Sámi Film Culture as an Emerging 'Network Cinema'

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Caption

This article examines how Sámi media organizations in Norway, Sweden and Finland communicate, share resources, and collaborate both professionally and creatively through transnational 'networking' practices. In doing so, the article assesses how far these 'networks' differentiate Sámi film production from the dominant Nordic media industries.

Abstract

The film cultures of the indigenous Sámi people are part of a developing branch of the Nordic film industries. Recent publications (Mecsei 2015 and Kääpä 2015) highlight a growing interest in the film and media production of this small population. Currently, the International Sámi Film Institute (ISFI), based in the Kautokeino region of Northern Norway, represents the largest Sámi media organization, providing financial and material support for Sámi filmmakers. Additionally, the ISFI works with small-scale production companies like Bautafilm and Skábma - The Indigenous Peoples' Film Centre in Finland, by providing training and other collaborative opportunities for aspiring practitioners at all levels. This collaborative work highlights both the transregional and transnational 'networking' potential of indigenous filmmaking practices. Analysing the workings of these small Sámi production companies also helps us to understand what role state support plays in Sámi self-determination. Although these Sámi companies are working to strengthen their regional communication links and form a collective Sámi media outlet, the bulk of their resources come from the respective Nordic film institutes. Drawing on the work of Manuel Castells (1996) and Marijke de Valck (2007), this article considers Sámi film production as part of an emerging 'network cinema', and looks at how network collaboration plays a complex, but nevertheless key role in the sovereignty of this emerging film culture.

Screening Sámi Identity: From Othered Subjects to Transnational Film Practitioners

The Sámi inhabit the northernmost regions of Norway, Sweden, Finland and Russia. This area, collectively known as Sápmi, is a large cultural expanse including both Finnish and Swedish Lapland. While the largest Sámi population live in Norway, their geographical position spread over several countries means they are subject to the laws of four separate nation states. Nevertheless, Sámi politics is a universally contested issue across the region, with battle lines drawn at political and economic recognition. Access to land and the freedom to cultivate, manage and control resources have caused major disputes between the Sámi and the Nordic host nations. These tensions also reach beyond the Nordic region. The Arctic space where Sápmi is located is also a site of global significance. The so-called 'Arctic nations' of Canada, the United States, Russia, Greenland and the Nordic nations (including Denmark because of its colonial relations with Greenland) are involved in an ongoing geopolitical and economic tussle over future resource implications.

In Norway and Sweden, in particular, new rounds of concessions for resource extraction have drawn widespread alarm alongside anxiety about the possible economic consequences for existing businesses in the North. The latest expansion in mineral extraction is being interpreted locally as a renewed wave of colonisation of the North, not just by the South, but by global capital more generally (Abram 2016,70)

As a result of its economic significance, the Arctic has also become a political emblem, representing one of the last remaining frontiers. These conflicts symbolize the hypocrisy of national and international conservation policies, alongside which economic and environmental exploitation continues unheeded. Although protecting the interests of indigenous cultures features in the agendas of the dominant players, few states actively engage with the indigenous populations of the Arctic and many are left open to legal mistreatment (Lawrence and Åhrén 2017, 149-167).

Alongside these wider political and economic matters, the cultural and identity politics of the Sámi lie at the forefront of the debate. With a population between 60,000-100,000, the Sámi are a diverse group made up of many different languages and cultural practices. As we shall see, this diversity is reflected in Sámi cinema which spans a variety of genres including fiction, documentary, and historical epics. However, their marginal indigenous status often results in stereotypical images portraying them as a homogenous group of 'exotic nomads.'

Similar hegemonic relations, where the Sámi are treated as subordinates, also exist in wider, mediatized contexts. In Finnish, Swedish and Norwegian film history for instance, the Sámi are frequently depicted in primative or mystical ways (Gustafsson 2014, 184-185). Such examples include the Finnish *Valkoinen peura*/*The White Reindeer* (Blomberg, 1952) where the Sámi are represented as dangerous shamans. They are also exoticized through the lens of documentaries like the Swedish *I fjällfolkets land*/*In the Land of the Mountain People* (Bergström, 1923). Although images of the 'artisanal' reindeer herding nomad have dominated, many of these traditional practices have all but died out across the region because of shrinking economic prospects and decades of enforced assimilation policies. However, such representations persist in popular culture and the imagination of the dominant Nordic media industries.

Films directed and produced by the Sámi themselves are a relatively new phenomenon, beginning in the late 1980s. In a recently published collection on cinemas of the Arctic, Monica Kim Mecsei (2015) discusses how cinematic representations of the Sámi throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries moved from derogatory to paternalistic and then shifted to the perspective of 'the insider', where the Sámi are finally beginning to tell their own stories. In 1987, Nils Gaup broke new ground when he became the first director native to Sápmi in Norway. His debut *Ofelaš*/*Pathfinder,* the story of an epic battle between a young Sámi boy and a group of mythological creatures drawn from Sámi folklore, was a contender for the 1988 Academy Award for Best Foreign Language Film, and immediately established Gaup as an ambassador for indigenous cinema. Gaup continues to influence an emerging generation of Sámi filmmakers. This is evident in his recent work with ISFI, where he coordinated and ran a series of workshops (ISFI 2011). *Pathfinder* emerged as part of a cultural revitalization in Sápmi, but particularly in Norway where the largest Sámi population live. The film also crossed cultural boundaries, appealing to large transnational audiences. The same could also be said of Gaup's second Sámi film, released more than twenty years later.

Gaup's next contribution to Sámi politics came with *Kautokeino-opprøret*/*The Kautokeino Rebellion* (2008) which dramatizes the infamous Sámi uprising of 1852, when a group of Sámi insurgents attacked and murdered several prominent Norwegian officials. This resistance against colonial oppression was one of the first recorded instances of Sámi rebellion and Gaup's film is a tribute to those who ultimately gave their lives for Sámi freedom and recognition. The Sámi figures involved and the events of the resistance created a folklore that has passed down through recent Sámi history. Previously, scholars have

highlighted Gaup's use of Sámi legend and mythology, drawing comparisons with similar themes commonly observed in the dominant film cultures. However, Iversen (1998) interprets the mythologizing of the Sámi in films like *Pathfinder* as a strategy designed to reclaim the exotic imagery used by the host nations. However, this self-exoticizing approach has its limitations, namely that such imagery still conforms to the dominant representations of the Sámi as Other.

Since *Pathfinder*'s release, several other notable Sámi filmmakers have emerged. In Finland, Paul-Anders Simma and Katja Gauriloff have used fiction to explore tensions in Sámi communities, and documentaries to highlight ongoing political struggle. Simma's semi-fiction film *Sagojogan ministeri/The Minister of State* (1997) is set during WWII on the Finnish-Swedish Sápmi border, where a Finnish soldier on the run is mistaken for a government official there to assist with a land reform programme. Simma uses the complexities of this border area to playfully mock identity politics from all sides. Simma's documentary *Antakaa Meille Luurankomme!/Give Us Our Skeletons!* (1999) moves from playful fiction to outright socio-political confrontation as it chronicles a contemporary fight to reclaim the heads of two prominent Sámi resistance fighters involved in the uprising of 1852. These two films emphasize some of the diverse strategies used by Sámi directors to have the Sámi recognized as a colonized people.

Equally, on the subject of recognition, Katja Gauriloff's 2007 documentary *Huuto Tuuleen/A Shout into the Wind* follows a Sámi community in contemporary Finland fighting to save traditional practices in the face of globalization. Pietari Kääpä notes the markedly different view of Sámi life in Gauriloff's documentary, one largely defined by mundane bureaucracy. According to Kääpä, instead of distancing the Sámi from the host population, this de-exoticization helps audiences see common, relatable struggles. 'From the perspective of the Sámi, it is more important to highlight the day-to-day activities of municipal legislature and other such unglamorous procedures than to continue to emphasize the 'inherent' natural mysticism' (Kääpä 2014, 166-167).

Other filmmakers like Sweden's Lars-Göran Pettersson have challenged the 'artisan' stereotypes associated with the Sámi. His 2003 film *Bázo*, a Sámi word meaning 'idiot', follows Emil (Sverre Porsanger), a Sámi sent to fetch the belongings of his older, successful brother after he dies in an accident on the border of Sápmi. In doing so, Emil unexpectedly becomes the custodian of his brother's young son. Unlike *Pathfinder*'s exotic snowscapes and mystic shaman, *Bázo* presents an entirely different image of contemporary Sápmi with depictions of poverty, violence, and marginalization. In a similar way to Gauriloff's *A Shout*

into the Wind documentary, *Bázo'*s offers a fictional view of contemporary Sámi life devoid of its 'exotic' qualities.

Sámi Film as a Transnational Movement

Cinema is increasingly discussed in transnational terms. This turn in film scholarship roughly began with Andrew Higson's seminal article 'The Concept of National Cinema' (1989) and his follow up 'The Limiting Imagination of National Cinema' (2000) where he questions the validity of the term 'national cinema' in an age of increasingly 'leaky borders' (2000, 67). Higson concludes that the production, distribution and exhibition processes involved in filmmaking cannot and are not contained within national borders. Although an open and complex concept, discussions on transnational cinema account for all aspects of film production, from the economic implications of cross-border partnerships, down to the identity politics of on-screen representations (Ezra and Rowden 2006). On the back of this transnational focus, concepts like 'intercultural cinema', 'hybridity' (Marks 2000) and 'accented cinema' (Naficy 2001) have emerged as new ways of conceptualizing cinematic identities increasingly shaped by migration, multilingualism and crises of nationhood.

   Where, then, does contemporary Sámi film production fit in with these developments? As an indigenous population spread across four nations, the Sámi are often referred to as a transnational population (Strøm 2015, 80) and indeed a pre-national (Kääpä 2014, 166) population by default. 'The Sámi have moved over time from being outsiders within the European nation-state system to being recognized as a national "minority," and from there to becoming an acknowledged (if "protected") part of egalitarian society' (Kääpä 2016, 136). Despite the smallness of their film practices, Sámi cinema is also increasingly operating on a transnational level, where companies are working across borders and collaborating with other pan-Sámi practitioners. Specifically, I conceptualize the relationships between Sámi producers as part of a growing 'network' where resources, talent and practical training are exchanged between diverse indigenous populations with a shared colonial history. In outlining the strengths, limitations and challenges faced by these emerging indigenous networks, my analysis looks at examples where national policy constrains the Sámi, but also how they are limited by their own agendas. Do these networks rely on the same marginal imaginary of the dominant culture, or is this network of 'cultural closeness' open to wider perspectives on Sámi identity?

Defining 'Network Cinema'

The term 'network' has been conceptualized in many ways. Sociologists Manual Castells (1996), Michel Callon (1986) and Bruno Latour (1988) have all used the term 'network' to describe how digital communication has reshaped human civilization and transformed the way people communicate on both 'local' and global levels. Castells believes networks, that is, systems of power based on information and exchange, have replaced the physical operations of industries. In his analysis, the power is no longer concentrated in one place and is now diffused across large and often globally situated information networks. According to Castells; these networks consist of 'nodes' or components that subsidize and feed into the network's overall power. However, although power may be more diffused, hierarchies can still exist within and between these networked systems. For Castells, this is because each node's participation in the network depends on what and how it can contribute to the overall system. On this basis, networks still have the power to exclude (1998, 70-165). Previously, film scholars like Mathijs and Sexton (2011) and Valck (2007) have adopted Castell's network theory in their analysis of cult cinema and film festival circuits respectively. As Sámi filmmaking has largely developed against the backdrop of the 'information age' where such theories have taken root, it is worth considering the operations of Sámi cinema in a similar context. My approach positions Sámi film practice as an emerging network made up of 'nodal' companies spread across Sápmi and beyond. However, to understand the networking dynamics of this small population, firstly I will elaborate on the development of indigenous film production.

Fourth Cinema and Emerging Indigenous Film Practices

Indigenous film is part of the so-called 'fourth cinema movement.' In film theory, the concepts of first, second, third and fourth cinema differentiate types of filmmaking practices. First cinema is high-concept spectacle and mass market entertainment produced by Hollywood. Second cinema typically describes European art-house films and auteur cinema and third cinema is political propaganda aimed at mobilizing economically marginalized and exploited groups (Petrie 2010, 79). Māori filmmaker Barry Barclay coined the term 'fourth cinema' in 1990. He saw indigenous people as something separate from the mainstream stating that their cultures 'are outside the national outlook *by definition*' (Barclay quoted in Murray 2008, 16). Barclay intended fourth cinema to represent and unify the perspectives of indigenous people worldwide. In other words, these were media products emerging from

cultures that were not just on the fringes of the dominant nation but totally excluded from it. As a reaction against this exclusion, Barclay saw fourth cinema as an emancipatory concept designed to challenge the status quo by establishing a shared political affinity with other indigenous peoples around the world. However, one of the paradoxes of Barclay's fourth cinema is that it defines itself against globalization and the encroachment of other 'mainstream' or non-native cultures. The danger is that this binary opposition approach may not fully comprehend how global influences have shaped indigenous film production and the cultural representations onscreen, including how indigenous practitioners have adopted or used such influences to their own ends. In the Sámi context, non-Sámi filmmakers like Lars-Göran Pettersson also complicate this binary opposition by contributing to Sámi politics in ways that do not conform to cultural or aesthetic Otherness. Although understanding Sámi film production as an independent industry challenges the 'artisan' label often used to describe indigenous people, the marginal status of fourth world politics is also a key characteristic adopted by organizations like the ISFI. In other words, although it aims to counteract the mainstream, fourth cinema simultaneously limits itself as something that can only exist in opposition to the dominant industry.

Simultaneously, defining the concept of industry is complex. John Caldwell's work (2008) pushes for a more complex understanding the term. Rather than viewing film and media industries as all-encompassing institutions, Caldwell examines the many subdivisions and levels of influence difference labour workforces have within the industries. Likewise, Vicki Mayer discusses 'below the line workers', (2011) that is, workforces who, despite their contributions, remain 'invisible' in larger industry dynamics such as those represented by Hollywood. I adopt a similar approach to Caldwell, defining the concept of industry broadly as a system of production, marketing and distribution of content, but one that varies greatly depending on whose perspective we consider. This ISFI actively promotes the 'cultural closeness' of its workforce, and the training activities are documented as part of the Institute's emphasis on Sámi involvement at every stage of the creative and practical filmmaking processes (ISFI 2011). Here, the 'visibility' of producers, scriptwriters and others trained by the ISFI are documented, profiled and promoted on the ISFI's website. However, the funding structures of Sámi film production, particularly that of the ISFI, are complex. Additionally, Sámi cinema is not necessarily produced with the same state support. For example, every project produced and financed by the ISFI must be vetted by representatives from the Norwegian Ministry of Culture (http://www.isfi.no/eng/resources/pdf/ISF_Articles.pdf). Given the complexities of these

structures, I consider the terms 'artisanal' and 'industrial' as too overdetermined and too organized around the concerns of mainstream interests to be useful descriptors for indigenous media production. An alternative approach could be to see Sámi film production as part of a 'network' based on shared politics and other concerns even across diverse practices that move beyond the Nordic region. We would need to consider both the practical and ideological implications of such a network and how far these companies rely on a collective pan-Sámi identity with fixed ideas about its own cultural definitions.

Sámi Film Culture as a Network

The Norwegian-based International Sámi Film Institute is central to understanding the recent developments in Sámi film culture. Established in 2007 as a jointly funded enterprise, the Institute received 300.000 NOK from the Sámi Parliament in Norway and a further 1.5 million NOK from the Norwegian Ministry of Culture (ISFI website). The Institute supports Sámi film production at every level, from financing through to distribution and promotion. The ISFI represents a significant step forward, where the Sámi have more creative and industrial control over the production and delivery of their media content. The ISFI's objectives over the coming years include strengthening partnerships with other Sámi media organizations across the Nordic region. To understand the collaborative developments in Sámi film production, I focus on several examples where these networks work in practice. In the context of Castells' network theory, I identify three ways the ISFI have built a node-based network system; collaborating with companies who provide technical equipment; networking through training and education; and crucially, networking through distribution at regional and international film festivals. Each of these channels, where different types of exchange take place, acts as a nodal point, feeding into the ISFI's collaborative strategy.

Networking Through Production, Distribution and Education

On the technical side, the ISFI co-produce with other emerging companies such as Bautafilm, a small Swedish production company based in Umeå and operated by Swedish- Sámi producer Oskar Östergren. They also collaborate with Rein Film, an Arctic-based film production service in Norway and another small Sámi company called Davás Film. Although they do not describe themselves as Sámi companies, Bautafilm and Rein Film play a major role in producing the ISFI's material. Fundamentally, these companies provide equipment and technical expertise both on and off-set, from supervising and managing location shooting

to editing and refining the finished products. Collaboration with other regional production companies is also a significant step forward for the ISFI and proves that this type of networking practice is not exclusively (and therefore not exclusionary) Sámi. The dynamics of these partnerships, where these companies have acted as 'nodes' in the ISFI's network, is especially evident in the recent *7 Sámi Stories* series (2014), an anthology of short films offering different perspectives on life in Sápmi. This series, along with other material produced by the ISFI was released on DVD and Blu Ray with the help of the Norwegian Film Institute (NFI) and was made commercially available through the Sámi publishing company ČálliidLágádus (http://www.isfi.no/samishorts/). Included in the series are films like Silja Somby's *Áile ja Áhkku/ Áile and Grandmother* (2014), the tale of a young girl whose grandmother teaches her 'the powers of nature and healing' (http://www.isf.as/eng/resources/pdf/7SamiStories.pdf) and *Iđitsilba/Burning Sun* (2014) Elle Márjá Eira's story about another young Sámi tribeswoman whose distinctive horn-shaped hat becomes a threat to the local church after they interpret the artefact as a sign of Satan himself.

Secondly, the training offered by the ISFI is key to understanding its strengths as a network. This kind of networking activity revolves around education where the ISFI run workshops designed to train Sámi filmmakers and industry professionals. These activities aim to help participants develop a comprehensive understanding of the filmmaking process, from scriptwriting to editing and finalizing the finished product. Crucially, nodes that feed into this type of educational networking are spreading transregionally across Sápmi, where Sámi media production is far less developed.

In Finland and Sweden, support for Sámi filmmakers is limited. The primary mechanism for film production lies with the Sámi Parliament in Finland and a government initiative established in 2012 designed to support Sámi film development (Kääpä 2015, 45). Language proved to be the driving focus as this was perceived as a clear marker of indigenous identity. Like Norway, an official governmental body subsidizes film, in this case, the Ministry of Education. Skábma – The Indigenous Peoples' Film Centre is the official media branch of the Sámi Parliament and deals with all film-related matters. Finland's national broadcasting company YLE also run YLE Sápmi, catering for domestic Sámi audiences with an emphasis on children's programmes, radio and news broadcasts in the Sámi languages. However, the ISFI are gradually expanding across Sápmi and working in conjunction with Skábma by running their workshops in Finland and providing financial support for Finnish-Sámi filmmakers. Although in its very early stages, this kind of networking marks an important step in the development of Sámi cinema. According to Anne Aikio, director of Skábma, the

ISFI are working to establish a collective pan-Sámi film institute, catering for the whole region (Aikio 2016). Another type of Sámi transregional collaboration also supports this vision.

This third form of networking happens through distribution at indigenous film festivals. Dellie Maa, a film and arts festival based in Northern Sweden is one such example run by Sámi filmmaker and producer Oskar Östergren who is also involved with the strategic developments at the ISFI. The Dellie Maa event brings indigenous creatives together from around the world and provides a platform for showcasing art, film and performance. Regarding the networking efforts, the festival is an important node for the ISFI's productions and regularly screens and promotes their content. The criteria for film submissions states that either the director, producer or scriptwriter must self-identify as indigenous although it does not elaborate any further on the definition of 'Sáminess'. To qualify for review, any film submitted must also have English subtitles.

In Sweden, there is an increasing fascination with Sámi culture. Regarding film and media production, this interest is reflected in shows like the recent Sápmi-set television series *Midnattssol*/*Midnight Sun* (Stein and Mårlind 2016 -). This large budget Swedish-French co-production, which was recently picked up by Sky Atlantic, merges the conventions of a typical Nordic noir murder thriller with themes of Sámi indigeneity. These investments have created a 'carpe diem' kind of pressure on Sámi producers looking to capitalize on such interest. However, although more non-Sámi production companies are exploring the perceived 'exoticness' of the region, fewer are willing to include the perspectives of the Sámi themselves. Östergren (2015) also acknowledges that Sámi film production still has some way to go before it can claim full independence as an industry. This is not just about being recognized by the dominant powers because this recognition is often based on specific ideas about the Sámi. One of the key ways the ISFI claims to differentiate itself is through language, an aspect that plays a major role in the networking relationships between these organizations.

The Place of Language in the Network

Sari Pietikäinen's work (2008) highlights the significance of language in the revitalization of Sámi culture across the region and is, therefore, a key consideration in the context of Sámi networking. She states that 'The ideological position taken is that Sámi language captures the essence of Sámi-ness and thus the sheer existence of the special Sámi identity and community

is related to the vitality and survival of indigenous languages' (Pietikäinen 2008, 23). Sanna Valkonen has also discussed how language plays a 'performative' role in Sámi identity politics. She states how 'a person's Sámi identity is produced performatively in those acts which are considered to result from Sámi identity followed by Sámi origin. This can be the unconscious performing of Sámi ethnicity as one's natural way of life or a more conscious construction of identity' (2014, 221). Consequently, Valkonen's concept of 'Sáminess' is contingent on a type of 'performance' whether one is born into Sámi culture, or chooses to engage in it later in life. Consequently, it is important to point out how language can be used ideologically.

Norway is widely regarded as having the most progressive attitude towards Sámi rights. Nevertheless, disputes over land and territorial rights continue. In 1987, the Norwegian government passed The Sámi Act leading to the establishment of the Sámi Parliament which was designed to foster the Sámi languages and cultures rather than act as a devolved political institution. To participate in the electoral roll through the Sámi Parliament, candidates are encouraged to identify with the Sámi languages or at least have a strong familial tie to a Sámi speaker. (https://www.regjeringen.no/en/dokumenter/the-sami-act-/id449701/).

Knowledge of a Sámi language is also an essential prerequisite for anyone seeking ISFI support, and because of the ISFI's influence, it has become a defining feature of Sámi film networking practices across the Nordic region. The ISFI stipulate that investment in Sámi language content is the primary goal. The statements made on their official website (http://isfi.no/) support this mantra emphasizing the need for the Sámi to have access to programmes in their own language and based on their own culture. This approach has proved controversial because of its exclusivity. For several hundred years, the Sámi have been assimilated into the host populations, often forcibly or through political and ideological manipulation. Despite increasing recognition, particularly from the latter half of the twentieth century onwards, the geographical position of the Sámi complicates matters, namely because Sámi culture 'is not protected by strong and clear borders' (Lehtola 2005, 9). Such drawbacks have arguably strengthened the need to invest in the Sámi languages as a key unifying marker of indigenous identity.

The cultural revitalization of the 1980s was a way of reclaiming and celebrating Sámi culture as an independent and self-defined force, where Irja Seurujärvi-Kari reinforces how 'The movement used language as a driving force in the construction and strengthening of Sámi identity, which in turn made it possible for the Sámi to function as "an imagined political community"' (2011, 70-71). However, assimilation is an ingrained part of Sámi

history. It has shaped political and economic decisions and, perhaps more ironically, played a role in the cultural revitalization itself. By excluding non-Sámi speakers, the ISFI underplays the extent of their subjugation in the economic and political narratives of their dominant host nations. Mecsei reinforces the drawbacks of this approach, including the problem of geographical exclusion:

> Because the Sámi majority are non-Sámi speakers due to assimilation policies, some very important cultural counter-narratives can be dismissed through such restrictions. Specifically, the language requirement creates spatial and temporal borders within Sápmi. This is especially evident in the region encompassing fjord, costal and southern areas which were most assimilated, and inner Finnmark, which maintained more cultural distinctiveness (Mecsei 2015, 82)

There are also other language-orientated nodes with close ties to the ISFI operating in Norway. Nuoraj-TV (Youth TV) (known as Noeri-TV in the South Sámi language) is a Lule Sámi language webcast founded in 2008 by Lars Theodor Kintel and run by Johnny Andersen, Jon Isaac Lyngman Gælok, and Tommy Hanssen. Kintel's template for the service was taken from Youtube and acts as an interactive platform based on participation and exchange between the channel and its users. The platform is originally a subsidiary of the former Norwegian-Sámi production company Julev Film AS and was funded by a single payment of approximately 220.000 NOK from Nord Trøndelag Fylkeskommune, a municipal county council in Northern Norway (Eira 2014). The platform has a variety of functions, integrating music, podcasts and video streaming orientated towards teenagers and young adults. Like the ISFI, Nuoraj-TV is designed to enhance the status of the Lule Sámi language, a language specific to the lower Northern parts of Sápmi in Sweden and Norway, with the goal of forming an interactive cultural and linguistic hub for Sámi teenagers. The wider aims of the channel are also to secure greater access to media content, employing external social media sites such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram as tools for reaching audiences. Reinforcing the strategic language goals, project manager Odd Levi Paulsen states how Nuoraj-TV aims 'to make Sámi an attractive and innovative language for young people, which can be used outside the home and school' (Paulsen quoted in Eira 2014). Nuoraj-TV 's funding was granted on the basis that the public service broadcaster NRK Sápmi lacked a specific media outlet aimed at young people in either the Southern or Lule Sámi languages.

This focus on language is also problematic in the context of wider issues facing the Sámi. As Östen Wahlbeck emphasizes in the Finnish case, language recognition is a comparatively superficial aspect of the legal obstacles faced by the Sámi. Effectively in the Sámi case, language has become an issue of 'soft power,' where the forces of economics are minimized or dropped from the discussion. Of contemporary Finnish law, Wahlbeck states:

> The status as an indigenous people has in Finland been interpreted as a basis for granting cultural and linguistic rights, which has not been considered a difficult political issue. However, group specific economic rights have been much more difficult to achieve. Specific land rights for the Sámi and in connection to this the right to define oneself as 'Sámi' has been the subject of heated debate in northern Finland (Wahlbeck 2013, 312)

This part of the ISFI agenda calls into question how far the organization can claim to represent the Sámi. Other perspectives, such as those of 'assimilated' filmmakers like Sweden's Liselotte Wajstedt and Norway's Ellen-Astry Lundby, are also excluded by such policies. Their respective road movie documentaries, *Sámi nieida jojk*/*Sámi Daughter Yoik* (2007) and *Min Mors Hemmelighet*/*Suddenly Sámi* (2009) are critical to understanding the complexities of Sámi identity. These complexities are represented both on a narrative level, exploring the history of colonization, but also through the form of the films. Both filmmakers make extensive use of collage and animation where the perspective revolves around adapting cultural memory and reimaging and constructively challenging aspects of Sámi culture. In retracing the roots of their Sámi mothers, both filmmakers embark on a journey back to Sápmi where they encounter prejudice against the Sámi and deeply ingrained divides within Sámi communities as a direct result of colonisation. Wajstedt's film, in particular, highlights the exclusionary effects of language when Wajstedt attempts to immerse herself unsuccessfully into a Sámi community using languages classes. These filmmakers are effectively alienated twice, both by the state and the ISFI who both rely on shared set of visual and cultural markers.

However, unlike the ISFI, festival nodes like Dellie Maa places little emphasis on Sámi language abilities. Instead, Östergren believes the key to Sámi autonomy lies in acknowledging their history as a colonized people. When the perspectives of non-Sámi speakers are lost, we cannot fully comprehend the effects of this colonial history (Östergren 2015). We must acknowledge these tensions because the Sámi are inherently part of the historical and political narratives of the dominant 'host' nations, and are not some separate,

mythological entity as they are often portrayed. Events like Dellie Maa are greatly significant for the development of Sámi film, especially as they embrace a wider perspective on issues such as language. Nevertheless, these dilemmas and differing opinions within the network prove there is a thin line between cultural objectification and voicing Sámi stories to the 'outside world.' The same issues have also been carried across as Sámi filmmaking has moved beyond the Nordic region.

Building a 'Common Narrative': Sámi Networking Goes Global

The collaborative efforts of Sámi networking extend beyond Sápmi and since its establishment; the ISFI has worked to build a global network of indigenous film practitioners. The inaugural Indigenous Film Circle Conference, hosted by the ISFI in 2011, was a series of lectures delivered by filmmakers, politicians, journalists, professors and prominent minority rights campaigners. Participants from the US, Canada, Greenland, Australia and Sápmi came together to offer perspectives on the state of indigenous media culture in their respective host nations. By expanding on the limits of national funding strategies and the economic viability of small-scale distribution in a globalizing media climate, the conference highlighted the common challenges faced by indigenous practitioners on a local and global level. This project has since developed into the Arctic Film Circle, an initiative established and hosted at the annual Toronto-based ImagineNATIVE film festival, the largest indigenous film event of its kind. These events are critical distribution nodes for Sámi cinema. According to the ISFI's website:

> The project involves five indigenous Arctic areas and has nine participants from these regions: Sápmi, Greenland, Nunavut and Northwest Territories in Canada and Alaska, USA. The Arctic Film Circle is a unique and special opportunity to unite through Indigenous Peoples' common experiences through a common film initiative. The ultimate goal of the Arctic Film Circle is to create an Arctic indigenous network for film workers in order to create synergies for future projects across borders and boundaries. Ultimately, the project will benefit all partners and filmmakers involved, including the extended network of alliances (Arctic Film Circle, ISFI)

On the ISFI's Arctic Film Circle webpages, the word 'common' is used multiple times in reference to the project's aim, which is to build a film script around the 'common experiences' shared by indigenous people. However, ISFI do not elaborate on what these

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'common' qualities are or how they relate specifically to indigenous populations. To grasp the complex dynamics of commonality and difference, a more systematic form of analysis is required. In analysing the dynamics of film festivals, Marijke de Valck (2007) draws on actor-network theory, a highly complex set of ideas designed to deconstruct power relationships that make up network systems. ANT accounts for the construction of a vast spectrum of social, political, and economic ideas. In the context of film studies and, in this case, indigenous media production, Valck's explorations of ANT provide a useful way of comparatively qualifying the autonomy of indigenous festivals. The theorists behind ANT, Bruno Latour, Michel Callon and John Law, claimed that academics, theorists, and other sociologists had failed to recognize inherent connections between social, economic and political structures. This had led to a separation of different methods, approaches and forms of criticism. For Valck, film festivals can be interpreted through ANT, occupying a unique position in the global film industry network by behaving as sites of mediation between nodal points by bringing together 'sales representatives, film critics and filmmakers' who are otherwise considered separate (2007, 34). She also states: 'I argue that film festivals can be seen as obligatory points of passage, because they are events-actors- that have become so important to the production, distribution and consumption of many films that, without them, an entire network of practices, places, people, etc. would fall apart' (Valck 2007, 36). Callon's 'obligatory points of passage' (1986, 27) bend and shape each node and effectively engineer the outcome of the overall network. By viewing festivals in such a way, Valck asserts how they behave as critical passageways, manipulating the right conditions vital to the function of the film industry at large. From this perspective, festivals are significantly autonomous events.

As evident in the above quote from the ISFI, festival networking is also key to the existence of indigenous media. As a site of convergence, or an 'obligatory point of passage', the ImagineNATIVE festival has helped to shape the direction of Sámi cinema. Indeed, ImagineNATIVE's film programme generally caters for a wider range of Sámi perspectives, reflecting and promoting the diversity of Sámi film culture across the board. The same could be said of similar events such as the indigenous Inari-based Skábmagovat Film Festival. Nevertheless, although their programmes are diverse, there is evidence of 'exotic' imagery used on both the ISFI and Skábmagovat websites (http://skabmagovat.fi/skabmagovat_2014/?page_id=189). As significant 'nodal' tools, promotional imagery and website design can reinforce certain expectations. Conventional images used on both sites include snowscapes, traditional indigenous dress and other

archetypal imagery associated with the Arctic such as the northern lights, a phenomenon that features in Sámi folklore (Brekke and Egeland 1983, 1-10). Such images are emphasized at film festival sites, where links and collaborative networks between indigenous people form. I propose there are two types of common narratives; those largely seen at networking events such as festivals where aesthetic Otherness appears to play a key role and secondly the type of common narrative described by Kääpä in Gauriloff's documentary *A Shout into the Wind*, where 'commonness' narratives are based on familiar and universal bureaucratic struggles. According to Kääpä, highlighting the 'banal everydayness' of these struggles is a key point of identification:

> What makes these particular depictions significant is that the banal divests these cultural negotiations of the sort of exoticness perpetuated in hegemonic representations through imaginaries of the mythical Sámi. Such perspectives are vital in evoking a more complex form of Sámi identity beyond the simplistic othering of exotic depictions of the reindeer herding mythical Sámi (Kääpä 2016, 147)

This type of banality is also reflected in Lundby and Wajstedt's work where Sámi themes and locations are stripped of the exoticness readily visible at the indigenous festivals where 'common' experiences are emphasized. The reality is that most Sámi people are not represented by the nomadic imagery used at such festivals and therefore fall outside the sense of 'commonness' implied by network-building initiatives like Arctic Film Circle.

The Agency of Fourth Cinema and Cultures of Otherness: Towards a Sámi Film Industry?

Sámi networking has a practical application as far as it produces content, distributes that content through co-ordinated festival events and provides education and training for Sámi-speaking practitioners. From this viewpoint, as a practice, networking supports and shapes the careers of individual filmmakers and other aspiring industry professionals. In this respect, the practices of Sámi networking bear the hallmarks of an emerging grassroots industry. There are, however, many problems with the power dynamics of these networking practices. These issues arise both in the ISFI's agenda, but also in the complex relationship between the Sámi companies and the dominant host nations, which ultimately govern and control the level of support granted.

In the context of the ISFI's vision, and despite the focus on supporting local and regional talent, there is a significant risk that these media channels, both those located in Sápmi and beyond, can only amount to a 'minority network' inclusively for minority audiences. In this sense, the problems facing the Sámi in today's global society are lost in a film culture that has limited its focus on language. However, these practices separate the ISFI from other more conventional studio models because this type of affinity is based on a shared sense of cultural exclusion. This affinity is also based on a shared set of difficulties as marginal filmmakers caught between the expectations of national institutions and the struggle for self-representation.

Gayatri Spivak's strategic essentialism (1988) and Slavoj Žižek's culturalizing politics (2007) are two postcolonial concepts also worth considering in a Sámi context. Strategic essentialism describes how marginal groups play into their own exotic or stereotypical imaginaries. These 'self-essentializing' acts can enable these groups to gain a foothold in wider political debates. Strategic essentialism can also be a powerful way of reclaiming such stereotypical images from the colonial power, sometimes subversively acting out contemporary political struggles. Culturalizing politics views self-essentialism in more negative terms. Žižek claims that this kind of cultural objectification exposes the limits of indigenous power. Economic hardship and political exclusion are the basis of repression and subjugation. Through a process of culturalizing politics, indigenous repression is only validated or made visible when their struggle is transformed into a fight for cultural survival. Like strategic essentialism, culturalizing politics relies on a simplified vision of indigenous people where recognition is based on cultural independence rather than political or economic freedom. Žižek and Spivak's theories reveal complex power relationships between colonizers and their former colonies. Like language, cultural struggles become part of a 'soft' politics. In the context of these power relations where the 'real' or 'hard' power of political and economic manoeuvring lies with the dominant host nations, we must consider how far Sámi networking forms part of a wider Nordic media network.

It would be important to qualify these developments by emphasizing the role of the Norwegian Ministry of Culture in the context of network power relationships. A case in point is the ISFI itself. Under the financial agreement with the Ministry of Culture, the Institute is also a cultural ambassador for Norway. In autumn 2014, the ISFI experienced both infrastructural and administrative changes when their official name was changed from the 'International Sámi Film Centre' to the 'International Sámi Film Institute' (ISFI website). The removal of the term 'centre' was designed to reflect the ISFI's role as a partner co-

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financed by the Norwegian state. As such, the ISFI can no longer identify itself as a regional organization and must effectively serve Norway's commitment to the development of indigenous media production. Such incidents parallel Charles Taylor's 'politics of recognition' (2011), whereby the state can withhold or permit the cultural or economic legitimacy of minority groups, and remind us that companies like the ISFI are still answerable to the dominant media industry powers.

Although operating independently with the technical and educational nodes of the network, the Ministry of Culture retains significant control over the financial and political running of the Institute. The Ministry also plays a role in approving grant applications made by Sámi filmmakers proving that content is also subject to the regulation of the dominant powers. The ISFI's role is, after all, defined by the Ministry and reflects on the Norwegian government as a supporter and developer of indigenous rights and freedoms. To adopt some of the key terms of Callon's work, the Ministry acts as an obligatory point of passage that each Sámi practitioner must negotiate. From this perspective, even though the ISFI focuses solely on the production of Sámi films, this institute still forms part of Norway's own network by emphasizing many of the 'Sámi' qualities widely recognized and endorsed by the dominant agenda which largely bases its assumptions of the Sámi on their perceived cultural Otherness.

Conclusion: Collaboration and Continuation

The contemporary position of Sámi film production is complex. The ISFI have taken responsibility for many levels of the production and distribution processes. As their remit has extended across Sápmi, networking has become a key strategy allowing the ISFI to exploit talent and resources in Sweden and Finland. I have identified three types of networking practices key to the development of Sámi film production. These developments include technical collaboration, networking based on education and training and exchange through distribution at key film festivals. This networking is built on the type of nodal cross-border collaboration like that used by Castells to describe postmodern communication structures and used by Valck regarding film festivals. There have also been similar attempts at distribution and collaboration through online portals like Nuoraj-TV. However, there are obvious drawbacks, both financial and ideological. These examples represent both the dangers and challenges facing such small organizations, especially those trying to appeal to an even smaller linguistic minority within the Sámi population. As well as dependence on financial

support from the Nordic film bodies, ideological bias and cultural regulation are part of the ISFI's own agenda, highlighting the problems of self-representation. However, the cultural Otherness of the Sámi is also part of this affinity.

Questions remain over the nature of this collective, language-driven identity and how far it can account for multiple Sámi perspectives across four nations. However, despite the barriers, these organizations represent milestones in the development of Sámi film culture. The ISFI was the first move towards institutionalizing Sámi film production and its regional expansion is growing rapidly. Although Sámi film may be limited by policy, the practice of 'network cinema' gives producers more control over their content and how it is exhibited and distributed. However, by prioritizing the Sámi languages, the ISFI align themselves with the establishment's own cultural definition of the Sámi. If it is to move across more borders, the ISFI must consider the implications of these language policies, particularly if it seeks to represent a complex and diverse Sámi population across the whole circumpolar region and beyond.

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