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Ethnic Reindeer Herders

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'Ethnic reindeer herders:

Groupness among reindeer-herding Sámi in Northwest Finnish Lapland

The article examines groupness among Sámi reindeer herders in Northwest Finnish Lapland, a region shaped like, and thus referred to as, the 'arm' of Finland. Our inquiry focuses primarily on how reindeer herders in the region identify with the principal ethnic and national reference groups, that is, whether they identify as Sámi or Finns. In a second strand of the study, we examine the Sáminess of the region's reindeer herders with specific reference to their livelihood.

Our research draws primarily on the concept of groupness elaborated by Rogers Brubaker (Brubaker, 2004: 12). The concept refers to a process or event in which the feeling of belonging to a group, and the influence of the group on the individuals in it, varies. Put succinctly, we are investigating the forms of groupness that shape the lives of the reindeer herders in the region.

The Sámi have an official status as an indigenous people, the only such one in northern Europe, and it is clear that their recognized indigeneity in some manner shapes their self-understanding. However, even though we refer to the indigeneity of herders, we do not use the juridical-political category of indigenous people as a self-explanatory starting point. Instead, we seek to examine herders' experienced group identifications. Do they consider themselves Sámi, Finns – or both at the same time? What do their possible Sáminess and Finnishness consist of?

We begin with a presentation of Brubaker's theory and the empirical setting of our research. We go on to analyse the data using Brubaker's framework and lastly put forward answers to the research questions.

Grass-roots ethnicity

In everyday language, and ethnohistory in particular, ethnic groups are often portrayed as rather clearly demarcated entities. We may speak of the Serbs of Yugoslavia and the

Catholics and Protestants of Northern Ireland as if they were homogeneous groups or even unanimous collectives with a particular set of opinions or particular views. Yet in reality, ethnic groups are rather heterogeneous internally and have fluid and shifting boundaries, and the Sámi of Finland are no exception. They are divided into three linguistic groups as well as a number of local cultures and ways of life that sometimes have relatively little in common – even though as a people they share elements that are communally recognizable (Seurujärvi-Kari, 1994; Valtonen, 2014: 44–49).

The central notion in Brubaker's theory is that no social analysis should associate ethnicity with a clearly delimited, pre-defined, reified ethnic group that does not exist in the form in which it is referred to in everyday speech (Brubaker, 2004: 7–27, 2013: 238–265; Brubaker et al., 2006). Rather, the concept of a group should be replaced with more detailed concepts, ones that better describe the processual nature of ethnicity.

Groupness thus refers to a process where the degree to which one belongs to a group varies. National or ethnic groupness may intensify during significant ethnopolitical events, ethnic unrest and times of mutual solidarity; at other times, it may wane, become taken for granted or mundane. Yet groupness may also fail to intensify despite active efforts to form a group, and it cannot be taken as a given or as an enduring element (Brubaker, 2004: 7–63). The recent history of the Sámi has been very much a history of groupness in which Sáminess as an ethnic category has been ascribed new, favourable meanings at the same time as criticism has been directed against the influence of the mainstream cultures of the Nordic countries. The pioneers in creating groupness have often been Sámi artists, such as Nils-Aslak Valkeapää (Nykänen, 2019; Valkeapää, 1983, 1994). A strengthening of groupness has also been seen in many struggles where the Sámi have asserted their right to self-determination. Among the moments of intensification one can cite the protests against the damming of the Alta River in Norway at the end of the 1970s; the dispute in the 1990s over the skulls of Aslak Hetta and Mons Somby, who were executed in the aftermath of the Kautokeino Rebellion; and the mining dispute in Kallak, Sweden, in the early 2010s (see, e.g. Nykänen, 2010; Valkeapää, 1983).

Brubaker takes a particular interest in conflicts. He emphasizes that ethnic conflicts should not be simplistically viewed as conflicts among ethnic groups (Brubaker, 2004: 7–27). Rather, what is required is more nuanced research on the ethnicised dimensions of a conflict and how those mobilising the conflicts pursue their chosen political agenda in the name of the

group's interests. Research has been done in this vein by Sanna and Jarno Valkonen and Timo Koivurova, who look at how the dispute relating to land rights and indigeneity in Finland has become ethnicised in the debate on the definition of "Sámi" (Nykänen, 2014; Valkonen et al., 2016). Their central argument is that the rhetoric seen in the struggle over the definitions of Sámi and indigeneity has invoked new, or seemingly new, ethnic categories and created groups that are treated as if they exist in an empirical reality that is separate from the discourse. Examples of such categories-become-groups include Forest Sámi/Lapp and non-status Sámi (Valkonen et al., 2016).

It should be pointed out at this juncture that ethnic groups are not merely figments of the imagination in Brubaker's thinking. For one thing, the everyday conceptions reflected in narratives and classifications of ethnicity are real. They may have both explanatory and consequential power. However, Brubaker stresses that research should not adopt these "folk sociologies" as they stand. Rather, narratives and classifications relating to ethnicity should be analysed as aspects of the object of research, as Valkonen et al. (2016) have done (see Brubaker, 2004: 9–10).

A second consideration which Brubaker points to is that ethnicity operates as a real force in the cultural practices and relations of the people who interpret that ethnicity. Ethnicity appears and recurs in cultural idioms, discursive frames, institutional forms and cognitive schemata, all of which have a collective dimension (Brubaker, 2004: 9–10). In other words, ethnicity need not have an essential foundation; it is a living and changing entity in a particular cultural frame. One might well ask whether such an entity would be any less real than the people who constitute it. Understood as a cultural idiom or cognitive schema ethnicity does not bind all of the members of the presumed group in the same way; it is not absolute or clearly demarcated but rather fluid, mutable and fragmented. Nevertheless, it has an identifiable effect, one that brings people together. Put in somewhat different terms, ethnic categories are part of the cultural understanding that is the shared cognitive reality of the people living in a particular area. Aspects of such an ethnicity are understood, remembered and produced through the schemata associated with the culture (Näkkäläjärvi, 2013: 32).

In addition to groupness and its related concepts, Brubaker proposes *category* and the processes associated with it as an analytical tool. Where 'group' refers to a community acting and communicating together, an ethnic category is more akin to a cognitive schema that underpins groupness or group formation (Brubaker, 2004: 12–13, 76, 2013: 244–249). The

notions of category and categorizing open up many opportunities for studying ethnicity without reifying references to ‘groups’. For example, one may investigate the degree of groupness associated with a particular category, the use of categories in various mundane contexts or the macro-level politics of categories, in which categories are ‘proposed, propagated, imposed, institutionalized, discursively articulated, organizationally entrenched and generally embedded in multifarious forms of “governmentality”’ (Brubaker, 2004: 13).

Brubaker has a particular interest in ethnic categories. Here, we expand this focus somewhat to take up a category connected with ethnicity but only secondarily, that of reindeer herder. Its primary association is life with reindeer. The category is ethnic in the sense that, for the herders interviewed, Sáminess and the Sámi language are specifically connected with reindeer herding (see Näkkäljärvi, 2013; Valtonen, 2014). One aim of this article is to examine what kind of Sáminess the interviewees realize through their ‘herding life’¹.

A third conceptual choice we have made drawing on Brubaker’s work has to do with the notion of identity. For Brubaker, identity, like group, is problematic as a social scientific concept. It is used in a wide variety of theoretical meanings, some contradictory (see Brubaker, 2004: 33–35), and is often defined carelessly. For example, it may mean an essential sameness with oneself, a collective similarity with a group, the impetus for or outcome of political activity, or a fragmented or diffuse self that in the postmodern era one may assume like a role (Brubaker, 2004: 33–35; see also Hall, 1996). Brubaker suggests that we abandon the heavily burdened concept of identity as an analytical category and replace it with less ambiguous terms. One such term is *identification* (Brubaker, 2004: 41). Like groupness, identification refers to action or events. We may, for example, identify as a party to some relationship or as a member of a group, or we may be identified or categorized. There are also other well-founded options to replace the term identity, such as *belonging* proposed by Michael Skey (2019). In this study, we use primarily the term *identification*, as it refers most clearly to our research questions, but also discuss belonging in some particular contexts, such as belonging to a place.

Put succinctly, the focus of our article is the groupness of reindeer herders at the grass-roots level in Enontekiö, Northwest Finnish Lapland. This groupness has ethnic as well as political dimensions associated with conceptions of the general groupness and indigeneity of the Sámi that emerged during the political rise of the people. Grass-roots groupness is not necessarily confined to ‘general Sáminess’ or general indigeneity. It is sooner and primarily connected

with a peer group that can be seen in daily life, the reindeer-herding Sámi of the region. It is not our intention here to say what the Sámi as a collective group think or what ‘real’ Sáminess is. Rather, we concentrate on describing the groupness of the herders and ethnicity as one facet of this.

Roughly speaking, ethnicity and nationality are performed on two levels: public and private. Public performances encompass celebrations, demonstrations, joint rituals and political speeches. Performing ethnicity in a public space is visible and meant to be so. Brubaker refers to those who publicly promote the interests of ethnic groups as ‘ethnopolitical entrepreneurs’. The term does not have a negative connotation nor, for example, does it mean an overly ambitious person looking out for his or her own interests. Rather, ethnopolitical entrepreneurs are simply actors who to a greater or lesser extent politicize ethnicity. They may be ‘politicians, journalists, spokespersons, the clergy, teachers and others’ (Brubaker, 2013: 263).

Our interest lies primarily in the private dimensions of ethnicity, that is, those habits and customs through which ethnicity is enacted in everyday interaction, as well as identification-related and sociolinguistic practices. The reindeer herders we have interviewed are not ethnopolitical entrepreneurs in the proper sense; they are full-time herders who, in the course of their daily routine, do not speak in the name of an ethnic group or, even less, a nation. They may adopt a conscious ethnopolitical role but, for the most part, ethnicity appears and is enacted in the private dimension of their lives.

Material

The empirical material for the present study comprises nine interviews with Sámi reindeer herders, carried out between 2005 and 2007 by Tapio Nykänen. Supplementing the interviews is material gathered through ethnographic observation. Nykänen carried out ethnographic research in Northwest Finnish Lapland on some 20 research trips between 2005 and 2018, during which he took part in a wide variety of herding activities, such as feeding reindeer and roundups. He has also compiled an extensive archive of photographs with a view to using them for research purposes and exhibitions. The other components of the ethnographic material comprise notes and correspondence.

Leena Valkeapää lives near the northwest village of Kilpisjärvi and lives the herding life day in and day out. She studies the people and life around her and does autoethnographic research based on her observations. In her doctoral dissertation, Valkeapää, among her other publications, has investigated the cultural and artistic meanings associated with the herding life as a person engaged in that life. Valkeapää's autoethnographic material includes thousands of photographs, movies, letters, and notes based on participant observation.

The interviews were conducted as part of Nykänen's master's thesis, the purpose at the time being to investigate reindeer herders' relations to the state. The thesis indicated that the herder community in the region has a distinctive system of social norms that sometimes takes precedence over legislation; the norms are based on cultural demands and traditions, which include competition for good pastureland, the long-standing 'stray' reindeer culture (whereby one could kill a stray from another herd if desperate for food) and, on the other hand, interaction based on a subtle diplomacy. The system relies on the internal dynamic of the herder community and on the village- and family-level groups within it² (Heikkinen, 2002; Nykänen, 2007).

The master's thesis dealt rather specifically with questions of groupings and identification and the material is thus applicable to analysing grouping among the interviewees in terms of Brubaker's framework. As the focal topics of this article differ to some extent from Tapio Nykänen's original analysis, we have augmented the interview material with rich (auto)ethnographic research material collected up to and including the year 2018.

On the surface, the interviewees seem to be a fairly uniform group. At the time they were interviewed all of them were engaged in reindeer herding as their principal source of livelihood; for some it was their only livelihood. To use Valkeapää's terms, the herders live and were living the herding life, one pervaded by work with reindeer or reindeer-related matters (Heikkinen, 2002; L Valkeapää, 2011). It is a life in which the way time is used and work is done is planned on the basis of changes in the weather and natural phenomena and the effects they have on how reindeer behave. The rhythm of life is also determined by seasonal events such as calving in the spring and roundups in the autumn, where grown calves are separated from the herd for slaughter (Heikkinen, 2002; L Valkeapää, 2016). A third determinant of the herding life on a daily basis is engagement with other people, in particular other herders. Many of the tasks involved in herding are done together although in the course of a year a herder might also have long periods when he or she is alone.

Some differences among the interviewees can also be observed. Where some earn their living exclusively from herding, several also rent out cottages and fishing services to tourists. The herders vary widely in age, the youngest being just over 20 years of age and the oldest over 70. The oldest herders remembered the days of ‘Kota³ Lapland’, when herders migrated with the herds, going from the northern parts of Muonio to as far north as they could in Northwest Lapland. They are not, however, part of the generation whose migration with reindeer extended all the way to the Arctic Ocean, but for many ‘migrating to the Arctic Ocean’ symbolized a life – now past and lost – where herders and their families moved from one location to another based on the animals’ natural annual cycle. The youngest interviewees had grown up in the era of modern herding, when herders live in cabins or at home while working (Heikkinen, 2002; L Valkeapää, 2011; on the history of herding, see e.g. Linkola, 1972). For the younger generation of herders, equipment – especially snowmobiles and ATVs – fuels, mobile phones, drones, GPS devices and other technology form integral aspects of herding and the herding life. Another crucial aspect of modern herding, in their view, is supplementary winter feeding of reindeer, which began gradually in the 1990s (Heikkinen 2002).

[Picture 1]

Sámi ethnicity

In recent years Finnish discussions of Sáminess in both the research community and public forums have tended to focus on the definition of ‘Sámi’. The dispute regarding the definition has revolved around ratification of ILO Convention No. 169 and any new land rights it may create or any earlier rights it may restore (J Joona, 2013; T Joona, 2012; Koivurova, 2008). In a very small nutshell, perhaps the most controversial issue is the role of ancestry. The Sámi Parliament of Finland claims that a person’s Sáminess cannot be based on the – sometimes controversial – ethnic identity of his or her ancestors but on his or her ties to the present-day Sámi community and culture. By contrast, the adherents of the Forest Sámi/Lapp movement claim that it is precisely ancestry that should be a central criterion when defining indigeneity in Finland (about the dispute, see (Junka-Aikio, 2016; Lehtola, 2015; Nykänen, 2014, 2015; Pääkkönen, 2008; Valkonen et al., 2016).

The dispute over the definition of ‘Sámi’ was topical also back when the interviews were conducted and its intensification in recent years has prompted interest among Sámi in

Northwest Lapland, as elsewhere. However, our principal interest here is not the views of the region's Sámi on the dispute but finding out what ethnic group the interviewees identify with, either unprompted or when asked whether they consider *themselves* to be Sámi more than anything else or something else. By way of background, it should be mentioned that all of the full-time reindeer herders in the region are on the electoral roll of the Sámi Parliament⁴, speak Sámi and are indisputably 'official' Sámi.

In the interviews, the herders were simply asked if they identified primarily as Finns or Sámi. When asking this we did not explain what we meant by 'a Finn' or 'a Sámi'. With one exception, the interviewees considered themselves primarily Sámi.

TN: Would you say you're mainly a Sámi or a Finn?

RH: Well, I pretty much consider myself a Sámi.

TN: What does Sáminess mean to you?

RH: It means that I have got Sámi roots from my grandmother, from my father.

TN: Are you mainly or primarily a Sami or a Finn?

RH: I'd say I'm a Sami.

TN: And only after that a Finn?

RH: Well, a Finnish citizen.

Only one of the nine interviewees said that he was primarily a Finn and, secondarily, 'a Lapp' (Sámi). He did not minimize his Sáminess, however. On the contrary, he expressed his view on the discussion about the definition of Sámi and criticised the people who did not consider themselves Sámi previously but want to be Sámi now.

The interviewees defined Sáminess primarily in terms of family, language, livelihood, art, handicraft and 'culture'. One interviewee said that, more than anything, Sáminess is 'a worldview'. None of the interviewees defined Sáminess explicitly through indigeneity, even though all of them were well aware of the people's status and discussions surrounding it. This

shows that the herders interviewed were not ethnopolitically very active. Instead, they seemed to associate Sáminess with practical, everyday dimensions of life. Based on our later ethnographic work this has not significantly changed. Due the public parlance about Sámi rights and the Sámi definition the awareness about the meanings related to indigeneity has risen, but still the Sáminess of the herders in Northern Enontekiö is strongly related to their daily life (see also Clifford, 2013: 21, 64).

Most often the interviewees mentioned language and herding. This is to be expected for many reasons. First, in the northern part of Enontekiö, all of the full-time herders are Sámi and speak the language. Secondly, almost all of the Sámi in the region are involved in reindeer herding in one way or another, with Sáminess and reindeer herding forming a shared cultural schema. Thirdly, Northern Sámi is the language of reindeer herding, featuring as it does a sophisticated and nuanced terminology describing herding practices and the conditions under which the livelihood is practised (Näkkäljärvi, 2013). Herders think and talk about herding in Sámi except in situations where it is necessary to use Finnish (as in roundups, where the helpers are often Finns). They are able to express many things in Finnish but shades of meaning may change and longer explanations may be required.

In Brubaker's theory, language is a quite important form of belonging to an ethnic category, in particular in the expression of relations between ethnic groups (Brubaker, 2004: 26). Language does not form a long-term site of dispute and resistance but it does give rise to temporary frictions and tensions in everyday interaction. Brubaker carried out empirical research in the Romanian city of Cluj, where in practice everyone speaks Romanian but only members of the Hungarian minority speak Hungarian. In groups with members of both minorities, the residents of Cluj whom Brubaker interviewed said that they felt it was polite to speak Romanian, which everyone understood. Romanians complained however, that even in mixed groups Hungarians tended to speak Hungarian and form a clique that excluded others (Brubaker, 2013: 252; Brubaker et al., 2006).

In Northwest Lapland language is both a unifying and dividing force. In groups with both Finns and Sámi, herders ordinarily speak Finnish, which everyone understands and can speak. Among themselves, and thus most of the time when herding, they speak Sámi. As noted, speaking Sámi is practical as the language has a large number of terms enabling detailed descriptions of nature, landscapes and reindeer that can be difficult to translate into

Finnish. At the same time, language is the substance of ethnic categorisation: those who speak Sámi become attached to Sámi culture, the Sámi way of thinking and their position.

Both Finnish and Sámi are used to signal ethnic categorising in concrete terms as well: in the case of disagreements or when they want to keep something among themselves, reindeer herders may speak Sámi in mixed language groups. They might even speak Sámi to people whom they know speak only Finnish, making the choice of language a means to make visible personal power relations or opinions. However, as in Cluj, it is ordinarily considered polite not to exclude anyone from ongoing communication. A special exception to this rule is that herders may speak Sami to children even in a mixed language group. This is not a signal relating to the presence of outsiders or what is being discussed but a customary and common way to teach a language in bilingual families. If the mother is Finnish and the father Sámi, the language spoken in the home will be Finnish. It is then important for the father to speak Sámi to the children.

Research on Sáminess has recognised the custom Sámi have of identifying new acquaintances as Sámi or Finnish on the basis of their family, that is, their last name (Näkkäljärvi, 2013: 36; L Valkeapää, 2011: 42; Valkonen et al., 2016). This consideration came up several times in our interviews but the phenomenon is even more familiar from interaction and many discussions with Sámi herders. The names of certain nomadic reindeer-herding families, such as Labba, Valkeapää, Magga, Juuso, Syväjärvi and Vasara, indicate both a person's Sámi ethnicity and a historical link to migratory reindeer herding. Similarly, certain names (such as Rova and Kultima) tell herders that the person is a member of a *verdde* family⁵, one which allowed nomads to stay with them and with whom they exchanged services and goods with during the old migratory days. Some of the *verdde* families in Finland have a Sámi background but over the course of time they have settled in houses and in the process became 'Fennicized'; that is, they underwent a new ethnic identification (Lähtenmäki, 2004: 290; L Valkeapää, 2011: 43). Nowadays some members of these old *verdde* families are involved in reindeer herding and are important part of the Sámi herding community, even if they would not be considered as ethnic Sámi themselves. One should note here that belonging to a *verdde* family as such does not necessarily imply that one *could not* be an ethnic Sámi. For example, Sea Sámi in Norway have traditionally had a *verdde* relationship with reindeer herding Sámi (Helander-Renvall, 2016: 45). In some cases, the ethnic status of *verddes* in Finland are tad unclear, which illuminates the processual nature of

the group identifications. A Sámi herder commented the ethnic status of a particular *verdde* by laughing and saying ‘Well, that’s difficult, you know how it is!’

[Picture 2]

Finnishness

The principal ethnicity with which the interviewees identified was Sáminess, which carried meanings associated with language, livelihood, art, family and worldview, among others. It merits mentioning, however, that Finnishness also constituted a framework within which the interviewees formed an identification. It was clearly a *national* identity, that is, one connected with Finland as a nation and, to some extent, as a state.

RH: Finland, the state – you know – it is particularly good because it provides people with a basic security. It’s a fact, it is, that a person has to belong to something. And so we belong to the state of Finland.

* * *

RH: Yes, it’s nice to be a Finnish citizen.

TN: So you’re patriotic to some extent?

RH: Yes, I am.

* * *

TN: Well, if you think about things like the state of Finland or being a Finn, what do these mean to you?

RH: When you’re a Finnish citizen, then you really feel a little like you’re a Finn.

* * *

TN: What significance does the state of Finland have for you?

RH: Hmmm...

TN: Finland as a country?

RH: These are pretty difficult questions (laughs) because I haven't thought about things like this. Its significance is certainly that when you get right down to it Finland is a safe country in the sense that – if you look at it – there are very few conflicts, so I feel that security is an important thing in Finland.

The significance of being Finnish does not seem wholly clear, nor is Finnishness something that the interviewees think about actively; but it does have positive associations (see Eriksen, 2001). Thus, for the herders, Finnishness is at least not exclusively a colonialist and discriminatory category – even though Finland is often portrayed as a colonialist country in official Sámi politics.

It merits mention that, in the interviews, Finnishness as a category does not usually seem to threaten Sámi identity or culture; rather, being Finnish has somewhat different meanings associated with it than being a Sámi does. Finnishness is security, citizenship and favourable conditions created by the nation-state. In contrast, Sáminess is closeness within the family, the language and the herding life. In other words, Sáminess is an ethnic groupness, a groupness underpinned by a special language and way of life. Finnishness, in turn, is a groupness based on being a citizen of a particular state. In other words, the interviewees considered themselves Finnish citizens, but did not feel that they belong to the Finnish ethnic community. Yet, it seems, they are often connected to the Finnish *social* community at least in some sense. This is not surprising, as herders are linked to Finnish society in many ways. They have gone to Finnish-medium schools and learnt to speak Finnish as well as they speak Sámi. A seemingly mundane but illuminating example can be drawn from sports culture. The world ice hockey championships, an annual event that is very important and visible in Finland, is followed by many of the Sámi herders in the area. Usually they support Finnish teams as much as any other Finnish citizen does. Supporting a team does not define individuals' identification, but it reflects the fact that Sámi herders living in Finland have meaningful ties to Finnish society and modern traditions. The situation is obviously similar with Sámi living in Norway and Sweden. Even if Sámi people often consciously value and foster their own old habits and traditions, they belong also to bigger national societies, which affect them in several ways (see Helander-Renvall, 2016: 44). Hence, also categories of ethnic groupness and national citizenship are processual and sometimes overlapping rather than fixed and firmly anchored (Brubaker, 2004: 41; Clifford, 2013: 59–60, 77).

Most recognisable tensions to be found between the categories of Finn and Sámi emerge in issues where the categories encroach on one another or especially when the state interferes excessively in the Sámi way of life. For example, the interviewees openly question the right of the state or its representatives to appropriate areas that reindeer herders have used for centuries. A concrete example of this is the case of the Malla Strict Nature Reserve, in which grazing of reindeer has been prohibited by a government decree since 1981 (Jokinen, 2005: 10). When the interviews were carried out, the Finnish Forest Research Institute (Metla), which controlled the area at the time, proposed that grazing could be allowed⁶. This never happened but did prompt positive sentiments among the herders:

TN: They just decided to propose that reindeer should be allowed into the Malla Strict Nature Reserve from now on. Does this seem like a sensible, good decision?

RH: It's nice to hear that such a suggestion has been made but I don't know if it will be accepted; hopefully it will happen.

TN: So it would be important for you?

RH: Yes. Now it seems like we are sort of petty criminals when we come into what is our old area and have to be there surreptitiously. It has been a source of stress affecting the whole village.

The closure of national borders to reindeer herding that took place in 1852 and 1899 also prompted negative sentiments among the herders.⁷ They felt that Nordic states in general had no right to interfere in the natural cycle (the annual migration to Arctic Ocean) of Sámi reindeer herding. The closure of the borders gave rise to a new type of groupness in which relatives on opposite sides of the border gradually became alienated from one another, and other herders in their own country became a more prominent reference group.

RH: These were all a single area and when the national borders came, the herders started learning to take advantage of the benefits they had on their own side, in their own country. And the result was that we couldn't go into Norway.

TN: It was a result of the borders being closed.

RH: Yes, it led to reindeer villages becoming alienated from one another but we still knew each other and got along. But we didn't have as much to do with them anymore. If there hadn't been fences, the herds would have got mixed a lot more.

* * *

RH: Well, I think it was a pretty dramatic change. The reindeer's natural migration route was cut off and with that the practice of people following the reindeer.

TN: So you mean neither the reindeer nor the people could get to the Arctic Ocean?

RH: Yes, that's what I mean. And it is quite a radical change, or certainly was when it first happened.

TN: Do you think these states had the right to do what they did – or was it a case of might makes right?

RH: Well, a bit of both. You could say that it was might makes right ... they said they had the right to do what they did ... but if you look at it strictly from the point of view of reindeer herding ... I don't think they had the right.

Typically, the herders emphasized that things had a particular appearance if viewed strictly from the standpoint of herding but in a broader perspective took on new aspects. They were careful to avoid saying that the perspective of reindeer herding was the only one. Their attitudes were typically not black and white, or terribly passionate. Although the herders defended reindeer herding and its role in Sámi culture, they also tried to look at things from the point of view of the state, that is, in terms of the category of Finnishness.

One way to look at integration into the state and the identification with the majority culture that this entails is to discuss the bureaucracy that the herders have to deal with on a daily basis. This topic came up recurrently in the interviews when the discussion turned to the impact of the state on herding. Increased bureaucracy had negative, positive and neutral associations. One negative aspect of it was the increased reporting involved and the need this created to learn how to use computers, although this was seen as bringing certain benefits as well. The system of financial support for the reindeer herding system prompted reactions across the board. All of the interviewees said that reindeer herding as it is practiced today would be impossible without a system of subsidies based on the number of reindeer, which

account for a significant percentage of herders' income⁸. Then again, two of the interviewees pointed out that if the borders had not been closed to reindeer herding there might well be no need for subsidies. Two other interviewees criticised the subsidy system for supporting reindeer herding in an unhealthy manner, that is, encouraging herders to maintain excessively large herds.

The attitudes towards the nation-state and its 'western' order are perhaps best reflected in the way reindeer herders refer to their daily life as 'a world unto itself'. The interviewees did not verbalize this distinctive character in any specific terms. Rather, they repeatedly referred to the fact that reindeer herding in Northwest Finnish Lapland represents a way of life that is not described in the media, for example. The herding life is 'up there' on the fells, where the herders move around on terms set by nature, the reindeer and other herders.

TN: Where do you see the presence of the state here in your daily life? How do you see that this area belongs to Finland?

RH: Well, I can't really say. We live a life of our own here.

TN: What does that mean?

RH: What can I say? (silence). I can't really say.

TN: Does 'life of your own' mean something the reindeer-herding community has, a world of its own?

RH: Yes, it's like a world of its own, very much so. Of course the state is there; you hear it on the radio and see and hear it on TV.

TN: But it is a world of its own, like somewhere else?

RH: Yes. It's a world of its own. That's what it is.

One might ask to what extent the existence of a 'world of its own' is related to ethnic identification or categorization. In the herders' comments their distinctive way of life does not seem to become ethnicized; that is, it is not explicitly linked to Sáminess. It is sooner linked to reindeer herding and living with reindeer, which we have described in some detail above. Then again, as we have observed, reindeer herding in the area is closely connected to

Sámi culture. In this respect, the reference to herding being ‘a life of its own’, in which the state – Finland – is present primarily through media, is interesting where ethnic reality is concerned. In Brubaker’s terms, one might think that Sáminess entails a cognitive schema in which the local reindeer-herding culture and the Sámi language form a separate entity in relation to Finnishness as it appears in the media. This separateness does not necessarily exclude Finnishness, given that Finland and Finnishness have a recognizable meaning to the interviewees. Rather, separateness more likely refers to the distinctive ethnicity of the herders’ everyday lives, in which different identifications form local hybrids and in which ethnicity and citizenship meet at varying interfaces.

[Picture 3]

Nature and the herding life

As observed above, the everyday lives of the interviewees are characterized not so much by ethnic categorization as by the herding life. (Indigenous) Sáminess and Finnishness are both possible categories for identification but the interviewees identify more frequently with the local herding life. In what follows, we briefly examine the meanings of groupness associated with the herding life and in doing so undertake a more fine-grained analysis of the nature of the Sáminess that the herders experience.

The distinctive and primary context of the herding life is the local terrain and nature in Northwest Lapland and the adjacent fell regions of Sweden and Norway⁹. Nature in the region comprises phenomena that are lived and experienced in concrete terms and conceptualized, examples being wind, snow, fire and, perhaps most importantly, the animals that share the surroundings with the Sámi (L Valkeapää, 2011; Valtonen, 2014). The significance of nature is present in many ways in the interviews as well. To the interviewees nature appears in the form of concrete phenomena and opportunities to do their work. It is seen primarily as a force affecting reindeer and improving or reducing their chances of thriving.

TN: What does nature mean to you?

RH: Well, it has a great deal of significance.

TN: In what way?

RH: How could I describe it ... we follow it constantly and make sure that the reindeer will be alright. We always hope for a good winter, that the weather will get down below freezing in the autumn before it snows and so on.

Sometimes observing whether reindeer are thriving or not involves aesthetic experiences, but aesthetics, too, are closely connected to the practical conditions for life. For example, the devastation caused to birch trees by the larvae of geometer moths is both a repulsive sight and a fateful event for reindeer.

RH: Well, that is nature at work. We can see what happens. We had these geometer moths and we can see how depressing these last two or three summers have been with no leaves on the trees; you start crying when the forests are blue at Midsummer.

As noted above, the nature/culture dichotomy does not apply in the case of the reindeer herding culture, at least in any strict sense. Nature is an essential part of the culture and the culture is part of nature. Exceptions to this were new technology and mechanization, which had changed the 'philosophy' of reindeer herding decisively: they have detached herding life from the natural conditions over which people have traditionally had no control. Yet in many ways the herders interviewed felt that they were living in and with nature, which is at the core of the reindeer herding culture. This orientation was clearly reflected in the concept of home, for example. All of the herders have a house somewhere in Enontekiö but most of them nevertheless felt that 'home' was in the wide fell area rather than in or near their house.

RH: As we say, home is here in the fells.

TN: It is an extensive area.

RH: It is quite spread-out. That's where it is; as long as we herd reindeer we have to think of herding in broad terms, as a larger community, not as a particular area.

Several interviewees also reflected quite critically on their relation to nature. One complained that it has been difficult in recent years to keep the number of reindeer in the region small enough¹⁰. He considered the degradation of winter pastures – the loss of lichen – to be detrimental to both biodiversity and reindeer herding itself. Two interviewees sharply criticized the excessive use of ATVs, as it takes a long time before the terrain recovers from the tracks they leave. Then again, all the interviewees said that mechanized equipment is an absolute necessity in modern reindeer herding. Without it the way of life would be utterly different and very difficult for the next generation to adopt. Their comments conveyed a certain forlorn dualism: on the one hand, the herders spoke respectfully about the long-lost Kota Lapland days and frowned upon unnecessary use of machines when moving around in nature; on the other hand, they felt that they were people living in a modern society and modern era who should live and work on the terms of today's technologized culture. Adhering to the old ways is not an option if one wants to survive and meet today's economic demands and compete successfully with other reindeer herders. In a small community it is essential to be able to adapt and to be flexible.

TN: What about the meaning of nature – is it very important?

RH: Well, I don't know. Life is so rough here any way you look at it that my life is like a mountain birch. It has to bend.

TH: And adapt?

RH: Adapt. Bend and adapt. That means it is like life has always been here – for ages.

The relation of reindeer herders to nature can be described in terms of one additional theme, predators. Large predator populations are a problem for herders but totally eradicating predators is not part of the Sámi herding tradition. This attitude has been well illustrated through interviews by Anna-Maria Magga (2012) in her master's thesis. According to Magga, reindeer-herding Sámi would readily kill off intrusive predators that killed tens of reindeer but otherwise they felt that predators were part of nature. Olov Sikku and Eivind Torp (2004) reached the same conclusion. Their research shows that reindeer-herding Sámi in Sweden have only hunted predators to the extent needed to prevent them from damaging herds. Herders there have accepted the fact that predators will occasionally kill a reindeer. Our own

observations support the results of Magga and of Sikku and Torp. An illuminating example can be found in a programme run at the end of the 1990s to catch wolverines in Northwest Lapland and move them farther south. The reindeer herders affected were happy that the population of wolverines, which had become quite large, declined but on the other hand felt ashamed at what had been done to wild animals (L Valkeapää, 2011).

In all, 'nature', 'fells' and 'reindeer' form important categories for everyday identifications of Sámi people in Northwest Lapland. Their Sáminess is not only connected to but constructed through living with reindeer in their 'land', which they strongly belong to. Following James Clifford, this can be called indigeneity that is constructed 'around the campfire' rather than at festivals or rallies (Clifford, 2013: 21, 64; see also Valkonen and Valkonen, 2014). Herders feel strongly that they, like their ancestors, are part of the local habitat, even though the 'philosophy' of herding has changed due to economic demands and technologization and some of today's herding practices may be harmful to nature.

Semi-diasporic indigeneity

Our interviews were carried out at a time when the discussion about the definition of 'Sámi' had already been going on for a number of years and the concepts relating to it had become fairly well established. Nevertheless, the interviewees seemed to have some trouble describing how they experience their ethnic identification. A general, indigenous Sámi groupness was clearly recognized but the feeling of belonging to the larger Sámi group did not prevail to the extent that competing identifications or 'double belongings' (Clifford, 2013: 77) became impossible. Many of the interviewees commented at length on the relations between being Finnish and Sámi and on their own position in these relations. One finding of particular importance is that Finnishness involved primarily (if not only) meanings relating to the state and nation, whereas Sáminess was sooner perceived as an ethno-cultural groupness. The interviews provide indications of the general rise of Sámi culture, the long-term influence of Finnish culture and the state, and the multidimensional and processual nature of ethnicities in everyday life, that is, an overlapping and richness of identifications (see Clifford, 2013: 59–60).

Having noted this, it merits pointing out that the reindeer herders who were interviewed for this research all felt strongly that they were Sámi. Even more importantly, they felt that they were Sámi living the herding life. Their experienced ethnic groupness was closely bound to

their life on the fells, in the cultural landscape of nomadism. Moreover, this ethnicity was strongly practical and corporeal: it was tied to the daily herding practices and to the cultural schemata they created (Brubaker, 2004: 9–10).

One more useful concept to describe the experiences of our interviewees could be *semi-diasporic* (see Clifford, 2013: 77). By this we refer to the fact that the Norwegian and Swedish parts of the traditional nature-cultural landscape are inaccessible to the herds of the Finnish Sámi herders and the effect this has on herders. As our interviews show, the herders still feel that the closure of the borders between Finland and its neighbours in the 19th century were not legitimate actions. In practice, closures alienated Sámi families and villages on opposite sides of the border and left herders on Finnish side, in particular, in a new and challenging situation. They became (and still are) forced to practice their livelihood as part of the Finnish reindeer herding system, which severely limits the possibilities for what traditionally had been an annual migration with reindeer (Nykänen, 2016). This has not made it problematic for Finnish Sámi herders to associate and take part in the international indigenous movement, but it has, among other developments, added elements of ‘double belongings’ to their experience.

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¹ In Finnish publications, we have suggested that one should use the term ‘poroelämä’ (literally ‘reindeer life’) to describe the life of Sámi reindeer herders (Author 2; Author 1 & Author 2). Compared to the usual term ‘poronhoito’ (reindeer herding), the term accentuates the holistic role of the reindeer in the life of the herders. In a word, reindeer are a concrete part of their everyday life. Here, we have translated the term ‘poroelämä’ as ‘herding life’. While the English term, unlike the Finnish, does not emphasize the importance of the close relationship between human being and animal, it illuminates the content of the life of herders well. Herding as they understand it is not their *work*, it is their *life*.

² A village-level herding group is called a *siida* in Northern Sámi and *kyläryhmä* in Finnish. A family-level subgroup is called *dalvesiida* in Sámi and *tokkakunta* in Finnish. There are no established English terms for these units.

³ A conical tent somewhat similar to a teepee.

⁴ The electoral roll of the Sámi Parliament is not an official list of Sámi people. There are Sámi who have not had themselves entered on the roll. However, in practice the roll has become a symbol of who is accepted as a Sámi and who is not (see Valkonen et al., 2016).

⁵ The word *verdde* is Northern Sámi and means literally a ‘friend’ or a guest-friend.

⁶ Heikkinen et al., 2005. Although grazing was prohibited by decree in the area of the reserve, after the end of the 1990s some reindeer began grazing in the area in the summer, and this number has become quite high since 2010. It has not been possible to do anything about the situation because the Finnish Constitution protects reindeer herding as a Sámi livelihood and is a stronger legal instrument than the decree prohibiting grazing. At this writing negotiations are under way between the herding cooperative in the region and Metsähallitus, a state-owned enterprise which now governs the area.

⁷ The border between Finland and Norway, which is the same as the present border, was closed in 1852, that between Finland and Sweden in 1899. See Lehtola, 2013.

⁸ In the period 2012–2013, roughly half of the income of reindeer herders in Finland’s reindeer herding area consisted of the sale for personal consumption of meat. The remainder came from the support paid for each animal (28.50e/reindeer), compensation for reindeer killed by predators or in traffic accidents, investment subsidies or income from wholly other sources (e.g. tourism).

⁹ We emphasize here, as Jarno and Sanna Valkonen have, that the relation the Sámi have to nature should be studied through the relation local people have to the nature around them, not to nature in a universal sense. Valkonen and Valkonen, 2014.

¹⁰ Northwest Lapland has had more reindeer than the maximum allowed by the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry at least in the years 2001–2002, 2006 and 2008–2012. In this last period, the number of reindeer was 11,182 on average, while the largest permissible number is 10,000.