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“Sami Ethnicity and Polity – Conflict and Compromise Regarding Development in the North”

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Sami Ethnicity and Polity - Conflict and Compromise Regarding Development in the North

Tom G. Svensson

The clash of interest resulting from commercial exploitation will necessarily impair the possibility for native peoples to continue their specific ecological adaptation mainly based on subsistence economy. This predicament relates to three different aspects equally important, the ones dealing with *politics, law, and ecology*.

Referring to the Sámi in northern Fenno-Scandia, I intend to explore some general features connected to the majority-minority complex and thus elucidating how natives have chosen to cope with this situation of conflict common in the northern Fourth World. *Land rights* and *negotiation power* are key concepts in the Sámi attempt to attain real influence in their own affairs. The discussion also relates to the ongoing international debate on the problem of sustainable development.

Development in the North gives rise to considerable costs for native peoples both in social and cultural terms. Development of non-renewable resources initiated by the larger society is constantly increasing in modern times. The clash of interests resulting from such commercial exploitation necessarily impairs the possibility for native peoples to continue their ecological adaptation which is mainly based on subsistence economy. This common phenomenon relates intimately to the problem of cultural viability. No doubt, as an outcome of such growing pressure on native land, ethnic indigenous minorities in general will experience accumulating difficulties in maintaining a viable life style and their unique life qualities. In fact, the question of cultural viability appears as a predominant enigma, which must be tackled by most ethnic minority groups in the North. As will be argued, this predicament relates to three different, though for native peoples equally important, aspects:

1) politics, dealing with the rather futile but absolutely necessary

ethnopolitical struggle for real and adequate power. In particular, this refers to negotiation power and unconditional cultural autonomy, including self-determination.

2) law, which has to do with the strategy of using a legal arena to strengthen their legal position with regard to certain basic rights, especially improved land rights.

3) ecology, pertaining to the capability to continue developing renewable resources indispensable to upholding their particular way of life.

These three key factors are viewed as interdependent variables in the on-going endeavour to realize cultural viability, one objective of which is to mark cultural distinctiveness. I conceive of a minority culture as being viable if it is able to meet the following minimum requirements:

1) to assume adequate resource development;

2) to constrain negative implications of external encroachments;

3) to counteract assimilation;

4) to possess creative and innovative power in diverse sectors of cultural activity

In the following article I wish to demonstrate how native ethnicity can be transformed into a political force. Great emphasis will be put on the gradual development of political structures, trying to clarify to what extent they are political, and also the importance of ethnicity in the process. My argumentation aims at generalization introducing certain broad issues; at the same time it refers back to a specific case, the Sámi minority situation in northern Fennoscandia. The condition outlined is rather typical for northern Fourth World problematics. Certainly, empirical variations are appreciable and systematic comparisons may not always be justified; on the other hand, by means of identifying general features derived from a specific case we may discern factors feasible for more systematic comparison. What we are mainly concerned with are processes of ethnopolitical development, and they take place in most Northern regions at present.

Basically the Sámi are found in the northern parts of Finland, Norway and Sweden. The total population is currently estimated to be close to 60,000, but there is no accurate census available. Norway has by far the largest number, ca 35,000, whereas Sweden contains 17,000, Finland roughly 4,000 and a meager 2,000 are living on the Kola peninsula in the U.S.S.R. Only a small part of the Sámi population, about 7,000, are reindeer pastoralists; far more are sedentary, obtaining their main means of livelihood from small-scale farming and inshore or lake fishing. In addition to pursuing these traditional forms of local economy, several Sámi have chosen various non-Sámi occupations, living in major towns in the north or in large cities or towns in the south. In the following paper basic features related

to current culture-political change among the Sámi will be elucidated, change which primarily concerns the Sámi with nomadic/pastoralist adaptation.

Advancement toward a Sámi political structure

From a Sámi point of view, the sharpening of conflicting interests between the larger society and the Sámi is a decisive factor in triggering a unification process on several different levels. Uncontrolled pressure on traditional Sámi land started at the time of the industrial revolution, i.e. in the 1880's, and was later considerably expanded with the establishment of structural constraints, such as a legal framework consisting of special reindeer management laws together with an administrative body particularly assigned to handle Sámi matters. This pressure caused changes which required a joint Sámi reaction. This is probably the beginning stage of Sámi ethnicity, a phenomenon which is inconceivable unless it is viewed in relation to a contrasting social unit, in this case the nationstate.

Basically a social concept, Sámi ethnicity is expressive and distinct in contrast to the surrounding non-Sámi world. In my view, Sámi ethnicity was intensified and grew in importance when interethnic relationships between the Sámi minority and the dominant society were formalized. The process of de-autonomization paired with increased tutelage, which changed Sámi life conditions drastically in the 1880's, called for new Sámi reactions and counter measures on ethnic terms.

The Sámi movement toward unification begins with the forming of local associations, at most involving a few local communities within a delimited region. Lacking adequate fora for organized gatherings, the Sámi were

relatively isolated at this time both vis-à-vis the outside world and internally. Contacts between Sámi belonging to different local communities and associations were infrequent and incidental and therefore did not constitute much of a foundation on which to build Sámi ethnicity. Already in the initial stages attempts by the Sámi to form nation-wide associations were systematically curtailed and opposed by the authorities. Apart from very few occasional meetings summoned to take a stand or to express an opinion on a significant single issue, the Sámi did not succeed in forming their own organization on a national level until 1950. This occurred close to fifty years after the first Sámi association was founded.

With certain variations, this process of change took place during the post-World War II era simultaneously in the three Nordic countries, Finland, Norway, and Sweden. Parallel with this development a pan-Sámi movement emerged, the aim of which was to outline an inter-Nordic Sámi organization. As early as in 1956 the Nordic Sámi Council was founded. Its ultimate purpose is to formulate a common political platform and to carry out Sámi political actions reflecting common goals among the majority of Sámi. (For more details as to the actual structure evolved, see Svensson 1986b.) Moreover, the Sámi affiliation to the World Council of Indigenous Peoples, WCIP, a world-wide organization of indigenous people in which the Sámi have played an active part from its start in 1975, is canalized through the Nordic Sámi Council.

No doubt, Sámi ethnicity has been successively reinforced by such linear processes of change, and there is a close connection between ethnicity and the emerging political structure. Growing cultural awareness is a prerequisite to forming relevant political structures, and the latter institutions are reaffirmed by

continuous political activities. Through regular meetings, assemblies, conferences, delegations approaching the authorities, etc., Sámi ethnicity is reconfirmed and strengthened even further. In addition to such reinforcement of ethnic cognizance, political structures become more ethnic and as a consequence far better adapted to function adequately in a majority-minority context (Cf. Eidheim 1971).

Sámi ethnicity appears as a driving force in the development of an appropriate political structure and in furnishing meaning for political actions emanating from the same structure; in shaping the latter, however, external factors play a role as well. Regardless of the nationstate, the Sámi political structures are formed following models worked out by the labour unions and general features related to co-operative systems in the larger society. In other words, there is nothing Sámi in the way the political structures on diverse levels are shaped. This process of adopting models from the majority society in order to make communication between the two parties more efficient, symbolizing a sort of equality, could be phrased institutional assimilation (Gregory 1976). This adoption may be considered a positive aspect of assimilation; the political structure becomes instrumental both in controlling and counteracting the continual pressure of cultural assimilation to which the Sámi have been subject for a relatively long time.

By establishing their own political structures the Sámi have placed themselves in the political landscape. They no longer remain passive in a wait-and-see attitude but have intensified and broadened the scope of their political activities. This appears mainly in the field of legal confrontation referring directly, or indirectly, to the issue of land rights, and in revisions of the legal framework originally inaugurated by the larger society without Sámi consent.

Such modernization would never have occurred without political structures of their own. For the first time the Sámi have the power to initiate actions and actualize issues especially urgent for them.

There is, however, one deficiency in the political structure at hand, that is the uncertainty concerning its representativeness. The delegates to the national meetings, and Sámi conferences on the Nordic level, and the members of the boards of these national unions are not elected from a constituency based on a Sámi census. Therefore, there is a tendency on the part of the majority society to ask who these Sámi represent and who they speak for.

This is a very serious matter and a conception which native peoples and their leadership frequently encounter. This slightly patronizing attitude necessarily reduces the effect of indigenous minority actions and articulation, a dilemma the Sámi experienced many times during the Alta case in Northern Norway. In this case, the Sámi tried to prevent a hydro-power development project from being carried out, a project located in an ecologically sensitive area for reindeer pastoralism. The Sámi mobilized on ethnic terms rather than on the basis of a particular occupation, i.e. the issue was defined as an ethnopolitical issue not only as a matter for reindeer management interests, for which possible losses resulting from the project readily could be compensated. Demonstrations and various political manifestations were paired with court actions, and never in Sámi history has so much attention been paid to them by the media. The tactic of the Norwegian authorities, on the other hand, was to restrain the definition of the situation, i.e. for them this was a matter related exclusively to a specific group of reindeer herding Sámi living in a certain local area which in no way should it be regarded as an ethnopolitical

issue. The question of representativeness reflects this predicament and is quite common whenever confrontations between the Sámi minority and the larger society occur. Consequently, for the Sámi the Alta case was a useful test case for native ethnicity based on representativeness defined by the Sámi themselves.

Diffuse representation easily undermines the limited position of power recently attained and at the same time opens the door for political manipulation. The situation is quite common whenever native peoples approach the authorities, and attention has been drawn to it by several authors. (See for instance Maybury-Lewis 1985, and Smith 1985)

Such inadequacy can only be remedied by the expressed willingness on the part of the authorities to meet the demands of the Sámi. Without representative political bodies the Sámi will be unable to master enough strength to meet the challenges in the years to come, i.e. to continue to maintain cultural viability in spite of increasing pressure and conflict occasioned by the outside world. The issue is urgent. Therefore, the Sámi in both Norway and Sweden have recently exerted pressure on their respective governments to get the necessary assistance to outline such decision-making institutions, popularly named Sámi Parliament. The Sámi in Finland have had such an elected body since 1973. It should be noted, however, that the Finnish variant is a political body in name only. Its function is strictly advisory (Cf. Müller-Wille 1977). A parliamentary inquiry is presently preparing for new legislation including a Sámi political institution modelled in a similar fashion as the ones proposed in Norway and Sweden. Clarification of the question of representativeness must be regarded as one important step toward improving Sámi self-determination.

The Issue of Sámi Parliament

Ethnic indigenous minorities who, by definition, possess very limited power have to be very deliberate and conscious in their strategic actions. One tactic is to look for confrontations of a certain magnitude in order to actively press for organizational transformations leading to greater influence in their own affairs. Guided by such an objective the Sámi have frequently used the legal arena. Developing their own organizational strength in the field of legal expertise by, for example, mobilizing legally trained Sámi or having their own Sámi ombudsman employed by the national union of Sámi, has become mandatory for the Sámi minority in pursuing its political goal of acquiring initiation power. One contemporary occurrence emerging from such a tactic is the Taxed Mountains Case, a case of the Sámi vs the Swedish State concerning rights in principle to land and water in the South Sámi region of Swedish Lapland (HD 1981). Another incident is the well-known Alta Case. In the course of trying to prevent a state-run hydro-power development project in the Alta river, the Sámi brought forth many other essential issues regarding Sámi native rights in the trial (HR 1982).

In the modern history of the Sámi, both these events stand out and have proven to have far-reaching implications for the Sámi, as well as for the responsible authorities in Sámi affairs and for the general population concerning its attitude toward the Sámi. As examples of significant change, the two cases are reasonably well documented also in recent anthropological literature (See, for instance, Bjørklund/Brantenberg 1981; Paine 1982, 1985; and Svensson 1982, 1984, 1986a, n.d.).

The final outcomes of these legal confrontations were not very favorable to the Sámi; on all essential issues disputed they remain as losers. In other

words, their usufructuary land rights were not transferred into ownership rights as demanded, nor were the Sámi able to prevent the proposed dam construction in the Alta river. Notwithstanding, the process of litigation as such actualized many hitherto concealed vital facts and circumstances regarding the Sámi minority situation; several agreeable statements made in the verdicts, offered the Sámi new and necessary stepping stones from which to push for further improvements in the field of minority politics in a broad sense.

It should suffice to mention here the unequivocal clarification by the Swedish Supreme Court of existing Sámi rights which are based on immemorial usage and considered to be equally firm as private ownership rights as a protective instrument in legal terms. This was a highly required specification in order to eliminate a state of ambiguity which had prevailed for too long, or let us say ever since the inauguration of the first reindeer management law in the 1880's (HD 1981).

The Norwegian Supreme Court made a very important concession which could be most useful for the Sámi in future legal contests. By its wording the Supreme Court rules that international law, especially art. 27 of the UN Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966) may be applicable in protecting vital Sámi interests in a national law dispute, should a case of industrial exploitation be of such magnitude that it could jeopardize Sámi cultural survival in a specific area. The main reason for the Sámi to actualize international law issues to the great extent they did was to obtain a definite statement in principle by the Supreme Court. The total and inclusive result of these two court cases, therefore, are considered by the Sámi to be examples of half-way victories, pointing to the fact that the legal arena of the dominant society can be converted

to an essential asset in the gradual process of ethnopolitical development, even if complete gains in concrete matters are still very far-fetched.

As a follow up to and immediate consequences of the two contests, the Sámi in both Norway and Sweden managed to have the respective governments appoint a Sámi Rights Commission especially assigned to make a comprehensive inquiry into all relevant aspects concerning Sámi rights. In this connection the issue of land rights was not the only item put on the agenda. Other equally important issues to be investigated refer to constitutional rights; i.e. status recognition as a people incorporated into the Constitution in the form of a special Sámi clause, and a special Sámi language law. Finally the Commissions should come up with an acceptable solution to the recurring problem of Sámi representativeness, i.e. to outline structure and content of Sámi Parliaments.

Why, then, are Sámi Parliaments so important at this stage? Apart from adding organizational strength to the field of Sámi politics and possibly strengthening culture awareness and ideological precision even further, they have to do with equality in a symbolic sense; in other words "our political structures are equal but not identical". In comparison with the existing Sámi political forms, the reformed political structures should form a satisfactory basis for any and all negotiations with external parties.

The Contents of Politics

Before elaborating on the question of Sámi Parliaments it may be pertinent at this stage to examine Sámi politics more closely. If we look at contents, i.e. issues at stake, we may discern to what extent Sámi politics in general are either ethnic or political in a real sense. I wish to emphasise the interdependency

between these two aspects, political and ethnic.

For indigenous minorities, all political actions of any significance are ethnically determined. Any lead is properly guided and legitimized by culture-specific considerations and the marking of culture distinctiveness is clearly emphasized. It is not because the Sámi are a marginal people with their own vital interests that they deserve to be taken seriously and even demand special treatment. Far more important is the very fact that the Sámi represent a distinctive ethnic minority whose culture ought to be both protected and preserved. In other words, the collision between different forms of ecological adaptation is secondary to the culture difference prevailing between the larger society and an indigenous ethnic minority. Not infrequently, however, ecological marginality and minority situation coincide. The constant activation of ethnic identity in various confrontations aiming at the realization of certain political goals surely reinforce Sámi ethnicity.

The extensive and fairly elaborate debate which arose among the Sámi during the Alta controversy suddenly made Sámi politics far more articulate, showing greater awareness, than ever before. As far as politics are concerned, it is not inappropriate in retrospect to indicate a dividing line here: before and after Alta. The Alta case and its repercussions have caused Sámi politics to become more apparent as well as more discernible. The same is true of the Taxed Mountains Case which lasted for 15 years. This case engendered broad solidarity in the Sámi population to the South Sámi who were directly involved in the case, and gave them increased insight into their own cultural history through new research actualized in the legal dispute. For a more extensive discussion of this particular point, reference can be made to an earlier article

(Svensson, 1978). The recent Chernobyl disaster and the great Sámi concern for its unpredictable consequences and severe damages offered the Sámi new sustenance for their ethnicity. Chernobyl led to consecutive negotiations with the proper authorities and generated active internal debate and exchange of new view points.

The primary objective of Sámi politics is to maintain cultural viability under varying circumstances. With this aim in mind three issues seem to predominate:

1) to counteract assimilation with greatest possible force despite intensified culture contact

2) to assure continuity in traditional resource utilization and development

3) to restrict socio-cultural implications of industrial developments

These headings can readily be specified further. In order to develop a front against various forms of more or less subtle assimilation and to create awareness of the danger connected to expanding tutelage (Cf. Paine 1977), the ethnic minority needs to actualize basic cultural concerns in its political program. The points in question facilitate the expedient marking of the ethnic boundary "we" and "they" (Cf. Barth 1969) and relate to such entries as language, education, and aesthetics.

Insistence upon a firm and unmistakable official recognition of the use of the native language in certain sectors of life, such as in the school system and in formal communication between the authorities and the natives, has been a political issue of very high priority among the Sámi for quite a few years. After Sámi pressure, a Parliamentary Commission was appointed in 1980 to conduct a broad inquiry into various cultural fields (NOU 1985:14). The language issue, i.e. to raise the status of the minority language to an equal level with that of the two official Norwegian languages, bokmål and nynorsk, became the most controversial problem to

resolve. Its political implication is both real and symbolic.

Bilingual proficiency is regarded as one necessary asset for coping effectively with assimilation pressure; the prerequisites for the attainment of such skill, however, rest to a large extent on the willingness and understanding of the authorities. Moreover, in order to function as an efficient means of communication, not merely as a cultural residue which is gradually losing ground, the native language has to be renewed constantly and to expand its range of usage into ever wider circles of communication. In the media, i.e. press, radio, and television, in diverse forms of official communication with the authorities, in statements made in court, and finally in literary expressions, in prose, poetry as well as drama, new areas are identified where the native language can be used adequately and can gain in importance. Providing that a sufficient number of people belonging to the ethnic minority take an active interest in using their own language in this new fashion, it will assuredly be enriched considerably, adding new vocabulary and phrases to the original tongue; at the same time its traditional way of expression will be maintained. As far as the Sámi are concerned, this has been a leading political issue for several years.

The proposal for a special Sámi Language Act (NOU 1985:14) met Sámi demands to a great extent and must be considered both innovative and unique in its progressive treatment of an indigenous minority. The issue was still controversial, however, and the political authorities chose to slow down the process of change having final legislation delayed year after year. Not until June 1990 was the Sámi Language Act passed by Parliament, an important and historic landmark for the Sámi in their continuous struggle for the reinforcement of cultural and political

autonomy. By means of this rather revolutionary act, Sámi and Norwegian are equal languages. In Sámi core areas of habitation individual and groups of Sámi can now insist upon Sámi being used as the means of communication in diverse levels of administration, in courts and other official arenas, and in the sectors of health and education. The strengthening of Sámi in terms of education is now authorized in constitutional terms. For the Sámi the language act, therefore, represents a great step towards cultural autonomy and increasing self-respect (Ot.prp. nr 60, 1990).

The Sámi have also been actively working for the improvement of education. The formal training in schools must have clear relevance to the students concerned. It must contain appropriate training in their own language, teaching of other subjects based on the use of the native idiom, and finally extensive training in the language of the majority society. To encourage bicultural competence in a broad sense, schools must offer courses in supplementary topics which are Sámi-specific; these should include Sámi cultural history, Sámi crafts, and instruction to reindeer herding and management from a practical as well as a theoretical point of view.

Scholarly research is an extension of education. Increasing numbers of young Sámi scholars are recruited into different disciplines particularly adapted for Sámi-relevant research; these include subjects like Sámi linguistics, history, law, and agronomy. More adequate means of education in the Sámi school system and the ability to argue their cause with far greater authority in diverse confrontations are immediate results from such scholarly activities. The Sámi now have their own "academy", the Nordic Sámi Institute in Kautokeino founded in 1973 and entirely manned by academically trained Sámi

personnel, its primary task is to govern and administer research according to a list of priorities of most urgent projects. In addition to this, it regularly actualizes crucial issues by means of interdisciplinary seminars and conferences. The results of these manifold activities are published by the institute, and great emphasis is put on bilingual presentation. From a cultural political point of view, the Sámi consider it vital not only to demand acknowledgement of the native language but also to demonstrate its versatile application.

The final specification in the area of cultural issues has to do with aesthetic manifestations. A noteworthy revival as well as a regeneration has occurred in the fields of traditional Sámi crafts and musical expressions, *yoik*. The continuity and change in these original forms of aesthetic creations currently form a paramount basis on which modern Sámi literature and fine arts rest. In confronting the majority society, the Sámi frequently refer to their own aesthetics, both to prove their vitality and to make their political articulation more highly coloured, emphasizing cultural distinctiveness as a kind of justified meta message in the communicative process (Cf. Graburn 1976).

No doubt, the changes leading to an undisputable recognition and enrichment of the native language, to the establishment of a school system more adequate from a native point of view and to an elevation of Sámi aesthetics in terms of both refinement and respectability, have quite effectively inhibited the process of Norwegianization/Swedenization. Furthermore, this cultural vitality, reflecting increasing autonomy, has aided the Sámi in their continuous struggle to reduce the effect of white man's administration in terms of tutelage. By means of proving time and

again that Sámi culture is both viable and very much self-sustained, there is little need for extensive external administration, a state of affairs to which the Sámi have long been subjected (See Svensson, 1976).

Cultural survival in a long-term perspective is not attainable unless original resource utilization is assured. Native resource development is particularly vulnerable, because the same territory is continually being subject to external encroachments on a growing scale. Extensive land use within a roughly defined territory, a characteristic feature of very many native peoples living in Arctic and Sub-arctic environments, can only with great difficulty coexist with the expanding exploitation of non-renewable resources which results from increasing contact with the wider society. Basically the emerging situation is non-competitive. However, as the number of concrete cases of industrial development increases, the traditional resource utilization of the Sámi becomes less feasible, and their ecological adaptation is severely oppressed and made difficult to maintain by this conflict of interest.

The renewable resources at stake are: 1) reindeer pasture, the use of which is adapted to seasonal variations in the reindeer herding year cycle; 2) wildlife harvesting consisting of various species derived from hunting and fishing; 3) secondary resources varying from wild berries or lumber to raw materials for craft production. Continuity in resource development along these lines can only be secured if the native political structure is ascribed sufficient power to act efficiently in defence of crucial native interests.

As a means of coping with this ever recurring predicament, land rights appear to be an essential factor. Native peoples in general must have ways to sanction and check uncontrolled heavy exploitations within their original

territories. This is the reason why for many years now the Sámi have considered improved rights to land and water as one of their primary political goals. Through the frequent use of litigation and the process of legislation emanating from parliamentary inquiries which come about under pressure initiated by the Sámi organizations, the issue of land rights is permanently kept on all agendas aiming at the strengthening of Sámi negotiation power. By virtue of the issue not being settled yet, however, its influence is highly limited indeed.

The restriction of socio-cultural consequences caused by diverse industrial developments is the third and final political issue to be treated in this context. The exploitation of non-renewable resources in areas which aptly could be defined as traditional Sámi land, *sápmi*, has increased markedly in recent years. The developments in question mainly involve mining, industrial forestry, and hydro-power development projects. That which is at stake in this connection is 1) to have the capability to influence the location of a concrete development project, so that the least possible damage is made; and 2) to have the power to prevent exploitation which severely affects a local group of Sámi and its opportunity to maintain and carry on the Sámi way of life. In such critical situations nothing less than a right to veto will suffice.

The question of veto power has recently been actualized by the Sámi, the Alta case being the first test. The Sámi Rights Committees in both Norway and Sweden have so far firmly denied any right to absolute veto, and there is a clear indication that the political authorities are not prepared to ascribe so much power to the Sámi. On the other hand, certain qualification and specification of existing Sámi rights point in the direction of a limited veto power. The issue is most complicated and still

unresolved. The Sámi await the opportunity when their newly established representative political bodies, *sameting*, will be delegated power which comes close to a veto power whenever required for cultural reasons, without giving it that critical name. Veto by definition does not imply negotiation, and if real negotiation power is what the Sámi aspire to, veto power may be a misconception. Regardless of the semantics, however, the crucial point remains; Sámi Parliaments without appreciable power can never be instrumental in the process of reautonomization so necessary for cultural survival.

The matter of compensation belongs to the same set of questions and deserves to be attended to. Like most other native peoples in the North, the Sámi are pushing very hard for fair and just compensation through the means of litigation as well as negotiation. The inclusive damages caused, not only the net loss of reindeer pasture, e.g., ought to be indemnified. This can be attained both in the form of monetary remuneration and in kind, i.e. the introduction of certain technical aids and constructions, which facilitate and make reindeer herding more rational. To be fair, the net loss of pasture and the deterioration of fresh water fishing must be estimated according to native standards not by those of white bureaucrats and technocratic experts. The latter have a tendency to take a surveying view of the detrimental effects of exploitation, evaluating in mathematical terms that which can be measured. They do not apply a holistic perspective, which is far more adequate, and which, besides economic consequences, include the health situation, effects on the demography, and emotional consequences, having definite sociocultural implications, i.e. cultural viability and sustenance is weakened.

At this point, it may be concluded that cultural viability relies heavily on the realization of the political goals discussed above. It should be equally evident that a precondition for carrying out such necessary and minimum political goals is the forming of native political structures which are far more empowered than they are at present.

In addition to large-scale development of non-renewable resources, atmospheric disturbances may have a far-reaching impact on the ecological niche of a native people, as, for instance, occurred after the Chernobyl disaster in 1986 with its unpredictable consequences for the reindeer pastoralist Sámi. In spite of Chernobyl's distant location from Sámi core areas of habitation, the radioactive fallout from the nuclear power plant explosion was carried all the way to Scandinavia and caused serious damage to the Sámi directly affected.

The Sámi have stated several times that the Chernobyl disaster is the single most devastating incident they have ever been subjected to. The situation is considered most critical, and the crisis involves all Sámi regardless of locality and primary occupation. With such a severe blow to the Sámi culture, firm ethnic unity is required, and rarely have the Sámi shown greater solidarity for those suffering the most. In the area affected, i.e. basically in the South Sámi region both in Sweden and Norway, most reindeer, fish and other food products from wildlife harvesting are contaminated. This will give rise to considerable economic losses. Social costs, however, are in no way negligible. (For a more thorough analysis of the Chernobyl disaster and its full range of socio-cultural implications see among others Svensson 1988).

In no way were the Sámi prepared to cope with a crisis of such amplitude; and they lacked adequate institutions which could be instrumental in solving

the dilemma at hand. Since both the political authorities and the scientific establishment appeared equally unprepared for such an unexpected catastrophe, the circulating information proved to be rather diffuse and at times even disputable, a state of affairs which made it extremely difficult for the Sámi to act firmly in defence of their vital interests. After lengthy negotiations, the Sámi have actually succeeded in having the government assume full responsibility for full compensation of losses. The exact meaning of the term full compensation was questioned and subject to intensive debate, however. Once again, in order to argue their cause most effectively by making native perspectives applicable, the Sámi need empowered political structures.

Native Power and Political Structures

As has been suggested, the realization of cultural viability may be conceived of as a primary objective of ethno-politics. However, cultural viability is not a kind of property which can be acquired on a permanent basis and retained with no further effort. Instead, it has to be reconfirmed continuously, and the on-going process of reconfirming cultural viability requires a political structure to which a certain amount of power is attached. From the point of view of carrying out ethno-political actions vis-à-vis the outside world it is crucial; internally it reinforces and affirms cultural vitality and uniqueness.

Let us return to the idea of a Sámi Parliament and take a closer look at the official proposal introduced by the Norwegian Sámi Rights Commission (NOU 1984:18). The Sámi Parliament, called *sámeding*, is to be ascribed advisory functions and act as a watch dog on behalf of the Sámi population in the general political process. The question

of authority is specified as follows,

1) The Sámi Parliament will have the authority to take up and give opinions in all questions considered relevant and especially significant for the Sámi population;

2) In the main its authority will be advisory, but it will also be assigned decision-making authority in limited political matters. The functions under this point will be transferred from the Norwegian Sámi Council (Norsk Sameråd);

3) The political authorities will be strongly requested, although not directly obliged, to present to the Sámi Parliament for hearing issues of special importance regarding the Sámi. (NOU 1984:18, p. 516).

In accordance with the Law of Administration, § 17 and § 37, the Sámi are guaranteed that relevant matters will be addressed to the Sámi Parliament. It appears that the conditions of the Sámi will be improved at least in one respect; i.e. they will be assured information control to a much greater extent than hitherto. Otherwise, in terms of real power, the outcome is fairly meager and depressing. The proposal, as it stands, has to be viewed as a restrained response to pressure exerted by the Norwegian Sámi, mainly as an after-effect of the Alta controversy. This cautiousness is characteristic whenever the majority society is obliged to convey some of its total influence to indigenous minorities. Usually such transfer appears as a minimum solution, and there is no reason to expect the Swedish Sámi Rights Commission to act differently on this particular point. As expected, it followed closely the lead already laid down by its Norwegian equivalent. The Norwegian Commission being first with its report served as a test case and example worth following on most of the fundamental questions raised in the inquiry. The separate report by the Swedish Commission concerning the Sámi in

relation to international law bears clear evidence of this (SOU 1986:36), so does the primary report on Sámi Rights and *Sameting* (SOU 1989:41).

In the future, a Sámi Parliament is intended to be the proper body from which Sámi politics will be canalized to diverse political authorities of the majority society. The authority from which any political action emanates has to be based on ethnicity and must be legitimate according to the ideal of representativeness vindicated by the larger society. Three primary political functions should be associated with such an institution:

- 1) to negotiate for fair remuneration in cases of industrial exploitation, like the Alta Case;

- 2) to negotiate for full compensation in situations of catastrophe, e.g. the Chernobyl disaster; and

- 3) to have the capacity to exert limited veto power against development in land areas crucial to culture maintenance in a special region.

The third point needs further specification. To realize necessary empowerment the Sámi should be entitled to veto power, but only in such cases of encroachment which are considered crucial to cultural maintenance in a special region. Such assertion refers to the communal sustenance of the ecological base required to carry on a particular way of life.

Such protective policy is congruent with the principles of aboriginal rights stated in various international conventions, now forming a constituent body of international law.

Providing these functions are achieved, the Sámi could possibly avoid lengthy and time-consuming litigation. Much would be gained by such change, making minority politics more effective. On the other hand, it ought to be clear enough that merely advisory functions will in no way suffice when actions are

taken on this minimum level of politics. What we are referring to here are core issues in any situation concerning indigenous minority politics where the question of land rights predominates. Politicizing, however, implies granting real power which can be exercised in concrete actions, not fictitious power only written down on paper.

An empowered Sámi Parliament can never stop a new disaster similar to the one in Chernobyl, but this is not the point. Whenever such unexpected and disastrous events occur, the Sámi have a great need for a political structure which is endowed with enough power to cope with such crises. In such instances the minority must be able to negotiate forcibly the terms of full compensation. In such cases, advisory authority is of no avail.

For different reasons the Norwegian government postponed its proposition to the Parliament for legislation on all issues treated in the first report (NOU 1984:18). Not until May 29, 1987 was the proposal for a Sámi Parliament adopted by the Norwegian Parliament (Ot.prp nr 33, 1987). The proposal as such and the actual power ascribed to the Sámi Parliament are still very much debated, not the least among the Sámi. Various Sámi organizations have different views as to the advantage of such a political organ, the power of which is basically constrained to advisory functions. On the other hand, the question of power is still open and has not been decided once and for all. In Sweden, for instance, where the proposal has not yet been turned into legislation, the National Union of Swedish Sámi (SSR) passed a resolution at its annual meeting in Kiruna, 1987, containing the firm demand that the establishment of a Sámi Parliament must be associated with real authority, so that it is empowered to sanction resource development and land usage in areas of numerous Sámi populations and also so that it can rely

on cultural self-determination. (Resolution B, June 1987, reproduced in *Samefolket* 1987:6-7). These opinions, which stand as an appeal to all Sámi, are shared by very many Norwegian Sámi. The ideal solution is that these newly elected bodies ought to be fairly equal in terms of real power in a pan-Sámi context; consequently the debate must continue.

It could be argued that the Sámi are in a unique position at present, as they can point to the need for negotiation power vested in a representative political structure. The Chernobyl disaster certainly emphasizes the legitimacy of such a requirement, and this highly negative and destructive event may be converted into an asset in the persistent struggle toward establishing a political structure which will be most workable and expedient to the Sámi.

Concluding remarks

As has been argued, native ethnicity becomes an important feature in response to the growing contact with the larger society. Out of necessity and with cultural survival in mind, native ethnicity is gradually transferred into a political force. Due to the unequal distribution of power, however, this process of organizational development is persistently constrained by the nationstate. On the other hand, any political strength which the natives are capable of acquiring will certainly have an impact on the tenacious inter-ethnic relation, which in turn will remodel and reconfirm native ethnicity further. The actual process leading to the empowerment of native political structures may differ in detail, depending on the specific case, but in its basic form the pattern ought to be fairly common (Cf. Brøsted et al 1985).

Integrating ecology, politics and law in an analytical frame of reference, I have argued for the overall significance

to native minority groups of maintaining cultural viability. Because of the minority situation this objective has to be reaffirmed continuously over time. Any native political structure must possess a minimum basis of power in order to assure resource development, to restrict sociocultural implications caused by external encroachments, and finally to counteract assimilation. If these minimum requirements are not met, native cultures will eventually become less viable and possibly succumb.

The concept of power indicates to what degree a native political structure is political in real terms and not in name only. The relative distribution of adequate power between the nation-state and the ethnic minority at any given time is the factor from which such estimation can be ascertained. The concept of culture elucidates in less exact terms how ethnic the same political structure appears. I am convinced that in order to function properly as a respected force, native political structures must be strengthened both in political and ethnic terms, a generative process that most likely never will terminate.

Moreover, from a strategic point of view, native political structures must assume initiation power. By means of confronting the larger society with crucial issues which never can be disregarded, indigenous minorities are pushing for a successive revision of the distribution of power in their favour. To have the capacity to initiate confrontations leading to conflict resolutions, the minority also proves its viability. As we can delineate from the Sámi case, and this is probably valid for most other native groups in the North, significant legal contests on matters of rights in principle, as well as official inquiries as preliminaries to new legislation, would never occur unless the natives actively worked for it. As a rule the nationstate and its various

agencies and organs remain rather passive and restrained whenever organizational change favouring native interests is at stake. For the Sámi at the moment the question of Sámi Parliament in relation to native power is one crucial issue not yet solved. We are facing similar problems in regard to official policy towards the natives in both northern Canada and Alaska; the process of trying to settle basic issues of native concerns tends to be extremely slow and most intricate, as have been elucidated by numerous researchers. (See in particular Asch 1984; Berger 1985; Pointing 1990.) Another variant is the model of home rule recently established in Greenland. In this case, one gets fairly close to Arctic self-determination which rests not only on a representative body, like the Sámi Parliament, although far more empowered, but also on its own executive power and central administration. Contrary to most other natives in the Northern Fourth World, the Inuit in Greenland also experience a common Third World feature of post- or neocolonialism (Dahl 1986).

Let me also add that the basic argument concerning ethno-political development among the Sámi connects to the empowerment debate currently taking place on a broad scale internationally (Cf. UN Report 1990). Cultural viability depends to a large extent on ecological sustainability, i.e. the traditional resource management system of an indigenous minority can meet external pressure from industrial development and remain viable only by means of sustainable development. Sustainable development refers to the active and effective way in which a minority adapts to constantly changing circumstances which are most frequently determined by external, modernizing forces. The reindeer pastoralist Sámi, with their appreciable vulnerability in land-use patterns, is an illustrative case for such a development process. Local

participation without real power can do little to influence resource management decisions in a wide cross-cultural frame work. In this case, empowerment of indigenous ethnic minorities who remain marginalized is required. The *Sameting* recently instituted has the appropriate form when it comes to managing more complex matters. Its political contents in terms of actual power, however, is far from satisfactory.

In conclusion, should a Sámi Parliament be restricted to advisory functions only, as has been suggested, the Sámi are bound to start pushing again for empowered political institutions, without which no indigenous minority groups can survive culturally in a long-term perspective. This simple fact must also be understood by the authorities responsible for managing concerns related to native peoples in their irreversible state of encapsulation.

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