evenings, involved competitions among professional artists in different genres in each episode. The series debuted in 2012, and *joik* appeared as one of the genre for the first time in 2017. The timing was perhaps not a coincidence, since 2017 marked the 100th anniversary of the first Congress for the Sámi people, a year of Sámi celebration of joint organised political movements for Sámi rights and recognition. *Joik* was one of the genres featured in *Stjernekamp* in 2018 as well, and NRK Sápmi contributed to making this happen. On 27 October 2018 on NRK's website, NRK Sápmi Director Mona Solbakk wrote that

Norwegians' use of *joik* in the entertainment series *Muitte mu* and *Stjernekamp* had received mixed reactions. She then reasserted that *joik* should not be limited only to the Sámi—the more people who learn it, the brighter its future will be, she insisted (Solbakk 2018).

Conclusion

This article has discussed the television series *Muitte mu*, which uses Sámi content to entertain the majority Norwegian population, elucidating the complexity of NRK Sápmi's obligations as an indigenous division of NRK. The role of indigenous media has been framed as involving manifestations of self-determination and self-expression based on the expectations of alternative representations from an indigenous point of view (Hanusch 2013). While the Sámi is the main target group for NRK Sápmi, it also has obligations towards the majority population. In the series *Muitte mu*, NRK Sápmi tries to reach a broad audience by using Norwegian celebrities and Sámi iconography to create a familiar atmosphere while introducing “the unknown landscape of *joik*” to the majority. I conclude that NRK Sápmi breaks new ground with this interethnic series by at least attempting to cross boundaries and place *joik* on the national agenda.

The *joik* is a strong identity marker of the Sámi, so the series raises questions about cultural appropriation and a traditionalist versus a pragmatic view of *joik*. The Sámi culture has long been subject to Norwegianisation, which has involved the erasure of cultural elements such as the *joik*. When *joiker* Håkon Isak Vars claims that the *joik* belongs to the Sámi—that is, it distinguishes the Sámi from the majority—he points to the art form as a way of gaining recognition. The alternative, cultural appropriation, involves power relationships whereby the majority coopts elements from a minority group, such as the *joik*. In the NRK Sápmi series, it is the Norwegians who are the novice pupils, while the Sámi teachers are the masters, and the cultural appropriation does involve evident respect for the *joik* as a cultural

expression.

If the series had focussed solely on Sámi *joikers* instead of Norwegian celebrities, it might have presented a “truer” image of Sámi culture and *joik*, but in today’s fiercely competitive television market, it would not have penetrated the broader audience. Interestingly, NRK1 has now decided to broadcast a second season of *Muitte mu*, and NRK Sápmi has also managed to place *joik* as a permanent genre for competition on the entertainment series *Stjernekamp*. It is therefore fair to say that NRK Sápmi has succeeded in making *joik* more visible to the non-indigenous population, though the broadcaster’s core audience, the Sámi people, may harbour the reservation that this content both reproduces and represents the majority’s view of the minority. What’s at stake, in the end, is the credibility, relevance and legitimacy of NRK Sápmi, which remain contingent on the broadcaster’s embrace by the Sámi. The reception of the series shows that NRK Sápmi needs to be aware of the fine line between gratifying the majority (and in this way increasing awareness of Sámi issues and culture) and alienating and pushing away the core audience.

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¹ There is no accurate census of the Sámi population in Norway, but according to Statistics Norway, there were 55 544 inhabitants in the so-called Sámi area in January 2017, which includes all three counties in northern Norway, stretching from Saltfjellet in Nordland county to Finnmark county. In comparison, the Norwegian population totals 5.3 million people, according to Statistics Norway.

² There exists no overview of Sámi media in Norway, Sweden, Finland and Russia, but examples of other Sámi media institutions in Norway are the northern Sámi language newspaper *Ávvir*; *Sámi Mágasiidna*, which publishes in northern and southern Sámi and Norwegian; the northern Sámi youth magazine, *Š*; and *Sáogat*, which publishes in Norwegian.

³ All translations are the author's.