Representing Cultural Difference

Reindeer Herding as a Signal of Ethnic Boundary in the Exhibitions of Two Sámi Museums

NIKA POTINKARA*

Abstract: *Nordic Sámi museums have been established with the aim of reclaiming Sámi heritage and strengthening Sámi cultural identity. Museums are significant places for representing ethnic groups and boundaries, and Sámi museums play an important role in defining Sámi ethnicity. This article discusses the construction of Sámi ethnicity in the permanent exhibitions of two Sámi museums, Siida in Finland and Ájtte in Sweden, focusing on the display of reindeer herding. In which particular ways do these exhibitions represent reindeer herding and the Sámi as reindeer herders? The article suggests that representations of reindeer herding contribute to the construction of an ethnic boundary, while having relevance also for the internal conflicts among the Sámi.*

Key words: Sámi, ethnicity, museum exhibitions, representations, reindeer herding.

Sámi ethnicity is a contested subject. Who is entitled to Sámi status? The question is frequently debated in Sámi communities today (see for example Åhrén 2008: 12; Amft 2000: 162–165; Eriksen 2002: 130; Sarivaara 2012). While the interest in defining ‘Sáminess’ may be motivated by Sámi ethno-politics and disputes concerning indigenous rights, the question is also related to the ways in which ethnicity is generally understood. What makes a person a Sámi? Is ethnicity based on descent or on exemplifying certain cultural features, and which features are regarded as significant?

Several studies indicate that on the individual level, being recognized as a Sámi is usually based on origin (see for example Valkonen 2009: 219–221; Amft 2007: 77) but according to the political scientist Sanna Valkonen (2009: 270), it also requires performing ‘Sáminess’. Being recognized as a Sámi on the basis of origin is also fundamentally based on cultural criteria – a person who is acknowledged as a Sámi by the Sámi community is someone who belongs to a Sámi family, and a family is considered Sámi if it is generally characterized by certain cultural features, such as speaking the Sámi language or

84 herding reindeer (ibid.: 237). According to many, a Sámi is someone who has grown to be a part of Sámi culture (see for example Näkkäljärvi 2012).

While the popular understanding considers ethnic groups as differing from each other by practising different cultures, the relation between ethnic groups and cultural features is not unambiguous. According to the anthropologist Fredrik Barth, we can assume no simple one-to-one relationship between ethnic units and cultural similarities and differences. Ethnic categories do take cultural features into account, but these features are not the sum of 'objective' differences. Some features are regarded as significant, while others are ignored. (Barth 1969: 14.)

As has been pointed out by the ethnologist Helena Ruotsala (2002: 383), cultural differences between ethnic groups in Northern Finland are small – almost non-existent – compared to differences between Finns living in northern Finland and Finns living in southern Finland. Nevertheless, the ethnic boundary between Sámi and Finns is significant in northern Finland today, whereas there is no generally accepted ethnic boundary between different Finns. This illustrates the fact that ethnic boundaries are maintained by a limited set of cultural features; most of the cultural matter that is associated with a human population may vary and change without critical consequences for the boundary maintenance of the ethnic group. A drastic reduction of cultural differences between ethnic groups does not inevitably lead to a breakdown in boundary-maintaining processes. (Barth 1969: 32–33, 38.) Ethnic groups may become more similar and, simultaneously, increasingly concerned with their distinctiveness (Eriksen 2002: 19).

The ethnic boundary between Sámi and majority populations is defined and depicted in various arenas: everyday discussions, books, newspapers, TV shows – in products of the tourism industry and popular culture as well as official reports and agreements. Museums, too, participate in shaping images of the Sámi when they display Sámi culture in their exhibitions (see Hansen 2005: 68). Contrary to the representations produced by the tourism industry, museum displays are posited to mediate accurate knowledge about the past and culture of the Sámi. In post-colonial discourse, displays produced by ethnic minorities themselves may be especially valued, as they represent an 'insider's view'. Thus Sámi museums – museums created and governed by the Sámi themselves – may be seen as presenting an authoritative account of Sámi ethnicity. This makes them an interesting research subject in the study of the boundary-making processes related to Sámi ethnicity.

This article discusses the construction of Sámi ethnicity in the permanent exhibitions of two Sámi museums, *Ajtte* in Sweden and *Siida* in Finland. The article is based on a qualitative analysis of the exhibitions, focusing on the representations of reindeer herding, as this is one of the most powerful cultural features used to depict a distinctive Sámi ethnicity. In what ways do the museum exhibitions represent reindeer herding and the Sámi as reindeer herders? First, I discuss the establishing of contemporary Sámi museums and present a brief overview of the exhibitions of *Siida* and *Ajtte*. Thereafter, I examine how ethnic boundaries are created and maintained in the exhibitions of the two museums by representing the Sámi as a reindeer herding people. Lastly, I discuss how the exhibitions

Fig. 1. The central room of Ájtte is surrounded by the other galleries. The disposition of the galleries suggests that this central room represents a reindeer gathering place, a 'curve' used at a round-up when reindeer owners separate their own animals from the herd. At the center of the room stands a lone reindeer. Photograph: Nika Potinkara.

may relate to disputes and power struggles among the Sámi.

RECLAIMING THE HERITAGE

Sámi culture has been on display in museums and other exhibitions for a long time. Already centuries ago the Sámi were seen as the last nomads of Europe, an exotic and interesting people in the eyes of European majorities. Sámi artifacts were collected in order to preserve something from a culture that was assumed would vanish before long (Ham-

marlund-Larsson 2008; Ojala 2009: 94) and displayed in ethnographic exhibitions (see Silvén 2009). Living Sámi people were likewise on display across Europe and America in the 19th and early 20th century (see, for example, Baglo 2011).

In recent decades, displays of Sámi culture have been heavily criticized by the cultural and political elite within the Sámi population (Amundsen 2011: 740). It has been argued that displays have perpetuated stereotypes and represented Sámi culture as static, without a distant past or a future (see Levy 2006; Olsen,

86 B. 2000: 16). The Sámi collections of national museums and universities have also come in for criticism: following the repatriation debate abroad, and the Sámi have demanded their heritage back 'home' (see Mulk 2002; Edbom 2005; Harlin 2008).

Together with other ethnic minorities worldwide, Sámi people have started to claim the right of self-determination. The rise of ethno-political awareness has led to the founding of new museums that aim to reclaim Sámi heritage and display the Sámi from their own point of view. Sámi organizations and local communities dominated by Sámi people had already collected objects around Second World War, but the most important wave of Sámi museum founding was in the 1970s and 1980s (Amundsen 2011: 733). In the ethno-political situation of the 1970s, new objectives were set for Sámi museums. The aim was to establish a Sámi museum in every country with a Sámi population and to separate Sámi museums from other museums with Sámi collections. The committee appointed by the Nordic Saami Council formulated criteria for Sámi museums, stating that the museums must be managed by the Sámi themselves, with a Sámi majority in the administration, have Sámi culture as their main theme, respect Sámi traditions, reflect Sámi values in their activities and be situated in the Sámi area (Edbom 2005: 18).

The first of the new Sámi museums was *Sámiid Vuorká-Dávvirat/De Samiske Samlinger*, set up in Karasjok, Norway in 1972. Today, there are several other Sámi museums in Norway, and new ones continue to be established – for example, a Skolt Sámi museum will be opened in the near future. In each of the other countries with Sámi populations, there is only one museum

concentrating on Sámi history and culture. The Sámi museum in Sweden, *Ájtte*, was opened in Jokkmokk village in 1989. In Finland, the first Sámi museum – an open-air museum without permanent staff – was already in existence by the end of the 1950s. It served as a basis for a new museum, *Siida*, opened in Inari village in 1998. There is also a Sámi museum in Russia, founded in 1962 and located in Lovozero village. Nowadays this museum is part of the Murmansk regional museum of local history and economy, and it is not governed and managed by the Sámi themselves.

Sámi museums collect, preserve, document and mediate Sámi cultural heritage. In their exhibitions, they may aim to correct what they consider erroneous or clichéd images of the Sámi, spread by the tourism industry (see Jomppanen 2007: 17). The museums are, however, also aimed at the Sámi themselves. According to the Sámi politician Johan Mikkel Sara (2002: 51–52), communicating with the Sámi community is more important for the museums than their relation to the majority culture: the museums are intended to serve as an arena for a dialogue within the Sámi community about Sámi identity, promoting a positive Sámi self-understanding. Such an aim is also articulated by the planning group of Siida, the Sámi museum in Finland. The Siida exhibitions are meant to give Sámi visitors insights into their own identity, which will then increase the self-respect of the visitors (Pennanen 2000: 11).

SÁMI CULTURE ON DISPLAY

The institutions discussed in this article, *Ájtte* and *Siida*, are both Sámi museums and museums of natural history. *Ájtte* is a principal

museum of Sámi culture, a special museum for the mountain region and an information center for mountain tourism. Siida is both a national museum of the Finnish Sámi and a nature center of Metsähallitus, a state enterprise administering state-owned areas. The two institutions – the Sámi museum and Metsähallitus – work together at Siida, and both have participated in the creation of the exhibitions. Thus, apart from representing Sámi culture, Siida and Ájtte also display local nature.

In Siida, the main exhibition consists of a nature section that represents the annual cycle in local nature, and a section representing Sámi culture. These two displays are in the same big room, the nature section encircling the culture section. Themes in the culture section include reindeer herding, fishing and farming, food, clothing, moving and know-how, the winter village system, dwelling, the Skolt Sámi, art, religion, and how the Sámi have become a united people. In addition, there is an introductory exhibition on regional history, nature conservation areas and some themes related to Sámi culture. Both exhibitions date back to 1998.

In Ájtte, the local or regional past is likewise displayed in an introductory exhibition, a corridor that leads to the other galleries. The other permanent exhibitions, established between 1989 and 2005, cover different themes: the way of life of settlers in the past, Sámi costumes and silver, the Lapponia area that has been nominated by UNESCO as a world heritage site, the way of life of nomadic reindeer herders, religion and mythology, and ways of moving. Some of the exhibitions concentrate on Sámi culture, while others combine the display of culture with representations of northern nature.

It has been claimed that not only

mainstream museums depicting the Sámi, but also Sámi museums, tend to represent Sámi culture in an ethnographic manner, paying little attention to changes throughout history (see Olsen, B. 2000: 26). The exhibitions at Siida and Ájtte, however, also include some objects, images and texts that refer to modern times. The introductory exhibitions of both museums are partly chronological, addressing diachronic changes from the latest Ice Age to modernity. Otherwise the organization of the displays is thematic, concentrating mainly on the 'traditional' Sámi culture represented in a somewhat static manner (see Webb 2006: 173–174).

The displays of the two museums thus have much in common, both in terms of the organization and content of the exhibitions. There are, however, some differences in the perspectives of the two museums. In Siida, Sámi culture is seen as a way of adapting to the harsh conditions of northern nature. The narrative style is scholarly, aiming at displaying an 'objective' view of culture. In Ájtte, more subjective 'voices' are presented, and questions related to identity are more explicitly discussed.

A distinctive Sámi ethnicity is constructed in various ways in the exhibitions. Traditional handicrafts, contemporary Sámi costumes, pre-Christian spirituality and the relationship to land and nature can be mentioned as themes related to the construction of an ethnic boundary between the Sámi and majority populations in Sweden and Finland. The distinctiveness of the Sámi is also highlighted by displaying Sámi reindeer herding. In the following, I look at the representations of reindeer herding and of the Sámi as a reindeer herding people in the displays of Siida and Ájtte.

88 REPRESENTATIONS OF REINDEER HERDING

Reindeer herding is a central theme in most Sámi exhibitions (see Webb 2006: 172), including the displays of Siida and Ájtte. In Siida, reindeer are represented in the nature exhibition encircling the display of Sámi culture, and two of the eleven main sections of the culture exhibition concentrate on reindeer herding. One section displays the annual cycle of reindeer herding, the ear-marking of calves, the administrative structure of reindeer breeding, and names for reindeer in Sámi language. The display includes figures with captions and other short texts, photographs and a few objects, such as lassos. Another section discusses the former winter village system, the spread of large-scale reindeer herding from the west into Finland from the 17th century onwards, changes caused by legislative reforms and the closing of national borders, and system of earmarks. This section includes short texts, a few large photographs showing herds of reindeer, several smaller images, some maps and a family tree displaying earmarks belonging to the members of one family.

In Ájtte, there are two exhibitions related to reindeer management. *Bierggit/Att reda sig*, dating back to 1992, displays the way of life of nomadic reindeer herders in the past. Themes in the exhibition include the making of clothes, utensils and other objects using natural materials, cooking and preserving food, moving with the reindeer, hunting, fishing and keeping domestic animals. Another exhibition called *Laponia*, from 2005, presents reindeer herding from a somewhat different perspective: when representing the nature of a certain geographical area, the exhibition also displays food, parasites, annual

migration and the rut time of the reindeer, together with some contemporary reindeer management practices. In both cases, reindeer herding is represented as a part of a greater whole.

In addition to sections depicting both traditional and contemporary practices, the displays present some powerful visual symbols related to reindeer husbandry. One such symbol is a Sámi tent, *goahti* or *lávvu* in North Sámi language, which was once a typical dwelling for nomadic Sámi reindeer herders. It is a very typical sight in Sámi exhibitions as well, both in Sámi museums and mainstream museums representing Sámi culture. Sometimes the tent appears 'natural', as in the Norwegian Folk Museum; sometimes it is presented without blankets, probably in order to enable visitors to see inside the dwelling. Sometimes it appears in a symbolic form, as in the Historical Museum in Oslo.

The display of Ájtte includes both a symbolic tent and a natural one. The former is made of exhibition structures of the *Bierggit/Att reda sig* exhibition. Objects, images and texts constitute the sloping 'walls' of this *lávvu* or *goahti*, and a round bench in the center symbolizes its fireplace. If this construction is so symbolic that it may escape a visitor's attention, it is impossible to overlook the other tent in Ájtte. This *goahti* in the entrance hall is life-size and looks fairly natural, and it is possible to step inside. There is also a relatively natural *goahti* in the main exhibition of Siida, although it is presented without blankets and has thus a slightly more symbolic appearance.

Both these representations of a life-sized *goahti* are visually rather dominant. In Ájtte, the significance of the tent is accentuated by the empty space of the room: the entrance hall

is big, high and light, and almost empty apart from the tent and a diorama representing a trade scene in the 16th century. As visitors begin their round in the exhibitions, they first encounter these two representations, together with the title of the display and a Sámi flag on the wall. In Siida, the tent is not similarly highlighted, but it is nevertheless one of the most noticeable constructions in the display.

As *goahti* and *lávvu* were dwellings of nomadic reindeer herders, these visual symbols contribute to the perception of the Sámi as nomads (Levy 2006: 142–143). No houses or cabins of settled Sámi are displayed in actual size in the exhibitions of the two museums, even though there is a little warehouse in an exhibition of settlers in Ájtte. Different dwellings constitute a theme in the main exhibition of Siida, and here houses are represented in photographs and texts. The tents, however, dominate in the photographs.

If a Sámi tent is one of the most frequently occurring symbols of Sáminess, so also are reindeer. Representations of reindeer are found in almost any visual material depicting the Sámi as a people. The most popular scene in museum exhibitions may be a stuffed reindeer together with a doll wearing a traditional Sámi costume (see Mathisen, S.O. 2011). This clichéd scene is not found as a diorama in Siida or Ájtte, but there are several life-size representations of reindeer in the exhibitions.

In Siida, there is one stuffed reindeer placed near the entrance of the main exhibition. This figure differs from the most widespread reindeer representations, as it is not a standing or running mature animal but a recumbent calf. With a knife in its ear, the reindeer represents the ear-marking of calves. Another reindeer figure in Siida is displayed in a more commonly depicted situation, pulling a sledge.

The figure itself, however, is made of wire netting and is thus symbolic, somewhat distanced from the most common images of reindeer.

In Ájtte, there are several reindeer representations in the *Laponia* exhibition. A diorama illustrates reindeer feeding in the winter, with a couple of stuffed reindeer together with the figures of a woman and a dog. The diorama differs from traditional tableaux of Sámi people together with reindeer, as it clearly represents contemporary life, and the woman is not wearing a traditional Sámi costume. In addition to this diorama, there are some small reindeer models in a showcase and some reindeer painted on the wall.

A reindeer is also found in the central room of Ájtte, surrounded by other galleries. The room is round and almost empty, with a plain natural landscape painted on the walls. At the center of the room stands a lone artificial reindeer. The empty space around the reindeer gives it a special significance (see Moser 2010: 27), as does its location in the middle of Ájtte's whole display. This reindeer is what visitors see when moving from the entrance hall via a corridor to the other galleries, and they must pass it every time they move from one gallery to another. The disposition of the galleries suggests that this central room represents a reindeer gathering place, a 'curve' used at a round-up when reindeer owners separate their own animals from the herd. Interpreted thus, the whole exhibition space of Ájtte is symbolically a place devoted to reindeer husbandry.

Reindeer herding is thus one of the essential themes in the permanent exhibitions of both Siida and Ájtte. This does not mean that the Sámi are presented solely as reindeer herders. Both museums discussed here also present

90 fishing, hunting and farming; according to the exhibitions, living in the north has demanded combining several sources of livelihood. Reindeer herding, however, is accorded more space than other means of livelihood. In addition to texts, images and smaller artifacts, the displays include dwellings of nomadic reindeer herders and stuffed or artificial life-sized reindeer. Visually the most dominant reindeer representation is that in the central room of Ájtte. By placing this reindeer in the middle of the display and a *goahti* in the entrance hall near a Sámi flag and the title of the display, Ájtte highlights the symbols of reindeer herding in the most central sites of the exhibition space.

TWO EXHIBITIONS, TWO NARRATIVE STYLES

In Ájtte, there are two permanent exhibitions displaying a way of life in the past. *Nybyggjarliv/Ádåárroviessom* (1989) is about the life of a settler family around the year 1900, whereas the already mentioned *Bierggit/Att reda sig* (1992) displays the life of nomadic reindeer herders up to the 1950s. These exhibitions differ in terms of ethnicity: the nomadic reindeer herders are clearly Sámi, but the ethnicity of the settlers in *Nybyggjarliv/Ádåárroviessom* is ambiguous. The settlers of the past were an ethnically mixed group, composed of both Swedes, Finns and Sámi, and the family displayed is not defined in terms of ethnicity.

The exhibitions partly represent the same period, and both concentrate on practical aspects of life – daily activities that were necessary in order to survive in the north. The visitor is informed about cooking and preserving food, washing clothes and building dwellings. The basic content of the exhibitions

is very similar, so they can almost be seen as parallels to each other. There are, however, some interesting differences between these two displays. While the content may be similar, the narrative styles are different.

In the exhibition about nomadic reindeer herders, *Bierggit/Att reda sig*, the narratives are often recounted in the first person plural. The pronoun ‘we’ appears frequently in the texts referring to the nomads of the past as well as contemporary Sámi people. Even though the exhibition displays a way of life that no longer exists, there are many references to contemporary life. A text may first tell about a practice in the past and then mention that it still continues today, and sometimes the past and the present fuse together in the texts; some texts use imperfect, others present tense.

In the exhibition about settlers, *Nybyggjarliv/Ádåárroviessom*, the pronoun ‘we’ is not used. The settlers are referred to by using the pronoun ‘they’ or passive, and all the texts are in the past tense. The texts do not mention that some of the practices displayed – such as hunting or picking berries – are still practised today; no connections are made between the life of the settlers and the contemporary way of life.

The difference between the narratives of these two exhibitions can be illustrated by two examples related to eating tasty and wholesome plants. In *Nybyggjarliv/Ádåárroviessom*, the text describing the use of cloudberries uses the passive voice and is limited to the past:

Plocka hjortron

De goda och hälsosamma hjortronen
plockade man och åt färska så länge det gick.
Socker till sylt var för dyrt att köpa.

Láddit

Dajt njálga ja avkkelasj láttagijt
tjoaggin ja bárrin náv guhkev gá anedin varán.
Sáhkár láttagijda lij ilá divras oasstet

In *Bierggit/Att reda sig*, on the other hand, a similar text describing the use of mountain sorrel is about 'us' and also refers to the present day:

Juomojt

vuorkkijin áldo- jali gájtamielkij.
Nubágijt aj sägodin, oarjjelsámij gompo.

Fjällängssyra

har varit vår viktigaste vitaminkälla.
Idag åter vi den som en delikatess.

Thus the settlers of the past, an ethnically mixed group, are distinguished from contemporary Sámi people and from contemporary people in general. They are displayed as a part of the local past, but apparently they have nothing to do with the present. The nomadic reindeer herders, on the other hand, are connected to contemporary people both by references to them as 'us' and by references to the present when describing their way of life. The culture of the nomads is clearly seen as Sámi heritage.

The connection between reindeer nomads and contemporary Sámi people is made explicit in the main text of *Bierggit/Att reda sig*:

Dávverij ja gávåj vuosedip sámij bierrgimvuogijt.
Da vuosedi sámmi bále gåk ulmusj ietjas tjähppudagá
ja máhto tjadá buktá adnet luondo boanndudagájt.
Ájgev mav vuosedip la dálutjis ja 1950-rádjáj.
Dat rájes la sámij iellem ednagav rievddam valla
mijá ávdásvásstádus la tjuottjodit dajt manep
buolvajda.

Så här levde vi samer fram till 1950-talet.

Än i dag reder vi oss bra i renens landskap
där sommaren är kort och vintern lång.

Här lever vi bäst av renen, jakten och fisket.

Runt renen har hela vårt sätt att leva vuxit upp
och i det livet är det naturen som sätter gränserna.

According to this text, the Sámi were nomadic reindeer herders up to the 1950s, and they still manage well in the landscape of the reindeer. The text constructs 'us', the Sámi, as a culturally homogenous group. In this discourse, the settlers of the past are apparently not considered to be Sámi.

REPRESENTING MODERN TIMES

Sámi heritage is thus associated with the way of life of the nomadic reindeer herders of the past in the *Bierggit/Att reda sig* exhibition in Ájtte. The display of reindeer herding is not, however, limited to the past. Both Ájtte and Siida also display modern reindeer husbandry.

In Ájtte, the visitor already meets a modern reindeer herder in the introductory exhibition, a corridor leading to the other galleries. In this corridor, the past is displayed through ten human figures representing different generations that have been living in the area after the latest Ice Age. The first five figures represent particular times, from 6000 years ago to the 19th century, while the last five are labeled according to their profession or way of life. Beside every figure there is a short text describing the way of life of the person in question. The first text, for example, tells that there are salmon in the river and moose in the forest, and that the person fishes and hunts and gathers plants that grow in the fertile land.

The timeline ends with a figure labeled as a reindeer herder. This is a modern man riding a

- 92 motorcycle and carrying a lasso. The text beside him differs from the other texts: it does not refer to the life of the man, but is taken from a programme of cultural politics adopted by a Sámi conference in Gällivare in 1971. The text defines the Sámi as one people with their own territory, language, culture, and society:

Ällobargge

Mij lip sáme
ja mij sihtap árrat sáme
ep dan diehti sidá árrat
buorebu jali nievrebu
gå ietjá almatja vearáldin.
Mij lip almasjtjárdá
iehtjama viessomsajijn,
iehtjama gielajn
ja iehtjama kultur- ja viessomvuogijn.

Renskötaren

Vi är samer
och vi vill vara samer
utan att därför vara
mer eller mindre
än andra folk i världen.
Vi är ett folk
med ett eget bosättningsområde,
ett eget språk
och ett eget kultur-
och samhällsliv.

As this text is connected to the figure of a modern reindeer herder, it is possible to interpret this display in such a way that the Sámi, as a people, are associated with reindeer husbandry.

A modern reindeer herder is also on show in the *Laponia* exhibition. The name of this exhibition refers to an area consisting of several natural parks and other nature conservation areas in northern Sweden, nominated by

UNESCO as a world heritage site. In the exhibition, the area is presented as a cultural landscape of reindeer herders and introduced to the visitor by a young woman, who represents the local herders.

The visitor meets this woman at the beginning of the exhibition, where she is feeding her reindeer in the already-mentioned diorama across from the doorway. Her voice starts speaking when the visitor has entered the room, speaking first in the Sámi language and then in Swedish, asking the visitor to come and see how she feeds her reindeer. There are also two big figures of a woman on the walls with speech bubbles. In the tape recording and speech bubbles on the wall, the young woman describes how she and her relatives have been using the Laponia area for a long time, before tourists and explorers came, and how they still use it. This young reindeer herder is the only contemporary figure present in the dioramas of *Åjtte*, and also the only onedirectly addressing the visitor. This makes it possible to see her as representing not merely modern reindeer herders, but also contemporary Sámi people in general.

Even though the *Laponia* exhibition emphasizes the continuity of the generations using the Laponia area, the display cannot be said to present a romanticized, old-fashioned image of reindeer herding and to efface the reality of contemporary practices. In one of the speech bubbles on the wall, the young woman tells that nowadays many reindeer are transported to the summer pastures by truck, and that many people travel there by helicopter. The medicine given to reindeer to protect them against parasites is displayed as an enlarged model of a hypodermic syringe in a showcase.

Also in *Siida*, the display refers to

contemporary practices related to reindeer herding. The most noticeable visual symbol of modern times in Siida, a snowmobile placed in the middle of the exhibition space, is a vehicle closely related to contemporary reindeer herding, even though it is also used by people not involved in reindeer husbandry. As in the exhibition *Bierggit/Att reda sig* in Ájtte, in Siida, too, past and present often merge in texts related to reindeer husbandry. The visual representations in the reindeer herding section of the exhibition combine old and new elements: one of the three lassos displayed seems to be a modern, factory-made one, and there are both relatively new color photographs and older black and white ones.

The exhibitions of reindeer herding in Siida and Ájtte thus include both nomadism of the past and the modern, mechanized reindeer husbandry of the present day. There are also several other narratives about modern times in the exhibitions, related to modernization processes such as the construction of roads, but reindeer husbandry is the only contemporary occupation highlighted. In both museums, and the continuity between past and present is especially emphasized in representations of reindeer herding. A present-day Sámi may thus be seen as a person using modern technology but engaging in a livelihood that is closely related to the heritage of the nomads of the past.

CONSTRUCTING THE BOUNDARY

As the connection between contemporary Sámi and reindeer is highlighted in the museum exhibitions, a visitor could get the impression that most Sámi are reindeer herders today. Only a rather small minority of the Sámi, however, is involved in reindeer

husbandry in present-day Sweden or Finland (see for example Green 2009: 45). Nor was reindeer herding an occupation common to all the Sámi in the past, and only some reindeer owners practised nomadic herding (for example Amft 2000: 117). Nevertheless, nomadism has traditionally been a central element in different depictions and displays of Sámi culture. Already in the 19th century, the Sámi were generally seen as nomadic reindeer herders (Keil 2004: 145–146), and attention was seldom paid to the differences between various Sámi groups. For many, nomadic reindeer herding has seemed to be more indigenous than the livelihoods of other Sámi groups (Lehtola 2012: 49).

There are no longer any nomadic Sámi, but reindeer herding continues to be highlighted in various representations of contemporary Sámi culture, both by outsiders and by the Sámi themselves. It is generally seen as ‘the most Sámi’ way of life (Mathisen, S.R. 2000: 180). Reindeer herding is particularly connected with the Sámi in Sweden and Norway, where legislation only allows Sámi to keep reindeer. But in Finland, too, where there are many Finns in the reindeer business today, reindeer husbandry is generally associated with Sámi culture, and it is common to assume that all the herders are Sámi (Ruotsala 2002: 17).

Reindeer herding thus serves to signify an ethnic boundary, not merely regarding the past, but also today. Many other distinctive cultural features have vanished, but reindeer herding is still practised, if in a somewhat different form than before. In a situation where differences in the ways of life are disappearing or decreasing, the reindeer – together with Sámi languages, Sámi costumes and handicrafts, and Sámi art and music – can be highlighted as something distinguishing the

94 Sámi from the majority populations of the countries they inhabit. Sámi museums aim explicitly to strengthen Sámi collective identity, hence it is natural for them to emphasize those cultural features that are seen as distinguishing the Sámi from majority populations. This may explain why both museums discussed here have also chosen to highlight modern reindeer management and to emphasize the continuity between the nomadic past and the present.

While reindeer herding has a great symbolic value and is often seen as the core of Sámi culture, it is also related to internal tensions in Sámi communities. Especially in Sweden, there are conflicts between reindeer herding Sámi and other Sámi, as there are hunting and fishing rights that belong exclusively to the members of reindeer herding districts (Green 2009: 47–53; see also Väisänen 2008; Åhrén 2008). The dispute goes back to the reindeer herding acts of 1886 and 1928. The legislation divided the Sámi into two different categories: nomadic reindeer herders, who were considered to be exercising the authentic Sámi livelihood and enjoyed immemorial hunting and fishing rights, and others who after the reindeer herding act of 1928 were treated as mainstream Swedes, and expected to assimilate to the majority population. It can thus be argued that the Swedish state created a dichotomy that associates the ‘real Sámi’ with the way of life of reindeer herders (see Amft 2000). The consequences of this policy can still be seen in Sweden.

Reindeer herders are commonly considered to be ‘more Sámi’ in Finland and Norway, too (see for example Olsen, K. 2000: 153), and they are often seen as a ‘Sámi elite’ in contemporary Sámi communities. According to the ethnologist Christina Åhrén, who has

studied the identities of young South Sámi individuals, there are different rankings among the Sámi. Individuals are classified according to a cultural scale of ranks, and reindeer herders rank higher than other Sámi (Åhrén 2008: 173–174; see also Valkonen 2009: 149). Thus the majority of the Sámi not involved in reindeer management may sometimes be in a somewhat marginal position in the Sámi community. Some Sámi feel that the focus on reindeer herding overrides other aspects of past and present culture and has a tendency to induce a sense of inferiority in those not involved in herding (Webb 2006: 173).

Since the 1970s the Sámi movement has struggled for the rights of the Sámi. In this struggle, the unity of the Sámi people has been emphasized, and sometimes there has been no room to explicate internal differences. Museum exhibitions have also contributed to the perception of the Sámi as a fairly homogenous group distinct from mainstream populations. This is understandable given the history of the Sámi. As the archaeologist Sharon Webb (2006: 175) has noted, a great number of Sámi assimilated with mainstream populations or kept their identity hidden during the assimilation times, lasting to the middle of the 20th century, and consequently there was ambiguity as to what it meant to be a Sámi. New museums had to turn to relatively simple images when representing Sámi ethnicity in order to create a collective identity. The ethnic boundary has been highlighted at the expense of cultural heterogeneity within the boundaries.

Sámi museums can still contribute to strengthening Sámi identity by constructing the ethnic boundary between the Sámi and majority populations. At the same time, however, they may also be of relevance to the

internal conflicts of the Sámi. When displaying Sámi culture, museums cannot totally dissociate themselves from struggles for power and recognition among the Sámi themselves.

REFERENCES

- Amft, Andrea: *Sápmi i förändringens tid. En studie av svenska samers levnadsvillkor under 1900-talet ur ett genus- och etnicitetsperspektiv*. Umeå universitet: Umeå 2000.
- Amft, Andrea: Etnisk identitet hos samerna i Sverige – en komplex bild. Mervi Autti, Seija Keskitalo-Foley, Päivi Naskali & Heidi Sinevaara-Niskanen (eds.), *Kuulumisia: feministisiä tulkintoja naisten toimijuuksista*. Lapin yliopisto: Rovaniemi 2007: 66–101.
- Amundsen, Arne Bugge: National Museums in Sápmi. Peter Aronsson & Gabriella Elgenius (eds.), *EuNaMus Report No 1*. Linköping University Electronic Press: Linköping 2011: 733–746.
- Baglo, Cathrine: *På ville veget? Levende utstillinger av samer i Europa og Amerika*. Universitetet i Tromsø: Tromsø 2011.
- Barth, Fredrik: Introduction. Fredrik Barth (ed.), *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries. The Social Organization of Culture Difference*. Universitetsforlaget: Oslo 1969: 9–38.
- Edbom, Gunilla: *Samisk kulturarv i samlingar*. Rapport från ett projekt om återföringsfrågor gällande samiska föremål. Åjtte: Jokkmokk 2005.
- Eriksen, Thomas Hylland: *Ethnicity and Nationalism. Anthropological Perspectives*. Second Edition. Pluto Press: London – Ann Arbor 2002.
- Green, Carina: *Managing Lapponia. A World Heritage as Arena for Sami Ethno-politics in Sweden*. Uppsala universitet: Uppsala 2009.
- Hammarlund-Larsson, Cecilia: Skärskådad samling. Samiskt kulturarv i Nordiska museet. Christina Westerlund & Eva Silvén (eds.), *För Sápmi i tiden*. Nordiska Museet: Stockholm 2008: 85–106.
- Hansen, Kjell: Kulturarvspolitik och museiutställningar. *Nordisk museologi*. No 2, 2005: 61–75.
- Harlin, Eeva-Kristiina: *Recalling Ancestral Voices*. Interreg IIIA-projektin loppuraportti. Siida, Åjtte & Várjjat Sámi Musea 2008.
- Jomppanen, Tarmo: Saamelaiset & eksoottiset odotukset. *Museo*. No 4, 2007: 17.
- Keil, Julia: From Cabinets of Curiosity to Counter-Culture Sámi Museums: 350 Years of Presentation of Sámi Culture. Jurij Kusmenko (ed.), *The Sámi and the Scandinavians - Aspects of 2000 Years of Contact*. Verlag Dr. Kovac: Hamburg 2004: 141–153.
- Lehtola, Veli-Pekka: *Saamelaiset suomalaiset – kohtaamisia 1896–1953*. Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura: Helsinki 2012.
- Levy, Janet E: Prehistory, Identity, and Archaeological Representation in Nordic Museums. *American Anthropologist*. Vol. 108, No. 1, 2006: 135–147.
- Mathisen, Silje Opdahl: Travels with the Lappish Equipage. An Investigation into the Representation of Sami Culture and History at National Museums of Cultural History in Norway and Sweden. A Paper Presented in International Society for Cultural History Annual Conference 2011.
- Mathisen, Stein R.: Travel and Narratives: Itinerant Constructions of a Homogenous Sami Heritage. Pertti J. Anttonen, Anna-Leena Siikala, Stein R. Mathisen & Leif Magnusson (eds.), *Folklore, Heritage Politics and Ethnic Diversity*. A Festschrift for Barbro Klein. Multicultural Centre: Botkyrka 2000: 179–205.
- Moser, Stephanie: The Devil Is in the Detail: Museum Displays and the Creation of Knowledge. *Museum Anthropology*. No 1, 2010: 22–32.
- Mulk, Inga-Maria: Samiska museer och

- förvaltningsorgan – identitet och kulturarv. *Vem äger kulturarvet?* Anföranden vid konferens om återföringsfrågor vid Åjtte, Svenskt Fjäll- och Samemuseum 6–8 juni 2000. Åjtte: Jokkmokk 2002: 11–20.
- Näkkäljärvi, Klemetti: Kohti kevättä ja Sajoksen avajaisia. A weblog writing 24.3.2012. http://klemetti.blogspot.com/2012_03_18_archi ve.html
- Ojala, Carl-Gösta: *Sámi Prehistories. The Politics of Archaeology and Identity in Northernmost Europe*. Institutionen för arkeologi och antik historia, Uppsala universitet: Uppsala 2009.
- Olsen, Bjørnar: Bilder fra fortida? Representasjoner av samisk kultur i samiske museer. *Nordisk museologi*. No 2, 2000: 13–30.
- Olsen, Kjell: Ethnicity and Representation in a “Local” Museum. Pertti J. Anttonen, Anna-Leena Siikala, Stein R. Mathisen & Leif Magnusson (eds.), *Folklore, Heritage Politics, and Ethnic Diversity*. A Festschrift for Barbro Klein. Multicultural Centre: Botkyrka 2000: 140–157.
- Pennanen, Jukka: Museo etnisyyden vahvistajana. Jukka Pennanen & Klemetti Näkkäljärvi: *Siiddastallan. Siidoista kyliin. Luontosidonnainen saamelaiskulttuuri ja sen muuttuminen*. Siida: Inari 2000: 10–12.
- Ruotsala, Helena: *Muuttuvat palkiset. Elo, työ ja ympäristö Kittilän Kyrön paliskunnassa ja Kuolan Luujärven poronhoitokollektiiveissa vuosina 1930–1995*. Suomen Muinaismuistoyhdistys: Helsinki 2002.
- Sara, Johan Mikkel: Samiske museer i samiske samfunn. *Vem äger kulturarvet?* Anföranden vid konferens om återföringsfrågor vid Åjtte, Svenskt Fjäll- och Samemuseum 6–8 juni 2000. Åjtte: Jokkmokk 2002: 51–53.
- Sarivaara, Erika: *Statuksettomat saamelaiset. Paikantumisia saamelaisuuden rajoilla*. Sámi allaskuvla: Guovdageaidnu 2012.
- Silvén, Eva: Lapps and Sami – Narrative and Display at the Nordiska Museet. Kajsa Andersson (ed.), *L’Image du Sápmi. Études comparées*. Humanistiska institutionen, Örebro universitet: Örebro 2009: 74–91.
- Valkonen, Sanna: *Poliittinen saamelaisuus*. Vastapaino: Tampere 2009.
- Väisänen, Jarno: *Accountable Arguments. A Rhetorical and Ethnomethodological Approach to Local Level Argumentation on the Rearrangement of Land and Water Rights in the Saami Area*. University of Joensuu: Joensuu 2008.
- Webb, Sharon: Making Museums, Making People: the Representation of the Sámi through Material Culture. *Public Archaeology*. No 3, 2006: 167–183.
- Åhrén, Christina: *Är jag en riktig same? En etnologisk studie av unga samers identitetsarbete*. Institutionen för kultur- och medievetenskaper, Umeå universitet: Umeå 2008.
- *Nika Potinkara, doctoral student at the Department of History and Ethnology, University of Jyväskylä, Finland*
- Address: Historian ja etnologian laitos FI-40014 Jyväskylän yliopisto Finland*
- E-mail: nika.potinkara@jyu.fi*