

Nation-building, not “Resistance Radio”

Self Determination, the State, & Saami Media¹

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Abstract

Saami media are an important, if not invaluable, part of Saami society recognized as both a right *and* a service to the Saami people. In fact, the role of media and media outlets has often been referenced as a manifestation of self determination. However, whereas other Indigenous and ethnic minority media often seek clear financial independence from the state, my research shows that the Saami have a more nuanced and complicated approach. Based primarily on 25 in-depth interviews with Saami journalists, journalism educators and others who have been involved with communication I shed light on the evolving, robust and at times contested understandings of self determination as articulated, justified and practiced by Saami media makers. I argue that by *not* conflating self-determination with financial independence, Saami media practitioners are engaged in an evolving understanding and practice of media and self determination.

Keywords: Saami media, self determination, media as a right, Indigenous journalism, journalism education, transnational media

Introduction

“Watchdog journalism” is recognized and promoted as an important function, indeed a public service throughout the Nordic countries. (Salokangas, Schwach & Virtapohja, 1997; Losifidis; Steemers, & Wheeler, 2005). The state guarantees and funds media based on the premise that media provides a service of informing, building and entertaining the (implicitly singular) nation for the purpose of facilitating a self-governing democracy. But implicit in this understanding is a problematic assumption that the projects of nation-building, democracy building and self determination are neatly aligned (Anderson 1983/1991; Strömbäck 2005, pp. 335-337; Glasser & Craft 1998, pp. 203-207). However, this conflation of media, nation and state provides problematic in the context of media production by transnational peoples. Tensions, rather than alignment, exist in media, state and national building projects of transnational peoples, such as Saami and I argue these tensions point to emerging and evolving understandings of media’s roles in the evolving practice of self determination.

Transnational peoples, such as the Saami, recognize themselves as one people – indeed one nation – living in, and at times separated by, four states. The existence of a media devoted to and run by Saami people *is* premised on the social, cultural and political projects of nation-building. But what are the relationships and tensions between

media, the nation and the state? As Pietikainen (2003, 2008) and other Indigenous media scholars and practitioners (Horn, 1999; Wilson & Stewart, 2008; Raheja, 2007; Browne, 1996) have pointed out for decades, if the media are recognized as both a manifestation of and vehicle for self-determination, then what is the relationship between media and self-determination both in terms of theory as well as in practice? What, if any, connection is there between the notion of *independence* (financial, political, social, etc.) and self-determination and how is this manifested in the structure, content and self-representation of Saami media?

Whereas other Indigenous and ethnic minority media often seek clear financial independence from the state out of concern of its influence on content, my research shows that the Saami have a more nuanced and complicated approach. Based primarily on in-depth semi-structured interviews with twenty-five Saami journalists, journalism educators and others who identify as being “politically conscious,” I shed light on the evolving, robust and at times contested understandings of self-determination as articulated, justified and practiced by Saami media makers². I argue that by *not* conflating self-determination with financial independence, Saami media practitioners are engaged in an evolving understanding of self-determination.

The Relationship between Financial Independence, Self-Determination and the State

The practice, structure, and political economy of Saami media has been discussed in depth by researchers such as Pietikainen (2003, 2008a, 2008b), Lia Markelin (2003, 2007) and Torkel Rasmussen (1999). Putting a positive spin on Gitlin’s (1996) understanding of mini-public spheres or sphericles, Charles Husband and John Downing (2005) have even argued that Saami media are illustrating a best practices model of how Indigenous groups and ethnic minorities can participate in and thus create a multi-ethnic public sphere. In this practice, the state’s responsibility to financially and structurally support this process is clearly detailed. Others, such as Lorie Graham (2010), have argued that Saami, as Indigenous peoples, have a *right* to media – a right that is based partially on language and cultural rights – and one that must be respected and enabled *by* the state because of the particular relationship between Indigenous peoples and the state (Kymlicka, 1995). There is an assumption in these writings that the media, as an institution, is playing a role in promoting cultural self-determination but little is said regarding the political implications of state-funded media. Borrowing from this previous research, I aim to look specifically at how Saami media makers are navigating the financial and structural relationship between Saami media and the state and the implications in shaping understandings of media and self-determination.

For the Saami journalists, self-determination does not *necessarily* equate financial and structural independence, and this is a reflection of their own method of achieving social and political change. As Pietikainen (2008) explains, “The fight for the survival and the development of the ethnic minority media frequently reflects and contributes to the political and social struggle” of those people. (p. 178). Much of this debate focuses on the perceived power of the state. The state can perceive an alternative to the existing order and power dynamics as a threat and thus respond by absorbing -- coopting -- the alternative into something that is safely dissident but not threatening to existing power

structures (Gramsci, 1971; Herman & Chomsky, 1988; Bob, 2005; de Jong, Shaw & Stammers, 2005).³ While some media practitioners and academics have taken a stance against complete dependence on state funds, many also acknowledge the serious consequences of financial independence from the state: namely, one may still not be able to be independent. In other words financial independence has a cost and it is not necessarily synonymous with self determination. By not having stable financial supported a lot of energy and attention will be focused on drumming up funds as opposed to media content and production. This diversion of attention in turn affects the quality and consistency of content and delivery of the media product (Howely, 2010; Plaut, 2010; Downing, 2001; de Jong, Shaw & Stammers, 2005, Pietikainen, 2008, pp.181-183, Markelin, 2003). In addition, it may not be the state that is the biggest enemy to independence. Although the state does wield influence, so too do other sources of income, such as corporations, foundations, and individual donors (Bob, 2005). In other words, *all* sources of funding have the potential to influence media and thus may impact their ability to be independent. So, is financial independence a necessary condition of self determination? And if not, what role can Saami media play in fostering self determination when they rely on funding from a state whose nation-building projects may be at odds with Saami self determination.

Methodology: Rationale of Interviewing Methods

Following in the tradition of Ulf Haanertz’s 2003 multi-sited ethnography of foreign correspondents as well as those involved in the growing field of political ethnography, my findings are primarily based on interviews with 25 Saami journalists and journalism educators as well as people in communications/leadership positions of Saami institutions (Lightfoot, 2009; Bob, 2005).⁴ Similar to Hannerz, I engaged in purposive sampling of journalists involved in the training, hiring, supervising and evaluating of self-identified Saami journalists as well as those involved in the creation of Saami media who may be able to provide a retrospective analysis (Hannerz, 2008, pp. 363-4). In other words, those who are both navigating tensions of state, nation and media in their professional lives *and* are “discourse shapers” – engaged in shaping the cultural narratives and institutions of self determination.

The majority of the Saami media institutions as well as Saami University College (*Saami Allaskulva* in Saami language) are located in the “Saami heartland” of Guovdageaidnu and Kárášjohka (known in Norwegian as Kautokeino and Karasjok, respectively) in the Norwegian side of Sapmi thus 20 out of the 25 people interviewed either lived or worked in those areas.⁵ Based on previous work I had been in contact with a few people at the Saami Parliament and Saami allaskulva prior to arriving in Sapmi but I arranged the majority of my interviews upon arriving in the field (Plaut, 2012a). The interviews 90-120 minutes long and were thematic semi-structured, focusing on the participant’s understanding of their work lives. All but two were conducted in person. All participants received copies of the transcript and their corrections were used in the analysis.

Following in the tradition of Kvale and Brinkmann (2009), I approach the interview process as an opportunity to engage and co-create knowledge noting that the interview itself is an unfolding co-created experience. I also recognize that when one negotiates and engages an interview, each person brings power, politics and culture to the interview. As Fontana and Fey remind us:

Interviewing is inextricably and unavoidably historically, politically and contextually bound. Interviewing is not merely the neutral exchange of asking questions and getting answers. Two or more people are involved in this process and their and their exchanges lead to the creation of a collaborative effort called the interview ... a contextually bound mutually created story” (2005, p. 695).

I am a journalist, a researcher, and someone who teaches journalism students. For this project, I was interviewing professional colleagues. However, I am a researcher from outside the community. (I am not from the Nordic region nor am I Saami.) I speak neither Saami nor the national languages. Thus, all interviews were conducted in English (the interviewees’ second or third, at times fourth, language) without the use of an interpreter. As with many journalists, I am a person who is linguistically and culturally removed. So, there are limits to my contextual understanding of what I am reading, hearing and seeing, which inevitably shapes my analysis (Smith, 1999, 2005). However, this distance also provides an opportunity for me to ask questions that those more embedded in the community and that insiders may not even think to ask, thereby providing the interviewees with an opportunity to explain things that are often taken for granted (Finlay, 2002).

Analysis and Interpretation

Although I engaged with written primary sources (including brochures, media strategies and books) the bulk of my findings and analysis comes from the interviews themselves (references as “personal communication” in the text.). In designing the research project I identified some more general journalism and journalism-education themes that informed my interview questions and coding (e.g. objectivity, sources, and credibility) but I also used indicative coding to identify certain themes raised by participants (e.g. Alta, language, and professionalization). Fairclough (1992) views discourse analysis as a *social practice* where discourse is a dialectical relationship between social structures and power (Fairclough, 1992; Jorgensen & Phillips 2002, p. 61). As such, I paid particular attention to how people defined terms and practices. In addition, I flagged when tension arose in identifying and describing particular terms such as: objectivity, professionalism, ideal of mainstream journalism, as this highlights what appears to be *conflicting* discourses and often signals opportunities for change. Following in the tradition of Fairclough again, I employed a particular kind of critical discourse analysis that is looking to unearth opportunities for social change and self determination *through* media production and structures while paying special attention to unequal power dynamics.

Limitations: A Particular Note on Who Was, and Was Not, Interviewed

Ten weeks is not enough time to conduct in-depth research, and there are some specific limitations that are important to note. Most importantly, I interviewed a disproportionate amount of people from “the Saami heartland” in the Norwegian side of Sapmi, which has unique economic, historical and linguistic characteristics (Lehtola, 2004; Solbakk, 2006; Somby, 2009; Pietikainen, 2008a, 2008b). In fact, many would say that because of Norway’s particular history regarding treatment of the Saami (Norwegianization policy, Alta Dam etc.) as well as its oil-wealth, the Norwegian government is now the most financially and legally supportive of the Nordic states with regards to formal Saami

rights and institutions. At the same time some scholars, as well as practitioners have also noted that that such support by the Norwegian state has led to an overshadowing of the experiences, as well as the initiatives, of Saami in the Swedish and Finnish (let alone Russian) side of Sapmi (Markelin, 2003; Markelin & Husband, 2007; Lehtola, 2004, Solbakk, 2006). In other words, there has, at times, been a conflation of the experiences of Saami in the Norwegian side of Sapmi, particularly those who speak Saami language from the interior of the country, with all Saami. This is problematic for although there are Saami media institutions in the Finnish and Swedish side of Sapmi, I was unable to include them in this research project.⁶ Further research with these journalists could help shed light on the different ways to identify, participate and shape Saami media that are beyond the Norwegian experience. In addition, I hope that more work can be done with Saami journalists who work in the majority language and thus trouble and expand the understanding of "Saami perspective" beyond that of Saami language.

Clarifications on the Terms "Saami" and "Saami Media"

An estimated 70,000 Saami live in what are presently known as the countries of Norway, Sweden, Finland as well as the Kola Peninsula of Russia. The definition of who is Saami is based on both subjective and objective criteria. Norway, Finland and Russia recognize Saami as an Indigenous population; Sweden classifies Saami as original inhabitants with special rights but does not use the term "Indigenous" in its constitution. Only Norway is a signatory to International Labor Organization (ILO) Convention 169 (Henriksen, 2008; Grote 2007). There is a long and painful history of colonization in all four countries, which has had a drastic effect on the socio-economic conditions and the sense of cultural worth among the Saami, although a "Saami revival" began in the 1970s. According to my interviewees, for many generations Saami would try and "pass" as a member of the majority society and/or deny their Saami origins. Thus the notion of "Saami identity" is an evolving process.

There is an elected representative body for Saami people in the Norwegian, Finnish and Swedish side of a Sapmi. A person is eligible to vote in the elections for the Saami Parliament if one of his or her parents, grandparents, or great-grandparents spoke Saami as a first language *and* if that person feels he or she is Saami.⁷ The rationale behind this decision is partially based on the forced linguistic and cultural assimilation policy, targeting Saami in all four countries, especially in Norway.⁸ The definition of "Sami-ness" can, of course, also lead to interesting situations where some members of some families will be registered as Saami and vote in Saami Parliamentary elections whereas their siblings will not.⁹

The Role of Language in Saami Media

The issue of language is sensitive because, although there are no official statistics, it is believed that less than half of the Saami population in the Norwegian side of Sapmi (where the language is considered the strongest) speak Saami and less than 10,000 read and write Saami (Solbakk, 2006; Gaski, 2006; personal communication K Somby, May 24, 2011; Lehtola, 2004; Skutnabb-Kangas & Dunbar, 2010). And yet the use of Saami language in journalist practice continues to influence how media makers, managers and

editors, at first blush, distinguished such media as *Saami* media (Pietikainen, 2008, p. 186).

There are times where those interviewed equated the term “Saami media” with “Saami-language media,” although there are self-defined “Saami media” and journalists working in the state-language. However, when asked directly if a person needed to use Saami language as the medium of communication in order to be considered a Saami journalist, all those interviewed were quick to clarify and to distinguish between “Saami language media” and “Saami media,” particularly in relationship to issues surrounding ownership, perspective and editorial control. In other words, it seemed much easier for people to identify Saami-*language* media than it was to articulate (a, singular) Saami *perspective(s)* within a media story or media outlet. And yet all those interviewed understood that Saami media, in terms of content as well as its sheer existence, served as both evidence and vehicle (and potential) for socio-political change.

Several scholars such as Kelly (2011), Fraser (1992; 2007), Graham (2010), and Rasmussen (1999) have written about marginalized peoples’ access, production and circulation of media and the relationship between such media and socio-political change. Some who make media identify, and self-identify, as being Indigenous, ethnic minorities, linguistic minorities and/or part of a sub/counter culture. For Indigenous peoples and to some extent other national and ethnic minorities (particularly in Europe), much of the conversation has revolved around the relationship between media and language with the assumption that media will help both preserve and develop minority languages and that language is a cornerstone of protecting, preserving and promoting culture (Donders, 2002; Kymlicka, 1995; Magga, June 3, 2011, personal communication).¹⁰ Of course, for many Indigenous peoples, the state (colonizing) language has become their first language. Thus, the use of Indigenous languages is not to ensure communication, per se, rather one that is symbolic pedagogical and often strengthens language revitalization (Graham, 2010; Kymlicka, 1995; personal communication, Pederson, June 16, 2011.).

Those interviewed recognized that preservation and nurturing of the Saami language may not be, nor perhaps should be, the explicit goal of Saami media because there are other institutions that are established specifically for this goal. As Sara Beata Eira, editor of *Avvir*, the only daily Saami language paper explained, “It’s not our official role to keep the language alive, but we’re doing it by our sheer existence” (personal communication, May 25, 2011). In fact, many of the arguments by those involved in Saami media production as well as journalism education drew parallels between the goals of Saami media with the language policies of other Saami institutions, arguing that where the use of Saami language becomes the norm, a Saami worldview will also become the norm, and in turn, valued as equal to that of the majority society (personal communication, Solbakk, July 29, 2011; personal communication A. Somby, August 2, 2011; personal communication, Pederson, June 16, 2011, Magga, March 28, 2012, personal communication).

The Structure and Audiences of Saami Media

The Political Economy of Saami Media

All Saami media is dependent on state support either by being a part of the public media outlet or by receiving direct and substantial subsidies (Markelin, 2003).¹¹ Every weeknight, as of 2002, all of Sapmi (with the exception of the Russian side of Sapmi)

can watch a 15-minute evening television news program (TV- Ođđasat) produced in the Northern Saami language on the main, public television stations (NRK Brochure 2010). This is in line with the strong tradition of public broadcasting found in all the Nordic countries. As MS and ODI Saami journalists for NRK Sapmi explained, "You cannot underestimate the tradition of broadcasting in the Nordic countries. Without the public broadcasting corporation (the Saami division), Saami journalism, as we know it, would not exist" (MS & ODI, personal communication May 23, 2011).

Without being prompted, all of my interviewees consistently reiterated that all Saami media are financially dependent on the state. They were also well aware that state funding creates limitations. Many, such as Katri Somby, a media historian and former reporter for NRK-Sapmi, saw the limitations as inevitable:

I spent 10 years working in NRK-radio. There were 5 or 6 people working in NRK in the 1980s, and now there are 70-80 people. It's like the BBC having its own Indigenous branch. It's a frontrunner in Saami media. Some people would say it's not Saami self determination but after working therefore 10 years I have to say I don't know where else we would go... We have a foot in the biggest media in the world, economically and politically. (*Personal communication*, May 24, 2011)

In other words, does being financially dependent on the state affect one's feelings of professional, journalistic and "Saami" independence, including political independence? Perhaps the more important question is how notions of independence and self determination shape the way that Saami journalists understand their own identities and roles as journalists.

What is "A Journalist?"

One of the ways in which media are seen as serving the Saami community is by enacting many of the "traditional" roles of media, such as keeping an eye on people and institutions of power ("watchdog journalism") and unearthing issues that are unspoken ("investigative journalism") in order to highlight opportunities for change. Not wanting to assume my own North American definitions and assumptions of journalism, the first question I asked those interviewed was, "What is a journalist?" The response was surprisingly uniform: a person who helps inform the people as a form of public service about the "debate within society". As Jan Gunnar Furuly, who identifies as Saami and writes for *Aftenposten*, Norway's largest newspaper explains:

A journalist should want to tell modern stories for your own people and also, a journalist should have a motivation to change society. Something should be different after you run the story. (*Personal communication*, August 2, 2011)

Nobel as Furuly's ideals are, this process can become particularly complicated when those involved in this journalism are a transnational, Indigenous minority within a state-funded media system. If you are trying to make sure something is different after you run the story, is the goal to make change, and if so, for whom? Who are your own people? Who are you reporting for and who do you choose to investigate? Ande Somby, a Saami law professor and veteran of the Saami movement, explains this need to balance as a kind of dance:

Saami media is in a very delicate position. On one hand, they need to serve the Saami population stories and on the other hand they need to fulfill the role of media in general... Saami journalism has to relate to the fact that what they produce can be hurtful to the Saami society and used against you by the Norwegian society. (personal communication August 2, 2010)

This dance can come at a cost, generating an overeager desire to prove that Saami media are “real” media without necessarily critically examining what criteria are being used to define and assess what constitutes “real” media. Somby illustrates the tensions by drawing out the following diagram. The various options of what Saami media can be on a four-pointed axis:

RESISTANCE RADIO – A SOLDIER MARCHING FOR THEIR CAUSE	BIRD SHITTING IN ITS OWN NEST
INNOCENT, TRIVIAL (THIN) REPORTING	FULFILLING THE ROLE OF CRITICAL MEDIA (i.e. not being that bird, soldier or “thin” media)

Like Furuly’s notion of media needing to create positive change in the society, Somby advocates that Saami media should aim to be *critical* media and in this point, Somby was not unique in his sentiment. When asked what “good Saami media” look like, nearly *all* those interviewed (journalism educators as well as those working in Saami institutions) defined critical media as “putting a critical eye” on the Saami society and airing the “debate within society.” This was the understanding of the journalists, the educators and those responsible for communication within Saami institutions. As Steinar Pederson, the rector of Sami University College (in Saami language, Sami allaskulva) at the time, explained that Saami journalists “are persons who are able to put a critical eye/focus on different parts of the Saami society where it is necessary to put critical questions. And without critical questions, no society will be able to develop” (Personal communication, June 16, 2011). But given power differentials between the state and Saami, how does one develop without, as Somby put it so bluntly and eloquently “shitting in one’s own nest?” thereby providing fodder for the state/dominant/colonizing society?

The Role of the Media in “Nation Building” and the Reality of Multiple Audiences

There were both common and conflicting goals and understandings of the role of media within Saami society, particularly in relation to the goals of “nation building,” “reflecting the debate within society” and “watchdog journalism.” At times, this brought about heated discussions as some journalists, such as Jan Gunnar Furuly, seemed to see “nation-building” as incompatible with the watchdog and investigative journalism that is the “engine” and “fire” of good journalism (personal communication, Furuly, August 3, 2011). Other people, such as media historian and former NRK journalist Katri Somby, saw much more synergy between the two goals, noting:

You can build up the nation – your nation – by being critical. Only by having Saami journalism education and Saami journalists are you building up the nation.

You need to be critical to society, to the system – you can bring positive stories but you need to be critical too and then sometimes you need to be critical of your

own people. You need to have both. What does Saami society do wrong and what does the majority society do wrong. It's not about having Saami propaganda but a living culture – a true people – not an image. There needs to be debate to have a society that is vibrant, living and evolving. (Personal communication May 24, 2011)

At the same time, there is a recognition that there needs to be “wisdom” in how one is critical, recognizing that there are multiple audiences with inherently different levels of power and that, as discussed earlier in this piece, being “critical” can be interpreted by those on “the outside” as being internally divided. (Personal communication, A. Somby, August 2, 2011).

Much of the scholarship on Indigenous media has argued that the media serve a civic and, at times, a political role in Indigenous societies (Pietikainen, 2008 p. 178, 187; Wilson & Stewart, 2008; Raheja, 2007; Pederson, June 16, 2011, personal communication; Rasmussen, July 14-15, 2011, personal communication). In fact, media can be recognized as a form of pedagogy (Kelly 2011; personal communication, “Anything,” June 26, 2011). In the case of Saami media, this pedagogical vehicle serves as a means both of preserving and developing the language (a “language nursery”) and of promoting distinct Saami worldviews or perspectives in Saami or state languages or even in English (personal communication, Rasmussen, July 14-15, 2011; personal communication, L.I. Somby, June 26, 2011; personal communication Solbakk, June 29, 2011). As the director of NRK-Sapmi, Nils Johan Haetta explained, by providing a singular program of news and entertainment, media creates common points of interest and discussion, thus creating and maintaining a common audience. This process, found in all national and/or public service media, helps create and develop a more unified identity and can be identified as a nation building project (personal communication, June 16, 2011). But does having a goal of “nation building” negate the role and responsibility of watchdog journalism? Many argued that it does not – rather it clarifies distinctions in co-constructed media perspectives based on both journalist and audience. Haetta illustrates this by reflecting on a piece that ran in 2005 on Oddasat (the daily 15 minute pan-Sapmi news program):

There was a report in Norwegian news, in the main news program in NRK. Statoil, the biggest oil company in Norway, had big success in Northwestern Russia. They were really doing well, I think they found some oil in an Indigenous area and they were really doing well. It was a story highlighting success. We also ran a story the same week but our entire story showed that Statoil, the Norwegian company, was spoiling the Indigenous land in Russia and there was a lot of pollution made by the Norwegian company. So that is NOT a very successful story. That is the differences in how we (NRK-Sapmi) choose to tell things (personal communication, June 16, 2011).

As Aslak Paltto, a Saami journalist in the Finnish side of Sapmi and president of the Saami Journalism Association, stated, “When you want to make the news for your people and the whole country, you have two totally different cases (stories).”¹² The question then becomes does it matter whose resources are being utilized to make said stories? Does this kind of financial and structural dependence – be it on consumers or the state – shape who is assumed to be the audience? And how do these factors affect the final product (story)?

Speaking Inside; Speaking Outside
– *The Example of Galdu and the Story on Fishing Rights*

In early Spring 2011, an agreement was reached between the Saami Parliament and the Norwegian government regarding the recognition, or lack of recognition, of historic water rights for Saami who make their livelihood from fishing.¹³ This was a contentious issue as some Saami felt that the Saami Parliament compromised too much with the Norwegian government by ensuring that they had access to traditional waterways and the fish. One of the organizations that was heavily involved in covering and providing analysis for this issue was the Galdu Resource Center for the Rights of Indigenous People (Galdu). Galdu is a publically funded research and advocacy organization that is charged with being independent and non-political. One of the main ways that it fulfills its mandate is through the production of accurate and timely news and analysis regarding issues concerning Saami and other Indigenous people.¹⁴ (Personal communication, Hansen July 8, 2011).

Galdu had covered water rights issues for some time, both in its hard copy journal, *Galdu Cala*, and on its website. In addition, the director at the time, Magne Ove Varsi, had published numerous articles, framing water rights as a human right in the Norwegian-language Saami newspaper, *Sagat*. When the fishing rights decision was to be announced, Galdu decided to send Silja Somby, an advisor for Galdu who is fluent in Saami to cover the story and elaborate on its possible implications. When she arrived, Somby recalled, “Everyone said that they didn’t have high expectations going in, but it was obvious as the meeting progressed... It was obvious that the Saami were very, very sad.” And it was obvious to Somby that this was “an injustice” that the majority society and thus the majority media, would “want to bury.” (personal communication, May 26, 2011). Given this, she chose to write a feature piece about the meeting and the reaction to the meeting using evocative descriptions of how people were sitting and their facial expressions. Through her description and the selection of whom to interview, she painted a picture of disappointment. Galdu does not normally run feature pieces, but ultimately, there was a decision to publish the story in Saami language only. Acting Director Janne Hansen explained,

The last article Silja has published in Saami we decided not to (translate)... [rather] we decided to just publish in Saami because it is a little bit...It’s about the situation when they made the final...fishing rights...It was a very tender. She was trying to show the emotions, not that people have but what people show, and it was... Well, *we decided to keep it internal information*. (My emphasis, personal communication, July 8, 2011)

The question then arises: Why did the Galdu staff feel it more advantageous to keep this “internal information?” As Sørensen (2006) points out in his review of the public fishing rights debates that took place over 10 weeks in *Nordlys* (the largest newspaper in Northern Norway), it is important to note “the kinds of stories these stakeholders tell and the narratives they create about fishing rights” as a kind of strategy of seeking support for those who they presume are a supportive audience (pp. 81-82). Is this a strategic use of private space, as detailed by Nancy Fraser’s conceptualization of subaltern counter publics (1992) or rather is this a case of not wanting to bite the hands that feed you?

Although an independent entity, Galdu receives all of its funding from the Norwegian government. Torkel Rasmussen, the current director of the journalism program at Sami allaskulva, often sees signs of self-censorship as an inherent threat based on the fact that Saami media is dependent on state funds. As he reminded me, "You always know who the owner is," but the difficulty arises in seeing how that ownership affects, or does not affect what stories are covered and how. As he explains, "The real problem is that you can never point out where the problem is. Which stories were wrong because of the ownership? ...Of course, it is obvious there is something to say if Berlusconi owns the newspaper... but it is not that obvious when it comes to Saami media" (personal communication, July 14, 2011). This points to a larger question of *how* one engages in a project of self determination when being completely financially dependent on the state.

A Realistic Strategy: Being Pragmatic about State Financial Support

By working for a publically funded agency or organization – be it Galdu or NRK Sapmi – there is a guarantee of consistent, basic operational funding and a transnational reach. Although there have been quite a few attempts at non-state funded Saami media projects, they have not been able to extend beyond hand and mouth survival with a limited geographical reach (K. Somby, 2009; Solbakk, 2006 pp. 172-198). Perhaps this is because early Saami media was primarily hard copy newspapers that needed to be distributed throughout a vast landmass or perhaps because there just are not that many Saami people. Whatever the reasons, the reality is also that, based on sheer numbers, Saami media will never be able to compete with a consumer market model. In addition, many have argued that based on its relationship with Indigenous people, the state has a *responsibility* to provide resources for Indigenous media (personal communication, Solbakk, July 29, 2011; personal communication, Eira, May 25, 2011; Markelin, 2003; Markelin & Husband, 2007; Graham, 2010).

When interviewing the various Saami journalists and those in charge of communications for Saami institutions, the financial dependence on the state was a constant point of discussion. What was surprising to me, as a North American researcher, was the fact that this was not necessarily surprising rather it was assumed to be a reality that needed to be negotiated. Janne Hansen, the acting director of Galdu, which was founded and funded by the State and Saami Parliament, explained it in the following manner:

When I started to work for Galdu, I knew this was a state agency. So I knew that the framework was to be freedom of speech, but still there is a framework about how free you can be. And you have to be aware of that and of course challenge that... So it seems to me that you are a little surprised that all the Saami institutions are funded by state money, but there are negative sides that we are aware of, or we should be aware of at least. But then there is the question: What happens if we don't work within this framework? What would the other way be?" (personal communication, July 8, 2011)

The strategic balancing of the strengths and weaknesses when working within a state-funded system was articulated by numerous journalists in numerous ways. Sara Beate Eira (the Editor-in-Chief of the Saami language daily, *Avvir*) as well as people such as John T. Solbakk and Ande Somby who observed and analyzed the media, commented

on the increased desire to *sensationalize* the news. In fact, according to many of those interviewed, there appeared to be a fear of conflating sensationalism with that of critical media so that time and attention would be spent on what was deemed petty scandals (e.g. “Are Saami politicians drinking on airplanes and billing it as a company expense?”) rather than serious “hard” issues (e.g. land rights and natural resource extraction). As Torkel Rasmussen, Director of the journalism program at Saami allaskulva explained, the issue may not be the level of skill but rather the desire to truly engage in investigative reporting within one’s own community:

Why do we have four (media) companies and not one? ... We always speak of nation building, yes, but which nation are they building? They (the Saami directors of the media companies) are building up a nation of Norwegian Saami, Finnish Saami, Swedish Saami, and they are making the differences (between the Saami) bigger. I don’t know if they are aware of this themselves but because they are so bounded, tied, to their mother companies...because of that fact they are not building this up as one people in four countries but...[pause]...four peoples in four countries. (personal communication July 15, 2011)

Rasmussen’s statement illustrates one of the strongest tensions found in Saami media: Has the state structure of funding both the infrastructure and transmission of media actually worked to *undermine* the transnational reality of Saami and rather reinforce a state-based identity? Furthermore, who is the audience being served: transnational Saami, Saami journalistic professionals, the larger state media companies, or, perhaps more realistically, all of the above.

What does it Mean to “Serve” the Saami Community?

One point that was consistently mentioned by all those interviewed (regardless of what side of Sapmi they found themselves) was the notion that journalists and media institutions envision their role as one *servicing* the Saami community. In fact, upon reviewing the transcripts I noticed the term “responsibility” consistently arose; 21 of the 25 people interviewed alluded to the fact that Saami journalists feel a *responsibility* to their people in terms of preserving and presenting the language, stories and news to Saami and for Saami (personal communication K. Somby, May 25, 2011; personal communication, Haetta, June 17, 2011; personal communication, Eira, May 25, 2011; personal communication, Furuly, August 3, 2011). When asked why Saami journalists do not work for “outside” media outlets with larger circulations, John T. Solbakk, a former Saami journalist and educator as well as the founder and CEO of the largest, international, Saami language publisher (Davvi Girji OS) explained it as such, “It is a long process to be free to go somewhere else. And probably they (Saami journalists) feel they have to serve their home people (first)” (personal communication, July 29, 2011).

Again the question arises: Who is being served by the Saami media? Who is the audience? For although many of the journalists working for NRK-Sapmi were concerned their stories may be too local or too insular for broader audiences, the numbers bear out a different reality: while there are only 70,000 Saami people across Sapmi, on average, at least 300,000 viewers tuned into the daily fifteen minute news broadcast. That means at least 230,000 people – about 2/3 of the audience – watching Oddasat are NOT Saami

(personal communication Haetta, June 17, 2011; personal communication, Eira, May 25, 2011; personal communication, Valio, May 27, 2011). These numbers suggest that there is a considerable interest in watching Saami media *because* of its unique, Saami, perspective, a perspective that is recognized across linguistic or ethnic or state boundaries

Conclusion: Negotiating the Debates Within All Societies

In this article, I examine how Saami journalists, media management and journalism educators negotiate their roles of serving the Saami community while being financially dependent on the state – the same state that is a colonizing force (Pietikainen, 2008, p. 178). Saami media are an important, if not invaluable, part of Saami society. According to those interviewed, access to consistent quality program in Saami language is both a right *and* a service to the Saami people as well as the majority population, if not the larger world. Saami political, economic, cultural and social rights are framed as a fight for self determination and have been for decades (Gaski, 2006; Henrikson, 2008, Graham, 2010). The role of media and media outlets has often been referenced as a manifestation of self determination because it permits both the language and worldview to flourish thus *servicing* the Saami community. My research suggests this conception of self determination goes beyond that of resistance and agitation *against* the state but rather sees the state as having a *responsibility* to provide the financial and structural means to enable Saami to conceive of, manage and develop their own way of life (Ahren, Scheinin, & Henriksen, 2007; Henriksen, 2008; Solbakk, 2006).¹⁵

Notwithstanding this point, there are different, at times conflicting, goals and understandings of the role that language(s), audience prioritization, and state-dependence should play in Saami journalism. There are tensions in understanding the goals and practice of Saami media, including the political economy of these institutions and how this reflects and affects the larger project of a critical media serving a nation spanning four states. Most notably the contentious relationship between financial dependence and journalistic independence when balancing institutional stability and ensuring fair coverage of the “debate in society”. I argue these tensions are not found solely in Saami society but rather are endemic in all media projects. The transnational nature of Saami media, however, makes these tensions, and the strategies to address said tensions, a bit clearer.

One of the major concerns is the relationship between financial dependence and journalistic independence, particularly across borders. Although many of those working for well-funded and well-positioned NRK Sapmi do not seem to be overly concerned with Saami media’s reliance on state funds others question how Saami media can fulfill its mandate to transnational nation building and watchdogging while remaining financially dependent on a singular state. Many of those who levy concerns are the up and coming journalists from the Finnish and Norwegian side of Sapmi. They wonder whether there needs to be more critical questions asked of the media and by the media to larger social and political power structures. This concern is echoed by some of the “veterans of the Saami movement” who caution that in the name of objectivity, Saami media, especially NRK-Sapmi, has taken to being overly critical of the Saami but rarely questioning of the state.

There is also a larger question as to whether one can actually speak of a common Saami media culture. Saami journalists and media outlets are also undeniably shaped by

the countries and cultures that they are in. Therefore, when alternatives to state-funded public service journalism were proposed in the 1970s and again in the mid-1990s and early 2000s, they are often deemed unrealistic because they are threatening to the status quo (personal communication, Rasmussen, July 15, 2011; personal communication, Solbakk, July 29, 2011; personal communication, Magga, June 3, 2011; personal communication, Paltto, May 28, 2011). As Rasmussen explains, this passivity may be symptomatic of larger approaches to understanding the relationship between media and socio-political advocacy:

But do we have the media we deserve or should we have better media? That is probably the question. Are the media too toothless?...Well, I have had this discussion with the students before but it was a while ago. And, yes, I think we mostly agreed then that the media is not good enough. They don't have enough power. They are not able to show the claws and use the teeth. (personal communication July 14, 2011).

If one believes that one of the media's primary responsibilities is to provide a "critical eye" on the various societies that influence, and are influenced by Saami, then Rasmussen's assessment is damning. By not "showing claws and us(ing) teeth," media is failing to serve as both an internal watchdog on Sapmi as well as on the Norwegian, Swedish, Finnish and, to a lesser extent, Russian states. They are failing to foster and what is referred to in Sapmi as a "debate within society" -- an idea which extends beyond the relatively small world of Saami media into an understanding of how socio-political change takes place on a national, regional and international level when state borders are not, nor should, be conceived of as *borders* of identity or action.

It should be clear by now that there is no, one, answer, rather there are tensions between media and the state and journalism's role in self determination, in *all* media projects. Self determination is an unfolding and negotiated process that is contingent on larger socio-political contexts and journalist's understanding of their own identities and practices. And it is in the practice of confronting and navigating these tensions that we, as media practitioners and researchers, can better understand the emerging understandings of media's roles in the evolving practice of self determination.

Notes

1. I wish to thank Saami allaskulva (Sami University College) for their hospitality as a guest researcher during the summer of 2011 as well as NRK-Sapmi and especially Rune Fjellheim of the Saami Parliament. I also would like to thank all those who agreed to be interviewed even though it was often during summer holiday. Thank you to the Liu Institute's writing group on Transnationalisms as well as Professors Claudia Ruitenberg, Sheryl Lightfoot, Jon Todal and Ole Henrik Magga for their comments on earlier versions of this piece and the editorial pens of both Sean McAlister and Mahruq Khan. I am also grateful to both the editor, Ulla Carlsson and the anonymous reviewer at Nordicom who helped push clearer research questions and methodology. Lastly, many thanks to the people who provided me rides throughout Sapmibeit for interviews, recreation as well as shoe repair. Funding for this research was generously provided by the Canadian Government's Social Science and Humanities Research Council and the Liu Institute for Global Affairs Bottom Billion Fund.
2. Because of the way the Norwegian government painted many of those involved in "the Saami movement" in the 1970s, the term "activist" has come to take on a negative connotation often associated with extreme, radical separatist politics. Therefore I am using the term "politically conscious" as that is the term that many of the Saami interviewed preferred to use for themselves.
3. There is a substantial body of literature, particularly in development studies and International Relations that examines the "money trail" and its effects on hollowing out potential alternative forms of under-

- standing and responding to both problems and solutions (Doty, 1996; Bob, 2005). In fact many have argued this is a form of power in and of itself -- please see Barnett & Duvall (2005) for an in-depth look at the notion of "productive power." In 2006 the book *The Revolution will not be funded* was published and put together an excellent example of work examining the "non-profit industrial complex" in the United States. Elsewhere (2010; 2012) I have written about the process of media and civil society being dependent on donors and the effects that has had in Central and Eastern Europe.
4. I conducted follow up interviews with three of the participants
 5. I also conducted interviews in Tromsø and at Kåfjord (where Riddu Riddu, the sea-Saami organized international music festival takes place) as well as Leammi (in Finnish Lemmenjoki) near Ánar and Ohejohka (in Finnish Inari and Utsjoki, respectively) on the Finnish side of Sapmi.
 6. Nor did I visit the Saami institutions in Oslo, Stockholm and Helsinki although I was often reminded that the largest Saami communities are actually located in the capital cities.
 7. For more information on the discussions that helped solidify this definition please see Ahren, Mattias; Scheinin, Martin & Henriksen, John. The Nordic Sami Convention: International Human Rights, Self Determination and Other Central Provisions. *Galdu Cala*, No 2/2008.
 8. There are actually nine distinct Saami languages and many are endangered. The most common Saami language is Northern Saami and that is the dialect used by the majority of the Saami media; for purposes of this paper when I use the term "Saami language" I am referring to Northern Saami unless otherwise noted.
 9. The 2009 film *Suddenly Saami* by Ellen-Astri Lundby illustrates a very compelling narrative detailing this situation.
 10. The relationship of knowing and using one's "mother tongue" is a right enshrined in various international and regional treaties such as the European Convention on the Rights of Minority Languages, the Convention on Economic Social and Cultural Rights, and the Convention on the Right of the Child. The right to media in one's language is specifically mentioned in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (Graham, 2010; Markelin, 2003; personal communication, Rasmussen, July 14-15, 2011).
 11. The Norwegian, Finnish and Swedish states all support Saami language radio and television on their public broadcasting channels and the Norwegian state provides financial subsidizes to the two daily Saami newspapers, one of which is written in Norwegian (*Sagat*) and the other in Saami (*Avvir*) and both of which have a circulation of under 3000.
 12. The term "cases" was used by many journalists in Sapmi to speak about the journalistic stories (be they news or feature); according to socio-linguist Jon Todal, this appears to be a Norwegianized borrowing from English (personal communication January 16, 2012.) To ease understanding for an English reading audience, I have noted this in the quotes by putting "(story)" next to "case" and then have modified quotes with the word "story."
 13. For an in-depth review of the contentious nature of the issue and the various ways it was framed within Northern Norway's media please see Siri Ulfsdatter Søren's piece , "Fishing Rights Discourses in Norway: Indigenous Versus Non Indigenous Voices" in MAST 2008, 6(2):77-99.
 14. For more information please see www.galdu.org
 15. It should be noted that many Saami consciously choose to *not* identify with the term "activist" or "advocate" but would rather call themselves politically or socially "conscious." According to many of those whom I interviewed, the term "activist" had been used as a derogatory, stigmatizing, label by the Norwegian state against those active in the Saami movement in the 1970s. I thus follow their lead and also use the term "politically conscious."

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