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Hannelene Schilar & E. Carina H. Keskitalo

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## Ethnic boundaries and boundary-making in handicrafts: examples from northern Norway, Sweden and Finland

Hannelene Schilar and E. Carina H. Keskitalo

Department of Geography and Economic History, Umeå University, Umeå, Sweden

### ABSTRACT

When ethnicity is said to be manifest and practised through handicrafts, these seemingly innocent objects become political. They raise questions concerning who can do what handicraft, who can use what symbols or what developments are “allowed”. They illustrate the continuous production of ethnic norms and boundaries, especially when global tourism enters into the equation. Taking a social constructivist perspective, our study addresses ethnic boundaries and boundary-making in handicrafts in northern Sweden, Norway and Finland. Our findings are based on fieldwork (35 interviewees) with people of diverse local backgrounds making and selling handicrafts. Methodologically, we avoid preselecting people based on ethnicity, but instead contribute to an understanding of the constitutive processes of ethnicity by looking at how ethnic talk comes into conversations about handicrafts. Our findings demonstrate that the interviewees draw an ethnic divide between “Sámi”/“non-Sámi”, while other ethnic-choices move to the background. This divide can be seen to be amplified by tourism. The boundary for who can make a Sámi handicraft or use Sámi symbols remains significant, yet also fluid. The article deepens the understanding of the Sámi/non-Sámi ethnic categorization, here in relation to handicrafts. It also helps unravel the complexities between tourism, ethnicities and handicrafts more broadly.

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## Introduction

Handicrafts are fascinating little things, charged and contested as to their meanings. They can be considered markers and practices of culture, identity and ethnicity. Equally, they can be viewed within a global system of touristic representation and idealized imagery. As these two worlds of cultural and economic activities come together, there are many clashes, interconnections and paradoxes that are worthy of research attention (Kramvig 2017).

Tourism is one part of the equation. It can be understood as a practice of othering, where destinations compete within global markets and seek to distinguish themselves

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**CONTACT** Hannelene Schilar  [hannelene.schilar@umu.se](mailto:hannelene.schilar@umu.se)

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through their most exotic, special features (Heath and Wall 1992; Morgan, Pritchard, and Pride 2004). In these processes, the complexity of internally varying places and cultures becomes overwritten with simplified discourse and imagery (Hummon 1988; Fesenmaier and MacKay 1996). Hence, what is *local* becomes a resource for tourism and constructed through narrations of authenticity and difference. Inserting what are now local ethnicities into the equation, ethnicity and ethnic practices, such as handicrafts, equally become resources for tourism (Comaroff and Comaroff 2009; Niskala and Ridanpää 2016). And because ethnicity is a project of difference (Nagel 1994), it “perfectly” fits into and feeds tourism’s discourses of othering.

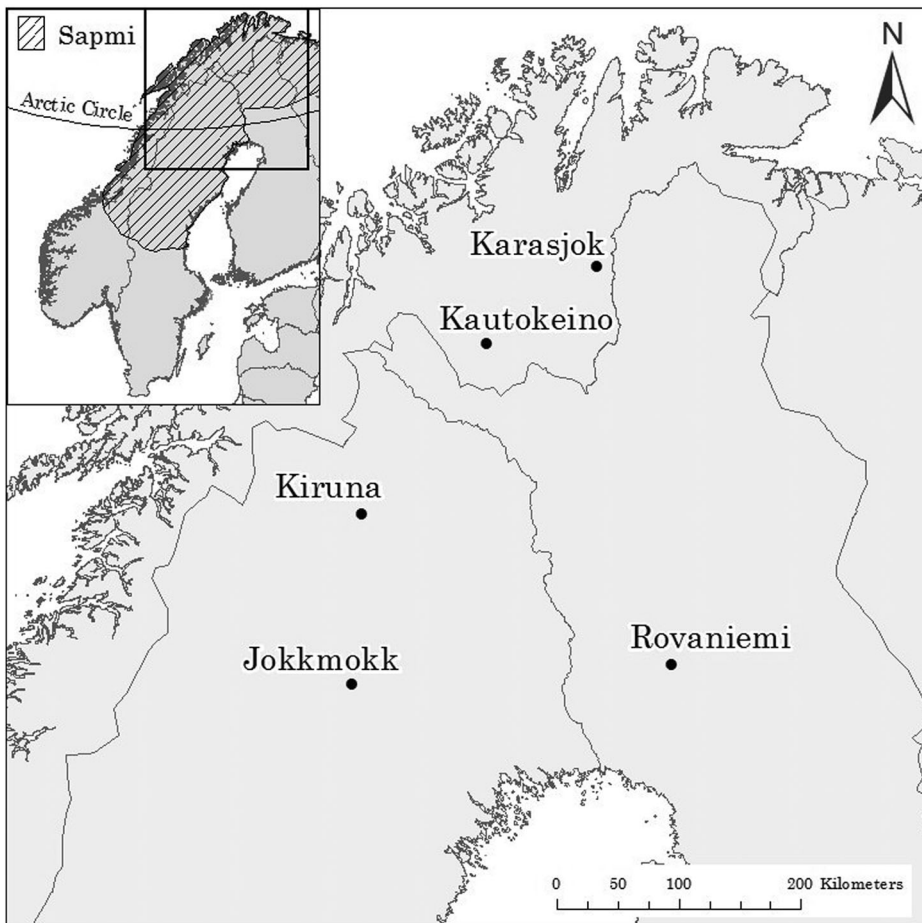
For local people, this may bring about both lucrative opportunities to sell their ethnic otherness, as well as new tensions as ethnicity becomes politicized and essentialized both internally and externally (Thuen 2012; Viken and Müller 2017). It may mean a new reflection and renegotiation of what a given ethnicity is about, which might not include or be comfortable for all. It may further mean that norms concerning what is permitted/forbidden in relation to that ethnicity are renegotiated and that ethnic otherness is emphasized where “symbols of difference are exposed [while] the signs of similarity are moved to the backyard” (Viken and Müller 2017, 19). Thereby, it enables a strange paradox: on the one hand, local people might want to emphasize their own ethnic difference, often through their traditionality; on the other, it seems their ethnic culture *is being* colonized, frozen in time or vulgarized. It cannot be determined which of these two dynamics is the defining one in any given case, rather, they can be assumed to work as a dialectic. Handicrafts, in this context, can hence be seen as contested objects that are squeezed between these different dynamics and imbued with ethnic discourse.

While various approaches could be taken to these complexities, in the present article we seek to contribute new insight by studying ethnic discourse as it becomes manifest in the talk and practices of handicraft sellers and crafters. The research context in northern Fennoscandia allows us to include various groups: national Swedes, Norwegians and Finns, ethnic minorities such as indigenous Sámi, Kven and Torne Valley Finns, as well as more recently immigrated people. This setting is particularly relevant in that people live in mixed communities and often have multiple ethnic backgrounds and lifestyles that may, in many cases, not differ significantly. From a Barthian perspective, they can hence adhere to several ethnic identities, commit partially or fully to different ethnic choices and even shift these choices depending on the situation (Barth 1969; Eidheim 1971; Waters 1990; Eriksen 1991; Nagel 1994). This makes it particularly interesting to ask: In what ways do handicraft crafters/sellers in northern Norway, Sweden and Finland construct ethnicity and draw ethnic boundaries in relation to handicrafts? We approach this question by conducting extensive fieldwork and interviews with handicraft crafters/sellers in these areas (35 interviewees). To clearly address the constitutive practices and discourses of ethnicity in relation to handicrafts, we avoid preselecting people based on their ethnicity or studying any ethnic group *per se* (Markwick 2001; Goode and Stroup 2015). Rather, we are aware that people with multiple ethnic backgrounds are part of our study, which is based on the ways in which ethnic talk comes into conversations about handicrafts. Such open approach led us (as it has other authors) to revolve around and concentrate on the ethnic divide that is upheld between indigenous “Sámi” and “non-Sámi” people. It is this divide that seems to be the most defining categorization, and it is the one on which we will elaborate here (Minde 2003; Gaski 2008; Thuen 2012;

Valkonen 2014). Thus, while there exist multiple identities and variations within these categories, our work highlights how the interviewees construct ethnicity in handicrafts through these two denominations. Taking a critical discourse approach, our findings illustrate accordingly: (1) how “Sámi” and “non-Sámi” are constructed as main discursive ethnic categories, connected to dynamics of who can/cannot make Sámi handicrafts or use Sámi symbols, (2) how Sáminess is talked about as an attractive quality, with Sámi handicrafts being interpreted as more genuine, as well as what these discourses deploy and (3) how Sáminess, particularly Sámi handicrafts, are being protected and in what specific dynamics of inclusion/exclusion this protection results. The article thus helps us achieve a deeper understanding of the Sámi/non-Sámi ethnic construction and its manifestations as well as its contestations in relation to handicrafts.

### Ethnicities and ethnic categorization in northern Fennoscandia

The research area (Figure 1) embraces the northernmost parts of Norway, Sweden and Finland, including various population groups: national Swedish, Finnish and Norwegian



**Figure 1.** Research area and sites: northern Sweden, Norway and Finland.

populations, recently immigrated people, as well as ethnic minorities of Kven, Torne Valley Finns, and indigenous Sámi. Ethnicity is not administratively registered; hence, the population figures concerning minority groups rely on approximations and are not official. For Sámi, Samer.se estimates between 80,000 and 115,000 people spread over the three countries, with about 2000 Sámi living in Russia as well. About 40–45% of Sámi are said to have some knowledge of at least one of the Sámi languages (Samer.se n.d.). Kven is a Norwegian minority with a Finnish language and cultural background, immigrated mostly in the 1700s/1800s. According to the Kven Institutt, there may be about 10,000–15,000 people with Kven background living in Norway today, with 2000–8000 speaking a Kven dialect. Kven was first recognized as its own language in 2005 (Kvensk institutt n.d.). Estimates are also vague for Torne Valley Finns, with at least 30,000, but up to 150,000 people recognizing themselves as Tornedalians and more than 150,000 people being able to speak or understand Meänkieli language, according to Tornedalinger.se. Tornedalians are also of Finnish language and cultural origin, living in the areas of northern Botnia: Torne, Kalix and Kemi River (Tornedalinger.se n.d.). All three minorities share a relatively recent history of being accepted as minorities, having their languages recognized and building institutions to support their diverse interests. These more recent developments can be said to have in part strengthened ethnic identity and reawakened both pride and political identity (Eidheim 1997; Valkonen 2014). They have also created a greater, though still limited, awareness of their existence and specific history among people in society at large. Particular research attention has been paid to the Sámi's exposure to national assimilation politics, the period of cultural revival from the 1960s onward, as well as their more recent recognition as indigenous people (e.g. Eidheim 1971; Minde, 2003; Gaski 2008; Mulk 2009; Thuen 2012; Valkonen 2014; Viken and Müller 2017). The current position of individual Sámi people can vary according to background, lifestyle, community as well as the legal situations found in the different nation states (Åhrén 2010). Addressing cultural policies, Mulk (2009), for instance, critically points out that the Swedish state may be continuing to echo the discriminatory attitudes of the past; while in Norway, stronger politicization seems to have led to a stronger position for Sámi people. Hence, neither Sámi nor any of the other minority groups can be viewed (or studied) as a single entity without acknowledging the great internal variation and heterogeneity.

In the area, contemporary communities are diverse. People often have multiple ethnic backgrounds, and lifestyles may not differ significantly or at all between groups or from the lifestyles of other Finns, Swedes or Norwegians, for example, with regard to housing, occupation or leisure (Müller and Pettersson 2001; Scheffy 2004; Valkonen 2014; Viken and Müller 2017). In such a context, people may be able to draw from and adhere to multiple ethnic identifications and categories. As Viken and Müller (2017) state, whether one adheres to a certain identity is in large part a matter of feeling – do you feel you are Sámi, Kven, Swedish, etc.? Furthermore, the Kven institute states: “Most Kven have both Sámi and Norwegian relatives. [...] The typical modern Kven is a Northerner [Norwegian: *nordmann*] who knows his/her family history [Norwegian: *slektshistorie*]” (Kvensk institutt n.d.; our translation). Ethnicity may hence be partly seen as a creative choice and discursive construction – as malleable depending on the situation or the audience (Barth 1969; see also: Eidheim 1971; Waters 1990; Eriksen 1991; Nagel 1994; Barker 2001; Kramvig 2005). Typically, people put forward arguments that revolve around ancestry, language, culture, appearance, locality or religion to talk about and “prove” their

ethnicity (Nagel 1994). Accordingly, “the central projects of ethnicity [are] the construction of boundaries and production of meaning” (Nagel 1994, 153). Discourses and practices thus draw ethnic boundaries, which divide and unify; they continually produce and reproduce a system of meaning – a “symbolic universe” that cannot be underestimated as an actual social force (Nagel 1994, 162; see also: Barth 1969; Goode and Stroup 2015; Wimmer 2013; Wimmer 2014). As noted, in discourses revolving around ethnicities in these areas, the most prevailing divide seems to exist between “Sámi” and “non-Sámi”. Valkonen (2014), for instance, observes that people speak in terms of *living like a Sámi* or *living like a Finn/Swede/Norwegian*; and there is reason to suspect that people with mixed ethnicities, including Kven/Torne valley origins, may also arrange themselves within these groupings. In smaller northern communities, there also seems to be some awareness of people’s ethnic backgrounds. As Müller-Wille (1984) suggests, at the local level, it can be known who is a Sámi and who is not.

There may be different reasons why these categories in particular are so dominant today. Paradoxically enough, national assimilation policies may have initially fortified the categories “Sámi” and “non-Sámi”, dichotomizing the social realms and creating some sense of otherness (Minde 2003; Thuen 2012). Thuen (2012) suggests that, later on, the ethno-political emancipation of Sámi likewise put pressure on identities and promoted dichotomized identities as either Sámi or Swede/Norwegian/Finn. According to Gaski (2008), for many Sámi the clear ethnic dichotomization implicit in the symbols of emancipation (map, flag, etc.) is problematic; hence, many Sámi, given their identifications, do not feel represented by these categories. Moreover, the local alternative umbrella term “Northerner” (as discussed by Thuen 2012) may be problematic, as it silently lets ethnic boundaries vanish, solidifies itself over other categories, and suggests an implicit shared identity that some may not feel represented by given their diverse identities.

Another reason for the prevalence of the Sámi/non-Sámi categorization may be that, in contrast to Kven or Tornedalians, Sámi have clearer legal status based on language as well as ancestry and institutional recognition as indigenous people, which go beyond self-definition. Hence, it is more “difficult” to be recognized as Sámi, and recognition brings with it particular rights, e.g. access to education, participation in Sámi politics or, in some cases, the right to land/resources.

Furthermore, it has been noted that today, Sáminess is a desirable status and source of pride as opposed to a historic stigma (Valkonen 2014). Accordingly, “ethnic distinctions and demarcation have become important issues at both the collective and individual levels” (Valkonen 2014, 210), especially because the question of who is and is not a Sámi is complex (Amft 2000; Müller and Pettersson 2001; Valkonen 2014). For instance, some people might identify as Sámi, but not be recognized as Sámi (Sarivaara, Uusiautti, and Määttä 2013); or some members of a family might both self-identify and be recognized as Sámi, while others might not based on their personal situation (Viken 2006). While Sáminess has often been associated with, for instance, reindeer herding, fishing, crafting and closeness to nature, what constitutes Sáminess today is much more contested. For instance, in Finland reindeer husbandry is a right of all people in the designated areas. Moreover, many Sámi live outside *Sapmi* (the Sámi land, see Figure 1), mostly in larger urban centres.

Accordingly, the fluidity of shared northern lifestyles makes Sámi ethnicity or way of life challengeable and open, allowing anyone to be *almost Sámi*, as Valkonen (2014) remarks. In this context, logics of ethnic inclusion/exclusion revolve to a significant extent around

blood, making Sáminess a racial matter situated in one's body (Valkonen 2014; see also: Nagel 1994). Hence, while an outsider can adopt Sámi lifestyles, Sámi ancestry per se cannot be reproduced and such "real" Sáminess not imitated (Amft 2000). As Samer.se (n.d.) claims:

What creates an identity is complex. Broadly, one can say it springs from one's origin [ursprung], partly from one's upbringing, and then of course one's choice. [...] One can have dual identities: for example, one can be both Sámi and Swedish and shift cultural codes in different contexts. (our translation)

Furthermore, the existence of categories such as *half-Sámi* illustrates once again the corporeality of Sáminess and even makes it a matter of *purity* (Olofsson 2004; Kramvig 2005). Moreover, among the different nation-states in the area, there is also a difference in how far back in time relations are considered Sámi. For instance, in Sweden, a grandparent and in Norway a great-grandparent must have been able to speak a Sámi language for one to claim one's own Sáminess.

Then of course, beyond self-identification and ancestry, also acculturation establishes thresholds for *how much* of a Sámi one can be considered. For instance, coastal Sámi might be seen as "less" Sámi, because reindeer herding tends to be portrayed as the more "authentic" Sámi occupation (Thuen 2012). Equally, Sámi who do not express visible cultural traits or who are not seen to possess specific cultural knowledge may feel somewhat less entitled to their Sámi identities (Gaski 2008). Thus, ethnicity, as we discuss in the following, is definitely also constructed based on historic and acknowledged cultural practice, such as language, Joik singing and, here, in particular, handicrafts.

### Handicrafts, Sáminess and the Duodji label

In a modern, capitalist context, handicrafts need to be understood in a twofold manner: as significant markers and practices of identity and as sources of income. This entails certain complexities that give rise to questions of cultural ownership, appropriation and commodification.

In northern Sweden, Norway and Finland, tourism constitutes an important part of the regional economy (Müller and Pettersson 2001; Pietikäinen and Kelly-Holmes 2011). In particular, tourism and handicrafts are seen as vital supplementary revenue for Sámi who continue to practise more traditional occupations, such as traditional reindeer herding, fishing, etc., or who currently practise these activities only to some extent (Müller and Pettersson 2001; Scheffy 2004; Dana and Remes 2005; Viken 2006; Leu and Müller 2016; Niskala and Ridanpää 2016). In contrast to indigenous people elsewhere, Sámi engagement in tourism can thus not be seen as a "last option", but represents rather one alternative among others (Viken and Müller 2017). Moreover, tourism may be particularly amenable to combining with what is sometimes seen as more "traditional" practices or specific lifestyles. Tourism occupations may generally signify a relatively flexible type of work that can be combined with preferred lifestyle choices, including diverse outdoor activities (Schilar and Keskitalo 2017).

Making handicrafts is historically a significant part of lifestyles in the area. For instance, crafting can serve recreational purposes, but also have utilitarian functions. Traditionally, these handicrafts are based on materials such as birch, reindeer horn/bone/leather and

imported wool, but also on silver, tin and sometimes iron. People make clothing, knives, bags, cups, etc., and often work with elaborate decorations (Dlaske 2014). To international tourists, such products may symbolize the exotic; tourists may be interested in buying handicrafts both in traditional forms as well as in more commodified, souvenired forms. Today, handicraft shops in the areas include a wide range of products, sourced locally or internationally, crafted or mass-produced, often using symbols of pristine nature (snow, northern lights, moose) or what may be seen as an exotic culture (the North, Sámi) from the outside.

Hence, products with Sámi signifiers often hold a specific attraction for tourists: they may be considered more authentic, with a higher perceived value. Thereby these products make ethnicity a resource for tourism (Niskala and Ridanpää 2016), producing a kind of *commercial ethnicity* (Comaroff and Comaroff 2009) and causing handicrafts to *become* souvenirs (e.g. Graburn 1984; Gordon 1986; Markwick 2001; Hume 2009; Swanson and Timothy 2012). The paralleling adaption (Cohen 1993) of ethnic handicrafts is at times discussed as the essentialization of people's ethnicity, cultural appropriation and neo-colonialization (Niskala and Ridanpää 2016). An additional criticism is that, owing to the modernization paradigm and the ambition of "preservation", forms of acculturation of handicrafts are inevitably being interpreted as bastardization or cultural decay (Moore 2008). In her case study on Alaskan Native products, Moore (2008) elaborates critically on the purchase of handicrafts by tourists and the possible underlying desire to nearly *possess* and immortalize the experience of the other, the indigenous body. She writes: "It is a body constructed as an essentialized being that validates the handmade object as the product of its authentic nature" (Moore 2008, 199–200). In the interaction with tourism, the native hence carries both lucrative potential and the weight of remaining "authentic", which often seems to suggest "not modern".

Regarding the northern Fennoscandian context, it has been suggested that tourism may be reproducing ethnic boundaries between Sámi and non-Sámi (Niskala and Ridanpää 2016), because tourism-worlds are overly simple: to the tourist's eye there are souvenirs with or without Sámi signifiers, but there is no or little variation between them. In contrast, representations of more complexity, such as local differences among Sámi or Kven and Torne valley origins, do not seem to be visible or to matter as much to the tourist. This may result in dynamics where other locals also work with – what can be interpreted as – Sámi symbols (Pietikäinen and Kelly-Holmes 2011) or where Sámi handicrafts become imitated, manufactured in faraway locations and then re-enter the local market (Cohen and Cohen 2012). As elaborated by Åhrén (2010) for the case of Sámi, such practices could violate laws concerning property rights and self-determination, as they might harm cultural identity. The legal aspect he addresses has only been discussed in a limited way by tourism researchers in relation to debates on the entanglement of culture and the tourism industry. Whether rejected or tolerated, the *copious fluff* of tourism (Wherry 2006, 26) seems to be more or less accepted as inevitable. Åhrén (2010) sees some kind of solution in benefit-sharing arrangements. However, the question here is: Who exactly could consent to and benefit from such agreements?

Considering handicrafts as significant markers of ethnic identity (e.g. Cohen 1993; Graburn 1984; Hakkarainen 2008; Hume 2009; Scheffy 2004), the adoption of Sámi cultural practices, such as particular handicrafts or symbols, by non-Sámi can be understood as a threat to Sámi ethnicity, making Sáminess a contested good (Valkonen 2009). In order to



protect Sámi handicrafts and culture, the Sámi handicraft association *Sámi Duodji* grants Sámi crafters a specific certification (see also: Müller and Pettersson 2001; Dlaske 2014). The Duodji label stands for the Sámi origin of the crafter as well as traditional form, material and method (Pietikäinen and Kelly-Holmes 2011; Dlaske 2014). Sámi crafters need to enter the association and purchase the label for their handicrafts. Some use the tags, while others do not. Yet, as Guttorm notes:

We need to remember that duodji, too, has its mechanisms of exclusion and integration. The question of what duodji is and which products can be considered as duodji is rather complex. In the Sámi area, there is heated discussion on such issues as how “traditional” a piece of craft must be to pass as duodji, how much you can “develop” it before it turns into something other than duodji, whether it must be made by hand or to what extent you can use machines, and whether a piece of craft is a piece of duodji only if it is made for one’s own use. (Guttorm 2012, 184)

Moreover, one problematic aspect is that some Sámi crafters may not appreciate being acknowledged for their ethnicity rather than for the artistic qualities of their work (Thuen 2002), while others may be seeking recognition for their ethnicity and expressing their ethnic pride through handicrafts (Scheffy 2004). Furthermore, having or lacking crafting abilities may also constitute a force of exclusion. This is articulated in an interview by Valkonen:

I don’t feel like a full member because I am physically so far from there [the Sámi home region] and precisely [not knowing] the language, and probably that I don’t master the handicraft culture except weaving laces, so somehow I don’t feel as entitled as the more active people. (Valkonen 2014, 218)

Hence, the issues relating tourism, ethnicity and handicrafts are manifold. When ethnicity is said to be expressed and manifested in handicrafts, these seemingly innocent objects become political. They raise questions concern who can do what handicraft, who can use what symbols or what developments are “allowed”. Studying the practices and discourses relating ethnicity and handicrafts, we consider it crucial to acknowledge both the specific historic, geographic context and claims about cultural ownership, as well as the more pragmatic understanding that no handicraft or culture has one unilineal tradition (Evans-Pritchard 1987; Cohen and Cohen 2012).

## Materials and method

We collected the material for the present study during several longer field trips (2015/16) to the locations shown in Figure 1: Jokkmokk, Kiruna, Karasjok, Kautokeino and Rovaniemi. We chose these towns as regional centres with multiple handicraft shops at each site, and selected popular shops where tourists buy handicrafts/souvenirs (see also: Pietikäinen and Kelly-Holmes 2011). Our aim is not to compare these diverse places, yet we do point out differences when relevant. Our sample included both people who both craft and sell their products, as well as people who buy products from other sources and then sell. Most shops had locals as well as tourists as customers, and sometimes the shops were important social spaces for locals. Most of the shops were independent, though some were connected to museums or tourist information centres. We excluded minor selling spots in gas stations or supermarkets. We identified

shops online as well as at location; people's references in place signalled that we had achieved good coverage of relevant shops.

Based on our initial understanding that ethnic groups should not be taken as levels of analysis (Goode and Stroup 2015), we did not pre-select people based on ethnicity (Markwick 2001). Instead, we included a variety of people crafting and selling handicrafts in these areas and studied the ways in which ethnicity was talked about in relation to handicrafts. The interviews were based on a semi-structured interview guide focused on the meaning and construction of handicrafts, though room was left for the conversations to develop flexibly and for us to ask follow-up questions (Carson et al. 2001; Valentine 2005).

The construction of ethnicity in relation to handicrafts was largely entered into the interviews quite naturally as people pointed out products, stating for example, "This is a Sámi knife" and thus bringing ethnicity into the conversation. The advantage of this was that we did not impose or predefine the role ethnicity would play or the terms that would be used. When people addressed ethnic boundaries – e.g. "This is nothing genuine, nothing Sámi" – we explored these boundaries further: How are they normalized, why do they matter, where is the boundary perceived to lie, etc.?

We spoke to 35 people in 32 interviews, where at three occasions a second person joined the interview. There were 27 female and 8 male interviewees. The question of the role of gender in relation to crafting/shopkeeping exceeds the scope of the present article, but deserves attention in its own right. The time and place of the interviews were determined by the interviewees. Most of the interviews took place in a back office, but also in the shops to allow us to look at and explicate the handicrafts. We understand that the researcher shapes the interviews and that discourses are created in interaction (Schilling-Estes 2004). Here, the interviews were conducted by the first author: a young, female German living and working in Umeå, Sweden at the time. During the interview situations with different people and at different times, the multiple subjectivities of the researcher shaped the interviews, evoking both insiderness and outsiderness (Dowling 2000; Fawcett and Hearn 2004). For instance, it was noticeable that the partial outsiderness of being German seemed to be beneficial, as it allowed the researcher to approach people of multiple backgrounds on similar terms. Likewise, the fact that the researcher used second languages (English, Swedish) might have emphasized her "outside" position and altered power structures somewhat (Tang 2007). The identity of being-a-woman was thought to create experiences of insiderness, mutuality and sharing with women in particular; conversely, the same involvedness also meant being cautious so as not to blur the boundaries between the researcher's own and the interviewees' voice throughout the work (O'Connor 2004). As elaborated by Ahmed (2016), interviewees also judge and treat the interviewer based on appearance. In this regard, we noted that some interviewees seemed to derive confidence from the young appearance of the researcher, allowing a very open, direct and playful way of talking. In one interview, however, it was felt that too little rapport or trust was created to lead an open and deep conversation (Broom, Hand, and Tovey 2009). The conversations were audio-recorded with the interviewees' permission, transcribed and the quotes to be presented in the article were translated.

For the present paper, we analysed the material using a critical discourse approach and following Fairclough in particular (Foucault 1977, 1980; 1989, 1992, 2010; see also: Bhaskar 1986; Van Dijk 1995; Billig 2003). Accordingly, we understand discourses as social practices that are tied to specific contexts and that produce and reproduce meanings and norms,

which are characterized by power, holding productive as well as repressive forces. For that reason, critical discourse analysis is explicitly *critical*: It is intended to identify certain social conditions, contextualize them and deconstruct how they are discursively legitimated (Fairclough 1989, 1992, 2010; see also: Bhaskar 1986; Van Dijk 1995; Sayer 2003). Ultimately, it aims to ameliorate social inequalities of gender, class, race, ethnicity, religion, etc. In our work, we intend to describe and explicate the ways in which ethnicity is constructed in relation to handicrafts. We are particularly interested in how different boundaries are produced and maintained, what their purposes and logics of inclusion/exclusion are and in what ways they are normalized. In our analysis, we pay attention to different discursive strategies, such as categorization, discursive representations, temporal references, etc., which make these discourses “work” (Van Dijk 1995; Mehan 1997; Wodak 1999; Barker 2001; Billig 2003; Kalmus 2003; Lynn and Lea 2003; Goodman and Speer 2007). Similar approaches to studying ethnicity have been used by, among others, Niskala and Ridanpää (2016), Nyika (2014) and Pietikäinen and Dufva (2006).

Our findings are structured in three parts. First, we explore the categorical construction of a Sámi/non-Sámi divide in relation to handicrafts and crafting. Second, we discuss Sáminess, which is talked about as an attractive quality situated in people’s bodies and as being transferred to the handicrafts. Third, we lay out how Sáminess and Sámi handicrafts are being opened up as well as protected.

## Findings

### *The making of a Sámi/non-Sámi divide*

As we notice from the outset and continuously during the fieldwork, the interviewees establish a significant divide between “Sámi” and “non-Sámi”, both when speaking about their own identity and when speaking about handicrafts, confirming the findings of Valkonen (2014). “Sámi” and “non-Sámi” (and sometimes “Norwegians”, “Swedes” and “Finns”) are made into generic categories in the interviewees’ talk (Wodak 1999). As illustrated in the following two quotes, this divide is both naturalized and problematized by people talking about ethnicity:

The community is quite dominated by the divide [Norwegian: *brytningen*] between Norwegians and Sámi.

It is a great community here! I used to say it is the community in Lapland, where you have the least Sámi/non-Sámi divide ... it just works well.

We also observe that handicraft networks are to some extent divided along these lines, that people collaborate more within “their own” group and that shops are often either designated “Sámi” or “non-Sámi”, e.g.: “In this shop we are only Swedes”. Or “Here, we are Sámi crafters”. Likewise, people arrange their personal identities within these two categories and in contrast, there is no – or very little – talk about Kven, Torne Valley or other identities. In the interviews, 11 people of 35 explicitly identify themselves as Sámi, 18 do not see themselves as Sámi (but several of them mention their closeness to Sámi culture through partnerships or lifestyles) and 5 do not speak of their ethnicity. One person states explicitly that he/she does not wish to think in terms of Sámi/non-Sámi.

The simplifying nature of tourism – here in particular as handicrafts are interpreted as souvenirs – also amplifies these categories. The following quote, for instance, illustrates that differences between Sámi handicrafts from different areas are perceived not to matter to the tourist gaze, because the tourist is simply searching for a “Sámi” souvenir, with Sámi signifying a homogenous entity:

Duodji are quite socio-anthropological ... they show who you are and where you come from. They even reveal a little about your way of living. All that ... does not mean anything to the tourist! The tourist just buys a little thing here [in Karasjok] or in Jokkmokk and where they buy it has no significance, they cannot see the nuances! They do not care about the nuances. They want *the Sámi* [her emphasis] and that is all the same to them. They cannot see the variation within. But for us there are great differences.

The tourist’s interest in and attraction to the exotic lure of “Sámi” (Niskala and Ridanpää 2016) causes different local people to use – what is perceived of as – Sámi symbols (Pietikäinen and Kelly-Holmes 2011). A recurring example in the interviews concerns the symbols taken from the Sámi shamanistic drum, e.g. the sun, the wolf, the god of fertility, the god of hunting. The interviewees describe an unfixed, but significant boundary that delimits who should be using such symbols. According to one view, anything with Sámi symbolism should only be made by Sámi, and everything else is understood as cultural appropriation (Niskala and Ridanpää 2016). In this context, the more pragmatic, commercial attitude in northern Finland is noted in particular and cast in a negative light.

It is like with the Indians, it is very offensive to use their symbols. Here in northern Norway people are very smart [about it], but not in Finland, Rovaniemi, for example. That is more like North America or China. They make things very cheap and don’t care if somebody who isn’t Sámi makes Sámi things. Or if a Sámi thing is “made in China” – that is sad! [...] I don’t want to have anything that is not made by Sámi.

The use of “they” here separates the interviewee clearly from “that” group (Mehan 1997; Billig 2003). Moreover, strong adjectives are used as a linguistic means of differentiation, e.g. “offensive”, “smart”, “cheap” and “sad”. The quote also illustrates the clash between local norms at different locations; repeatedly, a commercial attitude supposedly found in tourism centres in Rovaniemi is criticized by people at other locations. In another view, there is more emphasis on how the symbols are treated, understood and explained to the tourist:

We cannot understand why using Sámi symbols should be a problem, because we treat them with so much respect and have the knowledge about their background. It is a tribute to Sámi. And I have never experienced any critique from Sámi. Also, because there have been hundreds of years of cooperation between [other crafters] and Sámi. Sámi come here and order things: belt buckles, jewellery, and so on ... . But maybe some younger Sámi or somebody from the South could ask “But how can you do that?” and we kind of don’t understand the question.

This quote uses a causal orientation towards the past (“hundreds of years of cooperation”) (Nyika 2014) as well as a discursive representation of Sámi people (“never experienced any critique”) (Wodak 1999) to legitimize the use of Sámi symbols by a non-Sámi crafter. Positive value-laden nouns are also used to support the notion of genuine engagement with these symbols (“respect”, “knowledge”, “tribute”, “cooperation”). The idea that younger Sámi or people from outside the area are more critical of the use of Sámi symbols by diverse people reappears in other interviews:

Yes, there is a boundary of cultural appropriation and that boundary differs for different people. I often discuss this with my daughters and they are very critical, and more politically correct than me. And sometimes I feel the young have gone too far, nearly like a way of policing, like suspiciously: “Aha, what are you doing?” They easily see anything as appropriation and something ugly. There is a boundary, of course also for me, but sometimes I almost feel ashamed, because it feels like defamation.

The words used in this quote – e.g. “critical”, “policing”, suspiciously’, “ugly”, “ashamed” – illustrate the problematic, subjective and emotional dimension associated with the boundaries between Sámi and non-Sámi handicrafts. Hence, the use of Sámi symbols is talked about in a highly meaning-laden way, and there is a sense of separation between Sámi and non-Sámi that pervades the discussions. Finally, some interviewees reported having distanced themselves from these problematic aspects, sometimes using Sámi symbols without critical reflection or refraining from using them, as one Sámi artist explains:

I kind of felt it was too much. These symbols were used so much and I could not explain for myself why I was using them. [...] It didn't feel I should be using the symbols just like that. [...] Now I work more with nature symbols, like ptarmigans.

In this way, what is finally a Sámi symbol can be given new meanings as the involvement in tourism and use by different people changes. The following section will continue to explore how “Sáminess” is made an attractive quality that is situated in people’s bodies and transferred to the handicrafts.

### ***Attractive Sáminess***

In the interviews, Sáminess is talked about as a quality situated in one’s body (Olofsson 2004; Kramvig 2005; Moore 2008); even the categories “Sámi” and “non-Sámi” allude to the idea that “Sámi” is an attribute and “non-Sámi” the lack of that attribute. This makes Sáminess relative to what it is not (Barker 2001). Foremost, Sáminess is understood as inherited through ancestry and is explicitly referred to as a matter of blood as well as purity (Nagel 1994; Valkonen 2014). As one person states, “My husband is Sámi, so my children are fifty/fifty”. Over time, blood relations are seen to delude, for instance: “Far back we have something Sámi in the family, but not today”. People who have Sámi blood, however, seem to be considered able to “reawaken their roots” and relearn Sámi culture through practices such as handicrafts:

Duodji is a very good way for Sámi to come back ... You may have lost your last name, maybe you are born and raised in Stockholm – then Duodji is a good way to return to the Sámi context.

Here again, the choice of the words “come back” and “return” imply the corporality of Sáminess, and that even without any cultural practice people’s bodies contain Sáminess, which can be brought back to life. Hence, ethnicity is understood as inherited, acculturated and situational (Barth 1969). It may or may not be emphasized at different times in life or in some situations, and it may vary across generations. As some interviewees state: “My son is starting now, because he found a Sámi girlfriend” or “My daughters embrace Sámi heritage more than I do”.

Confirming other research, the interviews illustrate a reawakened pride among Sámi that contrasts to the historic stigma associated with Sáminess (Valkonen 2014). History

is used as a story of shared experience and collective suffering, which strengthens identity today (Kalmus 2003):

Earlier that [being Sámi] was nothing one wanted to show, it should rather be toned down and one should speak Swedish and not Sámi, but today it is beautiful to be able to be Sámi and we are proud of our culture.

Back then anti-Sámi politics were prevailing, but now they are decreasing, so we are finding our way back to our roots. So we feel that Sámi are not ashamed anymore and not afraid to show that they are Sámi. We have experienced very much in Karasjok after the war, the town was very affected by Norwegian politics ... all Sámi wore black dresses, they were very serious, they did not dress/embellish [Norwegian: *pynta*] themselves and they should represent something other than they were, not the Sámi. And Sámi was a private thing that belonged at home, like language.

The phrases used in these quotes create a sense of unity among Sámi through use of the pronoun “we” (Van Dijk 1995; Mehan 1997; Wodak 1999; Billig 2003): “we are finding our way back to our roots”, “we have experienced”, “we are proud”. Today, this pride is linked to a regaining of the public sphere after a period of being subjugated to the hinterland of the private, the hidden. The “should” in both quotes implies a power enforcing these injustices, which is implicitly associated with the non-Sámi and past Swedish/Norwegian/Finnish assimilation politics.

Thus, today, the dynamics are expressed as having changed to a significant extent, and the interviews portray Sáminess as aesthetic, beautiful and desirable. Similarly, it seems that past norms were thought to imply that “a Sámi” could not be, e.g. “a Swede”, whilst today with Sámi relations, one can choose or switch between identities or adhere fully to both Sámi and Swedish/Norwegian/Finnish identity (Viken 2006). Hence, Sáminess is seen as valuable, a sort of extra-identity and a matter of “who has it”:

There were situations where one wished to be Sámi, because maybe it is seen as something quite beautiful, aesthetic.

Anyone who lives in Jokkmokk knows exactly who has it and who does not have it.

I have it very clearly! Born and raised in a reindeer herding family, I have the language left, I have important Sámi ancestry, I am member of a Sameby [reindeer husbandry unit]. I am very privileged.

These quotes illustrate that Sáminess today can be seen as an attractive attribute amongst these individuals and communities, a “privilege”.

Also, there can be feelings of desire or exclusion for those who are not Sámi, in particular in communities where Sámi are the majority. One interviewee states: “I am not Sámi, but who knows ... [smiles]”, alluding to the desirable status and associations the interviewee attaches to Sáminess. In the context of tourism, and handicrafts, in particular, Sáminess is valuable: It is perceived as attractive and exotic in the eye of the tourist, lets Sámi handicrafts be perceived of as more authentic than other local handicrafts and allows them to be sold at higher prices (as also discussed by Niskala and Ridanpää 2016). Accordingly, interviewees state, for instance: “These are made by Sámi. We think they are more authentic” or “This is nothing genuine, nothing Sámi”. To non-Sámi crafters and handicraft sellers, “the Sámi handicraft” symbolizes a closed, unattainable category, seemingly “the more authentic northern handicraft”, besides which some may feel that their own abilities, their

northern identity and right of belonging are being neglected. Thus, one person states: “We would like people to know that Sámi is not the only authentic northern handicraft”.

### ***Protecting Sáminess***

Given that northern lifestyles are relatively fluid (Valkonen 2014), it is not surprising that Sáminess revolves to some degree around blood relations and serves as a protection that cannot be imitated, especially when it comes to handicrafts (Amft 2007). Hence, through their methods of protecting and sustaining Sámi handicraft culture, the Duodji organizations also use the blood boundary to keep Sámi handicrafts exclusive – the authentic Duodji is made by Sámi. This is widely accepted and normalized in the interviews by people with different self-identifications:

Of course you do not get the [Duodji] label if you don't have Sámi blood.

“Everybody is welcome to our school”. “Swedes as well?” “No, Sámi I mean of course”.

The “of course” in both quotes underlines the normativity of the statements. The practices guiding who can be admitted to Sámi handicrafting education, courses or expositions are also different in the three countries. One interviewee in Sweden mentions that even though he was genuinely interested and already had a crafting education, he was not allowed to attend a Sámi handicraft course. In another case, this time in Norway, a person speaks about the ways her art is inspired by and maybe even part of Sámi culture. Overall, this person does not feel her “non-Sáminess” presents a problem, although she portrays it as a barrier to taking part in Sámi expositions:

Crafter: Even if you do not have it in the blood, you are a part of it ... [Sámi culture].

Interviewer: Can everyone be part of it?

Crafter: Only Sámi crafters ... So, I'm not Sámi, right? But I feel I would like to express something of where we are through my art and for me that also includes the Sámi.

Interviewer: Is it a problem then not being Sámi?

Crafter: No, it isn't a problem. The only thing is, as I'm not Sámi, I can't take part in the Sámi art world and their expositions ... that is really a pity.

Interviewer: Do you think there should be more openness towards Sámi-inspired art?

Crafter: Yes, I think so. I think it's a little wrong ... Of course, there must be criteria for who can call themselves Sámi; that is all natural I think. But then again, I've lived here twenty-six years, I am married to a Sámi ... me and my children speak Sámi and much of what I do is inspired by Sámi culture. So I think actually, one could ease a bit on saying “You're not enough” [laughs].

This dialogue expresses the tension between feelings of actually being part of what is seen as Sámi culture, making Sámi art and belonging with such a group, on the one hand, and lacking recognition and legitimacy to some extent, on the other– being “not enough”.

Another case, from Finland, illustrates that non-Sámi crafters as well can become highly respected over time when they invest in Sámi culture and relations. In that case, an artist tells of making drums, which are acknowledged and used by different Sámi Joik singers throughout the area. She talks about how at first, when she began in the 1980s, people

were rather sceptical and questioned her openly. Yet, as she explained, when she studied closely the traditional ways of making these drums and increased her spiritual understanding of them, local attitudes towards her changed progressively and today she feels respected for what she does. Similarly, some Swedish and Norwegian Sámi artists speak about the exclusiveness of Sámi handicraft as perhaps being “unnecessary” or not particularly modern. They wonder whether a person born and raised in Stockholm should have a greater claim on Sáminess than some crafters as in the cases mentioned. They understand that the norms of today have emerged from a specific history, but suggest that it might be “time to move on”, especially in the context of handicrafts:

You have to see this within the historical perspective, then it may be easier to understand. Anyway, today we need to do something about it and we need to understand that we aren't enemies.

I think we need to get closer and closer together, both Sámi crafters and Swedish crafters, because we have a shared aim and passion.

In these quotes, one can note the shared “we” embracing Sámi and non-Sámi (Mehan 1997; Wodak 1999; Billig 2003) and an orientation towards the future (‘need to’). A claim is made for a necessary shift of focus from separateness to “shared aim and passion”. Furthermore, there is also a realization of common interest:

If we want to preserve handicrafts, we need to make them accessible to people, otherwise they are going to disappear. Nothing is going to change while people sit in their own kitchen and do their great handicrafts [sighs].

Here again, there is future-oriented talk (‘need to’) that implies a causal relation (‘if’) between the partially underdeveloped commercial/collaborative attitude of crafters and the prospect of handicrafts “disappearing”. Such statements point to the shared local interest in keeping handicraft cultures alive, through both their traditional and their developing forms and methods of expression.

## Discussion and conclusion

In the current article, we present new empirical material that illuminates the ways in which ethnicity is talked about and constructed in relation to handicrafts in northern Sweden, Norway and Finland. Our material is based on interviews with people of diverse local ethnicities (Sámi, Kven, Torne Valley Finns) and nationalities who make and sell handicrafts in these areas.

Deriving from the specific historic context, our findings show how the interviewees tend to express themselves using the discursive categories “Sámi” and “non-Sámi” (or “Swede”/“Finn”/“Norwegian”), while various other identity choices move into the background (Edwards 1991; Mehan 1997; Lynn and Lea 2003; Charteris-Black 2006; Goodman and Speer 2007). This confirms earlier work done by other authors in these areas (e.g. Minde 2003; Gaski 2008; Thuen 2012; Valkonen 2014). Local communities, in the present case particularly handicrafts networks, are also talked about as being divided using these terms. This dichotomization may be problematic, as more complex ethnic identities existing within a person are largely obscured, requiring adherence to either “Sámi” or non-descript/generalized categories. Tourism is further seen to enhance



that simplified divide, as some tourists seek out specific representations, such as “*Sámi handicrafts*”, thereby ignoring locally relevant nuances. In the context of tourism, as well as more widely, Sáminess is largely discussed as an attractive, aesthetic and desirable quality, in contrast to the stigma it had in the past. Thus, the interviewees typically interpret Sámi handicrafts as more genuine. In contrast, some non-Sámi crafters feel their crafting is neglected and their own northern identities considered less legitimate. For them and their handicrafts, Sáminess is normalized as a closed category, because Sáminess is implicitly understood as being based on blood relations and as not being attainable through cultural practice alone. Accordingly, our findings seem to confirm the notion that Sáminess is interpreted as relatively corporal and situated in people’s bodies (Amft 2007; Kramvig 2005; Moore 2008; Nagel 1994; Olofsson 2004; Valkonen 2014). Here, it is spoken about as a matter of “having it”. Those who “have it” can choose/switch identities in different situations or throughout life; they can feel fully Sámi and/or fully Swedish/Norwegian/Finnish. For those who “don’t have it”, Sáminess is not an identity choice, even for people who have deep ties to a Sámi culture (through marriage, children, lifestyle, handicrafts, etc.). In this regard, the notion that authentic Sámi handicrafts are made by Sámi is also naturalized. Accordingly, the Duodji organizations serve as protectors of Sámi handicrafts and can grant the authenticity label to Sámi crafters. However, our material also highlights cases in which the boundary is not so clear. In some cases, other locals working with Sámi symbols is accepted, for instance, crafters whose engagement with Sámi symbols can be framed as “traditional”. In other cases, a non-Sámi crafter’s recognition – for using Sámi symbols – may be locally negotiated over time, thus gradually gaining acceptance. Hence, as stressed by the interviewees, there are significant boundaries delimiting who can make Sámi handicrafts or use Sámi symbols, but where exactly these boundaries lie varies between different people and places. Some interviewees feel these boundaries stand in the way of more exchange and cooperation within northern handicraft networks more widely. Their comments seem to imply a possible shift from a Sámi/non-Sámi divide to a focus on handicraft culture as its own in-group with a “shared aim and passion”.

Bringing these findings back into a broader discussion, the study underlines the complex interplay of the work of ethnicity and that of tourism, where simplifying and essentializing processes are at play. In the Sámi/non-Sámi dichotomy, there is little space for variation, and Sámi is deceptively constructed as a single culture (see also: Thuen 2012; Keskitalo and Carina 2017). Following Thuen (2012), one could pose a challenging question: Is there actually a way for tourism to relate to culture without essentializing? Moreover, could the assumptions of traditionalism and purity that pervade ethnicity in some way include more modern, diverse realities (see also: Thuen 2012; Viken and Müller 2017)? In other words, is there another way than othering? The interviewees make it clear how very active they are in these processes, but also how very personally (and sometimes painfully) concerned they are by them.

Lastly, we need to acknowledge our subjectivity, and the possibility of our having over- or understated certain discourses. Thus we call for a prudent use of our findings. Given that we are situated at a Swedish university, we also critically reflect that we may have had some inclination towards applying the Swedish norms/knowledge we are more familiar with. The study is limited in its focus on handicraft crafters/sellers as a very specific group, and its scale covers a rather large, internally varying area the diversity of which

we cannot fully represent. In future studies aiming to provide more insight across the identified boundaries and into the role of tourism in relation to these discourses, we suggest using focus groups with crafters/sellers that are international/inter-ethnic. Additionally, it could be of interest to study the institutional structures that also forge these discourses, addressing for instance handicraft institutions other than Sámi Duodji. Furthermore, studies could also seek to work out more clearly a comparison between different places and people. Finally, our work also highlights the importance of ethnic self-identification as a crucial methodological approach in these contexts, avoiding ethnic pre-categorization and highlighting the varying self-identifications that exist.

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