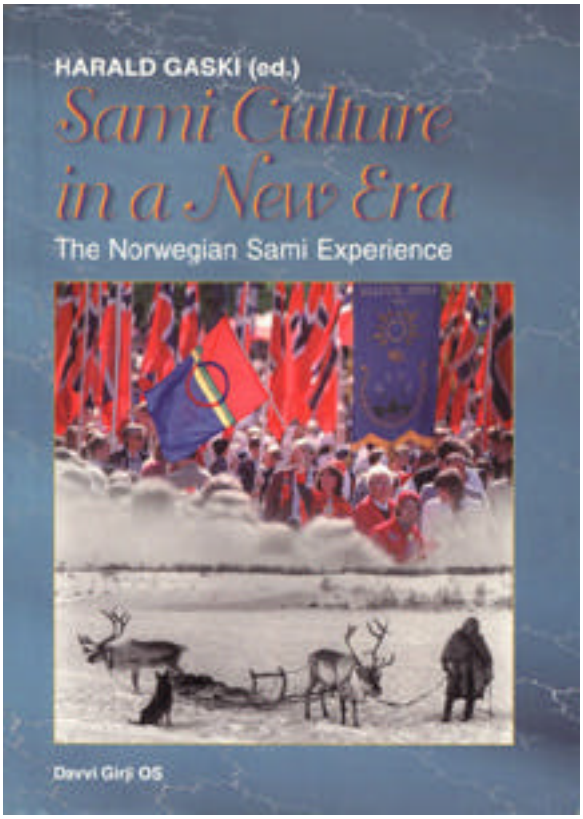

Harald Gaski:

Sami Culture in a New Era

In this introduction I will try to create a background for the following essays by saying something about Sami culture, identity and sense of belonging, viewed from the inside by an active member of a minority culture. I will try to do this by presenting some of the conditions within Sami cultural life that have been and continue to be important for the maintenance of Sami culture and identity. This means that I will deal with circumstances that have made and still make it possible for the Sami to practice their culture productively and thereby develop, confirm, and demonstrate their identity, both to themselves and to the outside world. I proceed in this manner, not to reject or downplay the significance of Sami political objectives, but rather because of an awareness that these objectives primarily have been and still are founded on the desire to establish the best possible conditions "for the Sami to develop their language, their culture and their communal life," as stated in the amendment to the Norwegian constitution, a document in which the Sami are recognized as an indigenous people within Norway's borders.

Sami policy has never been directed toward the establishment of a

separate Sami nation state. Instead, it has concentrated more on establishing rights that will assure the survival and growth of the Sami and their culture in their own ancestral areas of settlement. Even during periods of the most aggressive colonization and assimilation, as well as during the Christianization by force that took place in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the Sami turned to their own cultural expressions as an internal defense against external pressure. The Sami traditional form of musical expression, the *yoik*, became a medium for inside agitation among the Sami, challenging them to resist the demands of the colonizers that they give up their language and culture. Even if they lost their right to the land, they would never give up their right to have intrinsic value and Sami-ness. (Gaski 1993: 120-22). The *yoik* was chosen as a form of expression not only because of its central position among the Sami, but also because the *yoik* had a subtle system of double meanings and metaphorical imagery. It was necessary to camouflage the *yoik*'s political content because some of the public officials had acquired an elementary knowledge of the Sami language and could, therefore, suppress oppositional activities that were too obvious.

This also provides some historical background for the fact that the Sami focused so intently on the importance of language and artistic cultural expressions during the first stages of their political mobilization at the beginning of the twentieth century. The concepts of art and culture are relatively new to the Sami, but we can assume that what they encompass has been recognized so that art and culture have been manifested according to the Sami people's own understanding of their implications long before the terms became part of the language. In the rhetoric of cultural policy as well the theme has long been to preserve and develop Sami culture, a fact which would confirm that one at least has had a sense of what culture meant. "Culture" is a loan word into the Sami language. There is no traditional concept that covers the whole spectrum of meanings of activities which comprise the components of "culture". The closest one can come is *Sami vuohki* which is best translated "Sami ways", that is, way of being, way of living, mentality and values. "Art" is called *dáidda* in Sami, in contrast to applied art and handcrafts, for which the term is *duodji*. *Dáidda* is in this context a new Sami word for that which is ordinarily defined as art, that is, "art" as opposed to "craft". Modern *duodji*-products are works of art in both form and craftsmanship, but, traditionally, *duodji* has always been connected with the object's practical function, which is not solely to be displayed for its esthetic qualities but rather to be used in everyday life. (Guttorm 1995: 153-56). It is a fact, however, that even among the Sami handcrafted items are more and more often becoming objects for display instead of for practical use.

There is, however, an important connection between *duodji* and *dáidda*,

from applied art to art in the modern sense. *Duodji* comprises creative activities which are both intellectual and material, so a writer can equally well be called a *sátneduojár*, a Sami word meaning a crafter of words, or *girjeçálli*, a writer of books. Artists like Iver Jåks, Aage Gaup and Ingunn Utsi receive inspiration from the *duodji*-tradition for their sculptures. The principle behind their esthetic is to use organic materials, allowing wooden sculptures to be exposed to wind and weather and eventually decompose and disappear without a trace. In a way, this is parallel to the traditional Sami relationship with the natural environment, where the hand of nature erases all traces of Sami migration and settlement, perhaps only leaving behind the ring of stones around a campfire or the folklore surrounding the meaning of a place name. The Sami structures have never been formidable, and our cultural monuments are, above all, memories of culture, transmitted *orally*, as reminders, rather than physical legacies such as a cathedral or a statue.

One of the most prominent Sami cultural figures during the new revitalization from the end of the 1960s was Paulus Utsi (1918-1975). He combined his job as a *duodji*-teacher at the Sami Folk High School in Jokkmokk, Sweden with writing poetry. Utsi had a plan in his writing: He wanted to capture the language, entrap it in the very snares of language itself. He had in mind to write a poetic trilogy, whose individual titles would tell the readers how his plan was progressing. Utsi was able to write two collections before he died, *Giela giela* [Ensnare the lanuage] (1974) and *Giela gielain* [Ensnare with the language] (1980), the second collection appearing posthumously, with his wife, Inger, as co-author. In an interview, Paulus Utsi said that the Sami used to write in the snow, and that made him think of writing poetry. Perhaps it is precisely the transitoriness of this type of writing he had in mind when he, in one of his poems, compares the threatened state of a Sami way of life with ski tracks across the open tundra, which the wind wipes out already before the next morning dawns.

Writing fiction as a creative process, like other cultural work, has, until recently, been something which the Sami have become engaged in more or less reluctantly, not always simply because they have lacked the ability, but often because, in earlier times, no social status was to be gained from that sort of work. It was considered worth knowing how to write, for example in connection with trade and business, but it was mainly the non-Sami who reaped the benefits of their ability to write; and even if the Sami could encourage their children to do well in school in order to do well in the new society, the perception of real work was associated with manual labor and the Biblical edict, "in the sweat of thy brow shalt thou eat thy bread." But Paulus Utsi understood that the Sami also

had to learn new techniques, and that, in many ways, they would have to resort to the arts of the non-Sami in order to be heard and taken seriously. Utsi stressed both aspects of writing; its utilitarian value on the one hand--writing as a medium for both learning and livelihood, but also, on the other hand, its esthetic dimension, writing as an art form, as literature, which in its own way can open up completely different avenues for understanding and communication than those which factual prose will ever be able to do. Utsi wanted the Sami to preserve their own language as the minority's own voice, but also to learn the language of the majority in order to expose the majority culture's manipulations of the Sami by means of language; they should become aware of language as a trap with which one could ensnare, but also in which one could be ensnared.

In Sami tradition, anyone who discovers something new must also show that the discovery is significant, viable and of value. Therefore, Paulus Utsi was cautious when he set out to write poetry, first submitting some of his poems for print to the journal *Samefolket,* which is published in Sweden. Next, he wrote a small cycle of poems, made himself heard here and there, gained recognition, became someone from whom people wanted to hear more. And, then, the time was ripe to publish his first collection of poetry, *Giela giela* (Ensnare the language)-- that is to say, a call for gaining control over the language. In his second collection, he becomes more explicit about his intentions. It is the language that he wants to capture in the trap, and the weapon he will use, the trap, is language itself, *Giela gielain* (Ensnare with the language), because in Sami, the same words are used for learning languages and checking a trap: *oahppat giela* can mean both "learning a language" and "looking to see if there is anything caught in the trap".

Because of Paulus Utsi's premature death, the trilogy was never completed. Therefore the question is left open and remains unanswered: What might the title of the last volume have been? If he had continued along the same path he had set out, the title of the third volume could have been *Gielain gielain*, which, among other things, can mean "With the language among the languages," in reference to the status of the Sami language as one of many languages in the area where we live. Such a title would, moreover, serve as an appeal that Sami continue to be one of the languages in the North in the future as well; the Sami will have to learn other languages, but also maintain their own.

Proud of the language

What is it, then, that makes the Sami language unique? It is, of course, "the language of the heart" to those for whom it is mother-tongue, but it is also one of the most developed languages in the world when it comes to describing arctic

nature and conditions of life in the North. Sami descriptions of landscape can function as maps, in which are incorporated topography, geography and information as to which routes are best to take. The Sami nomenclature pertaining to snow and reindeer herding is beginning to be recognized internationally. Nils Jernsletten's article describes in more detail these aspects of Sami language from a linguist's point of view. Jernsletten is at the same time a person who himself grew up in the early post-war period knowing--and *using*--these terms in everyday life fishing salmon in the summers and catching ptarmigans in snares in winter to make the ends meet. Sami is a precise language in those areas that demand precision, and, at the same time, it also preserves terms related to kinship, and in so doing, it preserves conceptual knowledge of relationships within and between immediate family and extended kinship.

Sami is a verbal language, both in the sense that it is an oral language and that it, as a vehicle of communication, focuses on the verb, on action. Because it is possible to change a word's meaning and focus by adding an ending to its stem, the language provides possibilities for an almost infinite number of variations. Descriptions of movements may serve as points of illustration. The verb *njuikut*, for instance, means "to jump", without saying anything in particular about how one is jumping. *Njuiket* means "to jump only one time", however, while *njuikkodit* means "to jump continuously". *Njuikestit*, further, means "a small jump, a hop performed once", while *njukkodallat* denotes "several small jumps performed over an extended time". And here one can specify further the nature of the jump itself and the amount of time during which the jump is preformed by saying *njuikulit*, for instance, which can mean both "making a few quick jumps" and "jumping away". *Njuikkodastit* means "to make small jumps for a very short time". *Njuikehit* means "to cause to jump" and "jumping up to get something", but it can also have an entirely different meaning, namely "to copulate", specifically describing how the male animal jumps up on, or mounts, the female during the mating act.

One could continue to add endings to the stem of this verb and create another ten variations or so, but I would rather give another short example, which adds an esthetic dimension to the verb's description of the noun's way of moving. A *beavrrit* is a long-legged, tall and slim human being or animal, in other words, a handsome creature, at least according to today's understanding of what is attractive. From this word one can make verbs like *beavrut, beavrruhit, beavrasaddat* which all describe the special gait or way of moving that this nice-looking human or animal has. A *beavrrit* can be seen in contrast to a *loaggi*, who is a person with short and fat legs, often also dressed in ugly clothes that

makes a person look big-butted. The way in which this person moves is described by the words *loaggut* or *loggahit*, (Nielsen 1979: Vol. 1: 306 and Vol. 2: 543).

It is quite obvious that an awareness of the wealth of and possibilities within a person's own language makes him or her proud, and this awareness, therefore, contributes to creating a positive image of the language and the people who use it. The Sami have always been proud of their language, even if the assimilation policies in the Nordic countries during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries reduced the actively Sami-speaking portion of the population considerably. (Jernsletten 1993: 122-24). The ambitions regarding one's own mother language are also expressed in the oldest surviving Sami texts describing contacts with other people in the northern regions. The texts were written down in the 1820s, but they refer back to several earlier generations.. There the others--the strangers--are referred to as "people without a language," because they don't speak Sami. (Fellman 1906: 239-243)

Subordination, resistance and values of our own

Because of the majority culture's political dominance and attempts to assimilate the Sami, and the Sami's gradual subordination, both in terms of their social status and use of their own language, the fundamental relationship between the Sami and the nation states in which they live soon became one of minority and majority. Whereas esthetics, rhetoric and social relationships earlier had been primarily geared toward our own affairs, the political aspect of practically all Sami activities now emerged in the recognition of the Sami's status as a minority. In many cases, being a minority was stigmatized by the assimilationists, something which naturally lay the cornerstone for Sami opposition to being declared incapable of managing their own affairs.

The following essays in this book will implicitly comment on the cultural and political implications of the relationship between majority and minority, for the most part using a Sami point of view on the ways in which research, education and communication serve to shape and promote identity in a modern society. How did the Sami gain control in these three areas, and to what degree have they succeeded in giving them a Sami face? Have they managed to do it, and if so, what is the price they perhaps have had to pay in terms of the power and importance of tradition, a cornerstone in Sami thinking and consciousness? (Seurajärvi-Kari 1995: 82-88, Helander 1996: 1-3, Keskitalo 1994: 51-54).

These questions apply to the management of traditional livelihoods like reindeer herding, as dealt with in Johan K. Hætta Kalstad's article, but equally important is the way today's youth ascribe themselves as Sami without

necessarily adopting all the symbols of their parents' generation, as shown in Vigdis Stordahl's essay. The signs and symbols of the 70s have no longer the same meaning in present-day Sami society, even though they were important markers of identity and belonging in the symbolic warfare of the Sami Movement at that time, as Stordahl demonstrates.

In health care the cultural competence of the personnel is important for the success of the treatment, and not least for the trust and confidence of the patients. This self-evident truth still has not been that obvious in regard to the health services previously offered to the Sami, a fact which has been the driving force behind the development of a Sami health care making use of new technical achievements at the same as the cultural background of the patient is taken into consideration. This is relevant at so many levels in the relationship between the treater and the treated, but probably most obvious when it comes to language skills and comprehension of cultural taboos and more or less hidden traditional practices. Health is an important matter for all of us, and the fact that Sami health care so far has been well adjusted to the national health service of Norway should still not be an excuse to leave out a crucial part of the everyday experience of a minority's well-being as presented in Siv Kvernmo's article.

The Sami political awakening was, first and foremost, culturally based. The driving force behind political engagement was directed at insuring the rights to Sami language and culture. Not until later did the issue of rights to land and water come to the fore. The documentation of Sami history, use of Sami as a language in the schools, and news and information services in Sami have always been areas of high priority. Therefore John T. Solbakk's essay in this book on contemporary Sami mass media and their role in shaping a modern Sami society is founded on solid ground when it comes to valuing the importance of having information channels operating in one's own language.

The establishment of Sami institutions of learning was promoted early on as something which would contribute to securing Sami self-awareness and identity. It was important that the Sami themselves be involved and their resources utilized in areas of academic research.[1] The need for Sami researchers became extremely important as a political consideration, both as a disciplinary concern and as a matter of cultural policy. The building-up of a Sami elite and the emphasis on new themes in the ethno-political discourse is thoroughly

[1] Cf. the discussion about locating the first Sami Institute of Research outside of the newly founded University of Tromsø that took place when the Nordic Sami Institute was created in Kautokeino in 1974. Some of the arguments for a separate establishment in the geographic center of the Sami settlements can be found in A. I. Keskitalo 1976. In 1989 a Sami College was established in the same village.

described in Harald Eidheim's essay on the invention of Sami selfhood. As one of the most influential Norwegian academics supporting the evolving Sami movement and furnishing it with arguments for demanding a greater say in their own affairs, Eidheim's article traces the new Sami self-understanding from the 1970s all the way to the present and illustrates its impact and significance on Sami self determination--particularily in excelling in popular as well as fine arts.

Even if we, in this context, are mainly talking about education according to a Western model, based on studies and theoretical training, we must understand that education as an idea has always held a central position in traditional Sami upbringing. It was important to learn the practical skill, but it was equally important to learn the words and concepts that were associated with the work at hand. This education started early with the stories told by parents and close relatives, stories accompanying concrete work assignments, (Vuolab 1995: 33-34). These fictionalized versions of real life were important ingredients in the learning process. Already at a young age, it was important for a child to not only be able to perform a task, but also to explain orally how the task should be carried out; just as it was important to know the terms for landscape and topography in order to be able to describe a geographic location so well to others that they could find it without the use of a map. The great transition that many Sami children experienced when they entered the "Norwegian school" can, I believe, be blamed on the differences between the role of experience in the school setting versus in the Sami children's own world, as well as on the fact that the children were separated from their parents and close relatives and made to live at boarding schools.

A bi-cultural competence

Extending the reasoning I expressed in my description of Paulus Utsi's intended project, one can see that the Sami realized relatively quickly the importance of mastering both their own world and the view that "the others" had of the world. In spite of everything, the Sami have lived in close relationship with their neighbors throughout history, and they have thereby learned that surroundings can be viewed and understood in different ways. Mastering both ways became a strength by itself. While the official Norwegian view on bilingualism has been negative until the last decades, the Sami know better. Our entire history has told us that it is advantageous to master several techniques simultaneously. This was particularly true for the economic basis of Sami life, with combined operations consisting of, for example, farming on a minor scale, sea and lake fishing at different times of the year, berry picking and ptarmigan hunting. Our knowledge is transferable and useful in other contexts, however. Understanding the language

of those in power is a precondition for knowing their thoughts; being able to use that language oneself is the most important tool for arguing for a different understanding of the way things are.

Going to Norwegian schools did in fact benefit some Sami children by allowing them to develop a bi-cultural competence--learning Sami values and ideas at home, while at school becoming familiarized with Norwegian history, culture and identity. I am not saying that this applies to all the children--the percentage of "drop-outs" and children who didn't want to or couldn't adjust is too high for that assertion--but it would also be wrong to portray the history of Sami schooling as one of only suffering. Many managed very well in the schools--and still remained Sami. Some of them who have become the most eager advocates of the establishment of a separate Sami school system are themselves products of the school system they call assimilative.[2] An inventory of careers within the Sami society would also most likely confirm that it is exactly those who succeeded in the "Norwegian" school system who have made successful careers. They have solved the dilemma of a person from a minority culture in the modern world--that of having to master the systems of both the majority culture and their own. An interesting remaining question is, however, how do they define their Sami-ness in the modern society? Do they refer to their cultural background and knowledge of tradition as the essence of their "being Sami", or is their newly acquired ethno-political position vis-á-vis the minority and majority societies the main assets of identifying oneself as belonging to both parties?

The minority's other dilemma is, in fact, that, if we want any results whatsoever, we always have to explain our issues in such a way that the powers that be, the majority cultures, understand us. But then there are new potential dangers; when we have learned the language of power, we may begin to forget the thought patterns that form the foundation of our own language. Then our "differentness" can develop into purely a rhetorical veneer, turning us into a kind of political actors without a cultural base. We may ourselves begin to regard experiential knowledge as inferior to scientific knowledge. Science, in the formal sense, has status because it is "rational", while the Sami precise observations and terms are regarded as mere empirical and typological knowledge--and

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[2] There has been a great deal of research and writing about how the Norwegian (and Swedish and Finnish) school has not worked vis-á-vis Sami children and Sami traditions. This is partly connected with research done about the period of "norwegianization" of the Sami and of the Finnish immigrants, and the formation of boarding schools which were part of the strategy to "norwegianize" Sami children. Sources on these topics include Asle Høgmo 1989, Anton Hoëm 1976, L. Lind Meløy 1980, and Knut Einar Eriksen and Einar Niemi 1981. Among more recent material on the position of the school within today's Sami society, attention must de drawn to a booklet named *Kunnskap og kompetanse i Sápmi "En samisk skole i emning"* [Knowledge and Competence in Sapmi: The development of a Sami School] (ed. A. Balto), SUFUR 1996, where the current system is evaluated and different approaches tried out regarding new ways to develop an education more in harmony with Sami values and traditions.

consequently of lesser value. Our perception of the distinction between experiential knowledge and theoretical science has influenced the Sami so much that we have even felt forced to create a new word denoting "science" in order to be on equal footing with the majority culture. The new word *die¿a* [science], derived from the verb *diehtit* [to know], is thus set apart from *diehtu* which is the traditional noun for "knowledge".[3]

The terminology for animals and landscape, snow and conditions for traveling on snow, family and kinship is so precise that no scientific system can be more so. Nonetheless, parts of this precise language are in danger of being forgotten because of changes in society and a decreased use of such specialized terms in a modern world where distance between humans--the Sami included--and nature is increasing. An awareness of the fact that, historically, our people have had a scientifically developed language should instill pride in our own language in spite of the fact we, in the past, perhaps haven't differentiated so clearly between knowledge and science. But the differentiation probably was not so important in the past. Do we now have to introduce a separation of the two concepts in order to legitimize Sami research, and, if so, to whom do we legitimize it when we create expressions which perhaps contribute to alienating the user of the language from his or her own linguistic heritage? Will it be possible to operate within two different language-based conceptions of reality and still communicate across these in such a way that people who know the linguistic and cultural codes of both will be able to understand each other?

Are, perhaps, academics, artists and journalists today's architects in the construction of the new Sami society, a society which preserves its own values and traditions while it emphasizes the importance of working within the mainstream in a common effort to learn from and teach each other how to insure the survival of our planet.

The transition from tradition into becoming modern internationalists

One of the aims of this book is to comment on the transition of a traditional culture into the modern way of life--a process we have been witnessing over the last few decades. The changes in societal life, the introduction of state insured welfare programs, the ever increasing amount of consumption, and the dependence on public services has had a tremendous impact on Sami everyday life as well as on the incorporation of the Sami areas into the Norwegian welfare system. This development has been beneficial for the improvement of social

[3] Cf. K Nielsen's dictionary in which the concept of "die¿a" is not included. The main part of Nielsen's dictionaries were compiled from the beginning of the the twentieth century up to the beginning of WWII. In Pekka Sammalahti's *Sámi-Suoma sátnegirji* (Vasa, 1989) the concept is included meaning 'science', p. 110.

conditions in *Sapmi*, the areas where the Sami live, but has, at the same time, contributed to less obvious differences between the Sami way of life and the surrounding Norwegian culture. Being in the state of living in mixed communities over a vast territory, the Sami find themselves making up the majority of the local population only in the inner part of Finnmark, the northenmost county in Norway. In these municipalities there are also certain rights connected with being a Sami. These apply mostly to securing the use of Sami language in public activities. In other areas, like along the coast, the Sami have for a long time been outnumbered by the Norwegian inhabitants, who for the last few hundred years have been in a dominant position.

Some readers may miss a separate essay on the present condition of the land rights's issue in Norway, but for various reasons--and because of the rapid development in the international deliberations on indigenous peoples' rights[4]--the editor decided rather to ask several authors to incorporate those topics into their articles instead of having one essay deal exclusively with legal matters. The material regarding the rights' issues is so overwhelmingly huge that a substantial coverage of its full complexity would demand a whole book devoted solely to legal discussions. The intention of this book is rather to elucidate the background and the context for the legal, and political, claims for extended Sami rights--primarily through investigating the cultural foundation for the reasoning behind these demands.

Regarding the historical background for the Sami indigenous rights, I will first and foremost draw attention to Einar Niemi's essay and his extensive bibliography on the relevant sources examining different aspects of the legitimacy of the Sami claims to land and water rights. Niemi also presents the current discussions in the wake of the report from the Sami Rights' Commission, NOU 1997:4. This report which deals with land management in Finnmark, the northernmost county of Norway, states that land rights should not be granted on a specific ethnic basis. Implicit in this principle is the obligation of the Norwegian authorities to secure the preservation and development of Sami culture in Norway. This means that rights have a cultural, not an ethnic basis, and that it is out of respect for the cultural persistence which in turn implements growth and development in local societies that the national authorities accept specific rights granted to the habitants of particular regions. These prerogatives are not based in individual rights of a specific ethnic group, but as a means of securing the

[4] See more on the international movement of indigenous peoples, and their role in foregrounding the land rights' issue in international fora as the UN in H. Minde 1996.

continued existence of Sami culture collectively.

According to the Commission, it is necessary to make certain exceptions and to grant special rights to the Sami in order to achieve equity between Norwegian and Sami culture in Norway. The same kind of logic is the foundation for the suggestion that local management of specific resources within defined limited areas be safeguarded as the natural basis for Sami culture. As a consequence of this thinking, and in the wording of the Commission to avoid local dissension, different models of natural resource management are proposed with equal representation by Sami and Norwegians elected by the Sami Parliament and the Finnmark County Parliament. The Commission refuses rights based on ethnic criteria out of practical reasons connected with difficulties in management, and because of disadvantageous consequences--not on the basis of a principal view.

Most of the contributors in this collection are Sami themselves, and therefore occupied in issues of how to shape and reshape the values of the past into a future that will still be recognized as values belonging to "natural man". Defending an indigenous peoples' culture in a modern world must mean something in practice both for the Sami collectively and individually. There must be some cognitive and even philosophical justification for maintaining and developing a culture and a world-view which for "modern man" may seem outdated and backward. Even though the Sami probably are one of the most modernized indigenous peoples in the world, their role as communicators between an ever more estranged "Western" conception of Nature and the indigenous peoples' preferred holistic view expressing the statement that all creatures are fundamentally dependent on each other, is important and steadily growing. This is the time to utilize the benefits of belonging to the affluent countries of the world, and also to benefit from a modern education system that enables the Sami of today to assume the position of mediators: Advocating the view of the "natural man" to the international society of the UN and the IMF, and, at the same time, convincing the indigenous peoples about the importance of letting one's voice be heard by the international community. This is the task and the challenge of modern natural man, still hearing and obeying the heartbeats of the Earth itself, imparting its message through the most modern mediums to an increasing number of serious listeners.

One of the intended, or at least, hoped for distinctive qualities of this book is the devotedness to a cause manifested by every writer. The contributors are not just outside observers to events and tendencies, they are, on the contrary, deeply involved with the issues at hand. They analyze ongoing processes at the

same time as they themselves take part in shaping the future society by being active members of the community. Their involvement and their enthusiasm is the strength of this book--the development and achievements described are to some extent the products of the strivings of the same people. The present collection of articles should be the best proof for my assertion in this introduction that the Sami want to have a say in the shaping of the future society as well as in the research conducted on our own culture, history and management of land as well as identity and belonging to a place and a people.

The tribal voice in the new political discourse

In opposition to this goal is the awareness that this boundary between a Western course of action and that taken by the indigenous peoples are erased in the everyday world of Sami politics, because political interactions are becoming identical all over the world. There is only *one* way to speak on the international arena if a person wants to be heard and understood. Therefore, the representatives of the indigenous peoples who are expected to act as intermediaries between different world views need to have tremendous communication skills; the destiny of the indigenous peoples depends on how well Western society understands them and how interested in them it is, but the survival of Western society is perhaps also dependent on its gaining a new understanding of "the first voices". Because the discourse of politics is becoming increasingly "tainted", it is necessary to turn to the art of the indigenous peoples and to tradition to rediscover the central questions regarding our existence on earth. Whereas the politicians among the indigenous peoples nowadays speak with "the White Man's Voice", it is perhaps still possible to hear "the Tribal Voice"[5] resonate in indigenous art, both in traditional art and in the modern interpretations of, for example, what it means to be a Sami today.

Therefore, both art and science are in the process of revitalizing their roles as identity markers for many indigenous peoples of the world. Both disciplines defy limits and borders, also in an ethnic sense, and, therefore, they provide the best point of departure for the establishment and continuation of contact between different people and nations. One conspicuos Sami example of art work in this line are the books by the award-winning poet Nils-Aslak Valkeapää. On the cover of his book,*The Sun, My Father* Valkeapää has the image of a golden magical drum. In the middle of the drum, he places the Sami sun symbol, which also appears in the book together with a creation story, told in the form of a poem.

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[5] This expression is borrowed from the CD by the aboriginal Australian group, Yotho Yindi. The title of the CD is *The Tribal Voice Album* (Mushroom Records, Australia, 1991).

Among the photographs included in the book are those of Sami mythological places and old, preserved drums. Toward the end of the book Valkeapää returns to images of the drum but now it is torn.

The poems at the end of the book revolve around the concept of time, and the form of one of the poems is also a semi-circle that declares:"and time does not exist, no end, none/ and time is, eternal, always, is..."(poem no. 566). Completing a circle, the book's first poem is repeated at the end, not in completely identical form, but with the same theme. When the words come to an end, we carry with us the last poem of the book:"...and when everything is over/nothing is heard any more/ nothing/and it is heard." (no. 570). When we close the book, we discover that the back cover doesn't have the entire drum, only the figure of the sun which we found positioned in the center of the drum on the front cover. Time has changed, old beliefs disappear, but the knowledge imparted by the traditions that the Sami pay heed to is, among other things, the awareness that we are descendants of the Sun with all the obligations attached to that in terms of how we live today: As an indigenous people in more than a political sense.

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