

Clothing in the Arctic: A Means of Protection, a Statement of Identity

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ABSTRACT. The interest in clothing as a powerful item for cultural inquiry has recently increased among anthropologists. This has to do with its dual connection to *habitat* and *cultural identity*, allowing for ecological as well as symbolic analysis. The identification of contexts in which identity is communicated by means of clothing is considered an additional dimension to the study of clothing proper. Clothing is viewed as the most efficient means of non-verbal communication of cultural identity as well as culture-specific values and standards.

The communicative power of clothing is especially salient in various inter-ethnic contexts. Referring to the Sámi in northern Fennoscandia, clothing appears as an effective ethnic marker. At the same time the vitality of clothing as a material object is evident.

Key words: clothing, ethnicity, Sámi

RÉSUMÉ. Dernièrement, les anthropologues ont porté un intérêt de plus en plus marqué pour le vêtement en tant qu'article important dans l'investigation culturelle. Cela est dû au double rapport du vêtement à la fois avec l'*habitat* et avec l'*identité culturelle*, ce qui permet une analyse écologique ainsi qu'une analyse symbolique. L'identification des contextes dans lesquels l'identité est transmise par le biais du vêtement est vue comme une dimension supplémentaire à l'étude du vêtement lui-même. On perçoit le vêtement comme le moyen le plus efficace de communiquer non verbalement l'identité culturelle ainsi que les valeurs et normes spécifiques à une culture donnée.

La force communicative du vêtement se fait particulièrement remarquer dans divers contextes interethniques. En ce qui concerne les Samits de la Fennoscandie septentrionale, le vêtement apparaît comme une marque ethnique efficace. En même temps ressort la vitalité du vêtement en tant qu'objet matériel.

Mots clés: vêtement, ethnicité, Samits

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INTRODUCTION

To us Sámi the Sámi costume is part of our culture, it is a way of communicating about our belongingness, to which we demand full respect [Marianne Nilsson, 1977].

Clothing reflects both habitat and cultural identity, and thereby it becomes a significant objective for cultural inquiry. In terms of habitat, clothing is a means of protecting the body in various ways; in this respect it covers the body, or parts thereof, against cold, heat, sun, wind and wet. Clothing also varies according to the different seasons of the year. In arctic and subarctic environments, for instance, different kinds of fur and diverse ways of making use of the type of fur available — e.g., single or double coat — are used to meet basic needs depending on the season.

Clothing is also a means to communicate identity through shape and material used, ornamentation applied and sewing technique, which may indicate diverse levels of identity, including sex, status, ethnicity and age. Specific costumes may serve as effective visual markers of ethnic distinctiveness, and in numerous contexts they are used internally to reaffirm a sense of belonging and of community. In external articulation particular clothing also symbolizes cultural identity, for example in the political arena in inter-ethnic confrontations of various kinds. Thus, we have to look for varying contexts in which clothing plays a communicative role. Referring to the Sámi in northern Fennoscandia, we are able to identify two headings under which such contexts can be grouped: 1) *inter-ethnic encounters*, such as those that take place in the political arena, legal confrontations in matters of rights in principle and, finally, events relating to social and economic concerns; 2) *regular social gatherings*, for instance, markets, church holidays, sports events, cultural festivals and performances in the field of education or research. This contextual pattern is fairly common among native peoples in the North and in no way unique for the Sámi. Clothing conveys messages loaded with *meaning*. Obviously, clothing is a non-verbal form of communication,

but as such it is probably the non-verbal form that comes closest to verbal language with regard to informative power (*cf.* Mechling, 1987:320). In terms of analogy, clothing may be perceived as having both its own vocabulary and its own grammar (Lurie, 1981). Furthermore, clothing makes statements about 1) *identity*, in the sense that it helps to express group conformity and individual status, and 2) *culture-specific aesthetics*, i.e., a reflection of norms and standards for that considered beautiful in a given culture. Clothing serves as a distinct, visible symbol of both cultural and social difference (Kuper, 1973).

The language of clothing points to 1) *environmental resources*, the available natural resources that are suitable for clothing purposes and that form part of the ecological niche of a people; 2) *technical developments*, i.e., the techniques for sewing, cutting and shaping as well as currying of raw fur materials for clothing; and 3) *cultural standards*, which determine both practical and aesthetic norms and ideals prevailing in a given society (*cf.* Roach and Eicher, 1979).

In this paper, clothing as a statement of identity will be explored among the Sámi, who occupy the northern parts of Finland, Norway and Sweden. The main focus will be on contextual analysis and the communicative role of Sámi clothing.

The total Sámi population is currently estimated to be close to at least 60 000, but there is no accurate census available. Norway has by far the largest number, *ca.* 35 000, whereas Sweden contains 17 000, Finland roughly 4000, and a meager 2000 are living on the Kola Peninsula in the U.S.S.R. (see SOU, 1989:41, as the latest source on population figures). Only a small part of the Sámi population, about 7000, are reindeer pastoralists; far more are sedentary, obtaining their main means of livelihood from small-scale farming and inshore or lake fishing. In addition to pursuing these traditional forms of local economy, several Sámi have chosen various non-Sámi occupations, living in major towns in the North or in large cities or towns in the South (Fig. 1).

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CLOTHING AMONG THE SÁMI

Varieties Based on Region and Material

Their way of life and climatic conditions have influenced the set of basic clothing developed among the Sámi. The clothing must be sufficiently warm, but at the same time it should meet the requirements of ease and comfort, enabling adequate freedom of motion. Sámi traditions indicate three different kinds of coat, depending on material. Regardless of material used, however, the cut is quite similar, with the deviations being more regionally bound.

In winter a double coat of reindeer skin, *muodda*, was used all over the Sámi land in a manner similar to that among many other arctic peoples. In summer a coat similarly shaped but made of cloth, homespun (*gakti*), or chamois (*svaltja*) was worn; the one of chamois is the oldest and by far the most lasting. The contrast is appreciable: one *svaltja* is supposed to last as long as four *gakti* (Drake, 1918). In both winter and summer alternate coats were kept for everyday usage and for festive occasions, such as church holidays, markets, weddings and funerals, to mention the most frequent events. Not infrequently the winter festival coat is made of white reindeer calf-skin, which is particularly soft and delicate and marks it off distinctively from regular coats. In other seasons the coat is made of white *gakti* (Fig. 2).

As a rule the woman's *gakti* is longer, considerably wider and lacks a collar; in certain areas its lower parts are also furnished with plaiting. An apron, often with a conspicuously floral pattern, is commonly used as well, and since the 1930s it has become a customary supplement to the woman's dress. In recent years such aprons are worn mostly by older women, as in Gällivare, with its great number of læstadian devotees (Fig. 3). This may seem to be a contradiction, as læstadian



FIG. 2. Traditionally on diverse festivals and social events white was, and to some extent still is, a predominant colour among the Sámi, both for fur coats and coats made of homespun, *gakti*. This picture from the early 1900s shows a group of Sámi at the Tana market in Finnmark, northern Norway. Photo: Ethnographic Museum, Oslo.

beliefs suggest rigid continence in all areas of embellishment. One exception, however, is clothing, which appears far more ornamented and colourful than anything else involving home and daily life. These aprons, with their conspicuous floral ornamentation, were integrated as parts of Sámi female costume and were apparently made acceptable to people who live under extremely Spartan and simple conditions and to whom the point is to demonstrate that everything aesthetic and useless is sinful. This revivalist movement of læstadianism derives its name from its founder Lars Levi Læstadius, a clergyman from Swedish Lapland of mixed Swedish/Sámi descent. The movement started in the 1830s in Karesuando, where Læstadius served as a priest. Soon afterwards it spread over a large part of Sámi land, incorporating great numbers of Sámi and Finns among its believers. Ecstasy and exaggerative asceticism are characteristic features. (For further information see Gjessing, 1953, and Ruong, 1982:58.)

Regionally the primary types of Sámi coats correspond closely to the difference between the main dialects of Sámi: East Sámi in northeast Finland and the Kola Peninsula in the U.S.S.R.; North Sámi in northwest Finland and the northernmost regions of Norway and Sweden; Central Sámi, mainly in Swedish Lapland but also among corresponding Sámi groups on the Norwegian side of the border; and finally South Sámi in both Sweden and Norway.

Except for the winter fur coat, few distinctive marks remain among the East Sámi, for Western-style clothing has long been used during the entire temperate season. Pointed leather moccasins together with special shoe ribbons and women's caps (*samsad*) are the only items surviving that reflect cultural identity (Figs. 4, 5).

The coat made of cloth (*gakti*) displays the greatest regional divergence, with variations seen in colour, shape and embellishment. The basic colour of the cloth is blue in various shades, but black and white occur, as well as green in rare instances. A few narrow strips in red, yellow, green and blue, colours characteristic for all Sámi ornamentation, are attached in such a way as to beautify the costume and make it regionally distinctive. These also have a practical purpose as they cover some of



FIG. 1. Map of northern Fennoscandia.

the crucial seams, strengthening these parts of the coat (Porsbo, 1988:37). Obviously the use of blue or green ribbons is dependent on the choice of basic colour for the coat. The shape may vary with regard to the kind of collar, whether the coat has a small or large chest opening and how wide it is. Moreover, the degree and sort of embellishment gives a clear indication of regional peculiarity. In certain areas we find coats with very conspicuous ornamentation, the coat almost totally covered by broad ribbons in varying embroidery patterns and colours; in other regions more sober adornments are salient (Figs. 6, 7).

The introduction of the sewing machine in the 1920s brought forth a change in the choice of textile material. Home-spun was completely abandoned and the Sámi seamstresses turned to thinner, manufactured fabrics; at the same time they could elaborate more lavishly on ornamentation (cf. Porsbo, 1988:24). At times such excessive embellishments were seriously opposed in areas where the læstadian faith predominated. The western Læstadians, living in the Jukkasjärvi-Gällivare region on both sides of the Swedish-Norwegian border, were the most severe advocates of continence, whereas the eastern Læstadians, living farther to the north, were more liberal. The difference of views here is reflected in traditional clothing patterns.

The coats in Finnmark and Karesuando are designated by an extra high collar with a small chest opening. They are very



FIG. 3. Asa Kitok, from Gällivare, Swedish Lapland, dressed in traditional woman's headdress, *matjuk*, and with apron with a floral pattern. Photo: T. Svensson, 1975.

wide, almost baggy, and this effect is emphasized as they are girded by a broad leather belt. With few exceptions the embellishment is also highly elaborated. A transitional type of coat is found in Jukkasjärvi and Gällivare (Figs. 3, 8), somewhat more restrained in both shape and adornments. The intermediate style proper between the two extremes found in north and south is the one in Jokkmokk and Arjeplog and adjoining areas in Norway, i.e., in the core area of Central Sámi habitation. This coat is recognized by its narrower width and sparse ornamentation. A larger opening in the chest to which a beautifully decorated chest piece is attached appears as its most pronounced section (Fig. 7).

Finally, in the South Sámi area on both sides of the national border, including the Forest Sámi in Swedish Lapland, people wear a half-length, gently clinging coat with a large chest opening with a chest piece, mostly decorated with tin-thread embroidery in strict but very complex patterns. This coat is furnished with a markedly low collar, and in modern times it is usually dark blue or black, sewn either in common wool or cheviot, and it is worn with matching long trousers. The belt, embroidered with tin thread, is comparatively very narrow and has a negligible effect on the hang of the coat. Apart from the cap, the chest piece is probably the part of the costume that varies the most between different localities within the South Sámi region (Fig. 9).

Regardless of varying shapes, the Sámi coat appears fairly large and puffed up. It is important that it is not tight in order to facilitate movement and also for putting on "in one fast throw," as they say (Porsbo, 1988:36). The belt around the waist of this puffy coat offers sufficient space for keeping valuables, such as purse, tobacco and pipe, which is essential as there are no pockets attached to the coat. In order to give further



FIG. 4. Fetsi Sverdloff, from Suenjel, northeast Finland, wearing typical East Sámi headdress for married women, *shamshik*. Photo: Karl Nickul, 1932.



FIG. 5. East Sámi youth from Natjavre playing. As we can see, footwear and caps are the only distinctive clothing features among both boys and girls. Photo: Ellisef Wessel, Ethnographic Museum, Oslo, c. 1900.

protection under extreme weather conditions, in particular against wet and severe wind, the Sámi have developed a special covering of homespun or cloth (*luhkka*) cut as a short poncho with hood, but large enough to cover the indispensable rucksack, in addition to head, neck and shoulders.

The decisive change in winter clothing from fur to textile occurred in the 1920s (cf. Porsbo, 1988:49). After the introduction of the snowmobile, however, the use of both coats and trousers of fur has come back and seems to be steadily increasing. Shoes and mittens of fur are retained, even if some special skidoo boots are tried out as well. In the opinion of many Sámi reindeer pastoralists, fur clothing appears superior to any manufactured clothes, because you sit rather still on the skidoo for many hours each day during herding activities and are thus exposed to much more strong wind and cold than when you move slowly and tenaciously on skis. The use of the *luhkka* has been revived for the same reasons (Porsbo, 1988:67).

To express high status silver was used in the clothing; under more festive circumstances both men and women wore a special belt adorned with silver applications that indicated fortune in reindeer herds. The women also employed a silver collar (*silbahalsie*) to beautify the costume for special occasions, such as weddings, church holidays and important market days, and to express wealth. This silver collar was attached to the woman's coat in the front as an enlarged chest piece exuberantly decorated with numerous hanging buttons, loops and clasps made of silver (Fjellström, 1962). With few exceptions, this kind of adornment showing high status was most commonly used in southern and central Sámi land.

The type of clothing having the greatest impact in manifestations of identity is undoubtedly the headdress. Women, in particular, maintain the significance of the cap, and in many areas it is the last clothing item to be relinquished (Ågren, 1977). The cap represents the most evident marking of identity in terms of locality, gender and marital status.

Within the same region men's and women's caps are, as a rule, pronouncedly different. Men's caps are the only ones provided with a peak, usually of leather, the practical use of

which is to protect the eyes against wind and sun exposure. The red tassel of woolen yarn, in variable sizes and attached on top of the cap, is another visual sign of male identity. The cap with such a tassel is a very colourful item and is peculiar for the region including the parishes of Karesuando, Jukkasjärvi and Gällivare; Karesuando has the largest tassel as one of its distinctive marks, whereas farther to the south a variation consisting of a fairly high wedge-shaped cap (*tjupp*) for both men and women is prevalent (Figs. 10, 11).

In contrast to the minor variations in men's caps in the northernmost region of Swedish Lapland, women's caps are highly distinctive. The Karesuando cap (*jorbot*) is rather flat and rounded, with a large white lace border attached around the lower edge (Fig. 12). The *dourran* is a traditional cap used in Jukkasjärvi and adjacent parts of Norway. For many years its use decreased, but it has recently been revived by some young women in the area. Its front section is distinguished by elaborately ornamented woven borders and the part of the crown is low and tightly wrinkled (Fig. 13). Finally, in Gällivare women wore a narrow, high cap (*matjuk*) sparsely ornamented and with folded top (Fig. 14). Even this cap has come back to some extent, after many years of decreasing use. Of these three women's caps, *jorbot* is by far the one used most.

None of these caps was particularly good at protecting against severe cold. For this reason women wore a specially designed outer cap in winter in both Karesuando and Jukkasjärvi, whereas in Gällivare a shawl tied around the *matjuk* served the same purpose (Porsbo, 1988:63).

In Finnmark and northwest Finnish Lapland we find a four-pointed cap (*savka*), poetically called "the cap of the four winds," or rather cardinal points, worn in several varieties by the men. The most observable difference is that between the caps of Karasjok and Kautokeino (Figs. 6, 15). In this region these men's caps are contrasted with very distinctive women's caps, the most conspicuous of which is the horned cap (*ladjo*) (Figs. 16, 17). For practical reasons the characteristic horned cap disappeared long ago and by the turn of the last century very few women still wore it (Gjessing, 1940). Instead, women

eventually turned to a soft but fairly large cap with elaborate embellishment (Fig. 18). Recently this horned cap has been revived and its distinctive shape and ancient usage among most of the northern Sámi gives it special symbolic power.

By means of different shapes of the cap women may also distinguish marital status, as, for example, among the Skolt Sámi in northeast Finland, who traditionally used three dissimilar caps. For unmarried girls a low head covering (*pervesk*) (Fig. 19), exposing the entire crown, was used. Married women, on the other hand, wore a cap (*shamshik* or *samsad*) that was much higher in the front and also decorated in a more elaborate fashion. Widows, finally, had a special cap too (*povednik*), which was comparatively flat at the front and less lavishly ornamented (Nickul, 1948; Figs. 4, 20).

Contextual Analysis

In order to understand the communicative power of clothing, one must discover in which situations culture-specific clothing is used as a means to communicate identity and to confirm belonging. Four primary types of contexts where distinct dresses are used can be identified. First there is the *everyday life situation* related to reindeer herding or other traditional activities. In such situations distinctive Sámi clothing, fairly worn out, is still in use by quite a few people as a



FIG. 6. Man's coat and cap from Kautokeino with elaborate ornamentation. Photo: Ann Christine Eek, Ethnographic Museum, Oslo.

natural way to manifest attachment to a particular culture. The number retaining Sámi clothing in this connection is constantly decreasing to the advantage of more Western-inspired clothing.

Far more significant are contexts related to political life and cultural events. Cultural events such as weddings, funerals, confirmations and special annual church holidays have had a special meaning to the Sámi ever since they were Christianized and are occasions when the finest set of Sámi costumes, together with the most precious adornments, are commonly used. Traditional market days, such as those held in Jokkmokk, Gällivare and other centres of Sámi habitation, and the Easter holiday celebration in Kautokeino are other regular gatherings where the Sámi costume is frequently used.

Art or handicraft exhibitions where Sámi are actively or passively present are other reappearing events in which the Sámi costume is highly relevant; the same is true for Sámi sports championships and diverse staged performances in the fields of film, theatre and concert, as well as general cultural festivals. Those who perform, as well as the great majority of the audience, wear Sámi clothing on these occasions. Other situations of a cultural nature involve participation in the Sámi school system, either as a student or as a member of the school board, or in academic performances, such as public doctoral defences and scholarly conferences. In these latter situations both the primary performer and members of the audience make a point of wearing Sámi costume. To wear unmistakably Sámi dress on such ceremonious occasions, with their special rules of etiquette and conduct defined exclusively by the majority, conveys a message loaded with meaning to the outside world. Here cultural pride is united with the satisfaction of academic achievements, and the most efficient visual means to present this message is by means of the Sámi costume.



FIG. 7. Man's coat from Tysfjord, Central Sámi type, showing restrained adornments. Drawing: Viktor Eliassen, Ethnographic Museum, Oslo.



FIG. 8. Coat from Gällivare sparsely decorated. The man also wears the old man's cap without peak and with a very tiny tassel on top. Photo: Melander, Ethnographic Museum, Oslo, c. 1900.

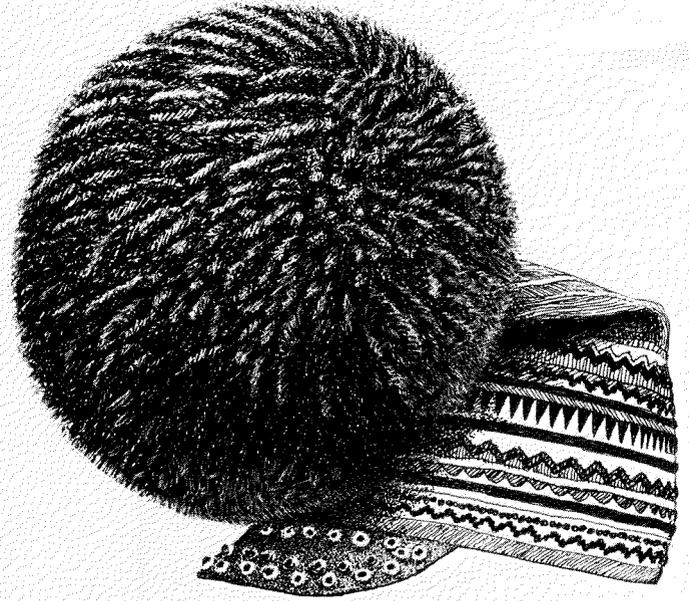


FIG. 10. Man's cap from Karesuando, with its conspicuous, large tassel. Drawing: Viktor Eliassen, Ethnographic Museum, Oslo.



FIG. 11. Man's cap, *tjupp*, from Tysfjord, Norsk Folkemuseum, Oslo, nr Sa 2237, collected in 1936.

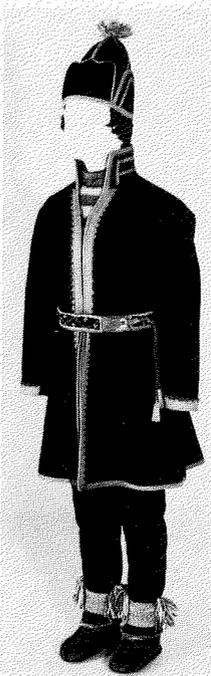


FIG. 9. Man's coat from Røros, South Sámi type, Norsk Folkemuseum, Oslo, nr Sa 292, collected in 1889, but shape and decorative patterns still remain. The belt Sa 2085 was collected in 1934.

Other opportunities where it is seen as appropriate to wear Sámi costume are occasions when public honours are conferred on highly deserving individuals or during the inauguration of specific Sámi institutions, such as special Sámi museums or a Sámi culture house in such different locations as Kiruna and Snåsa, or Stockholm and Oslo; the Sámi humourously refer to the latter cases as "Sámi embassies." Equally relevant are the frequently recurring Sámi dance nights, particularly arranged for Sámi youth and younger adults as a popular get together. ●

Practically all of the cultural events mentioned here are generated by culture contact; they are situations defined as unequivocally Sámi but where Sámi and non-Sámi meet with a similar purpose in mind, i.e., to enjoy something specifically Sámi. Consequently, even apart from politics and inter-ethnic controversies, the Sámi are given ample opportunities to make themselves noticed in society, using Sámi clothing as one of their most prominent non-verbal messages about identity.

For the sake of simplicity, contexts related to political life can be divided into two types: 1) those dealing with internal political gatherings or meetings, and 2) the ones having to do

with various inter-ethnic political encounters. The first variant reflects diverse forms of more or less formal assemblies held by Sámi national and inter-Nordic organizations or by local associations, which non-Sámi may attend as auditors in many instances. Examples of such recurring meetings are national assemblies held once a year by Swedish, Norwegian and Finnish Sámi, national meetings of Sámi Nuora (Sámi Youth Association), SameÁtnam (Sámi National Association Concerning Cultural Matters), Nordic Sámi conferences held every three years, and the organizational work and specific activities of Sámi Institutta (Nordic Sámi Institute) in Kautokeino. More



FIG. 12. Woman's cap, *jorbot*, from Karesuando, Norsk Folkemuseum, Oslo, nr Sa 1354, collected in 1911.

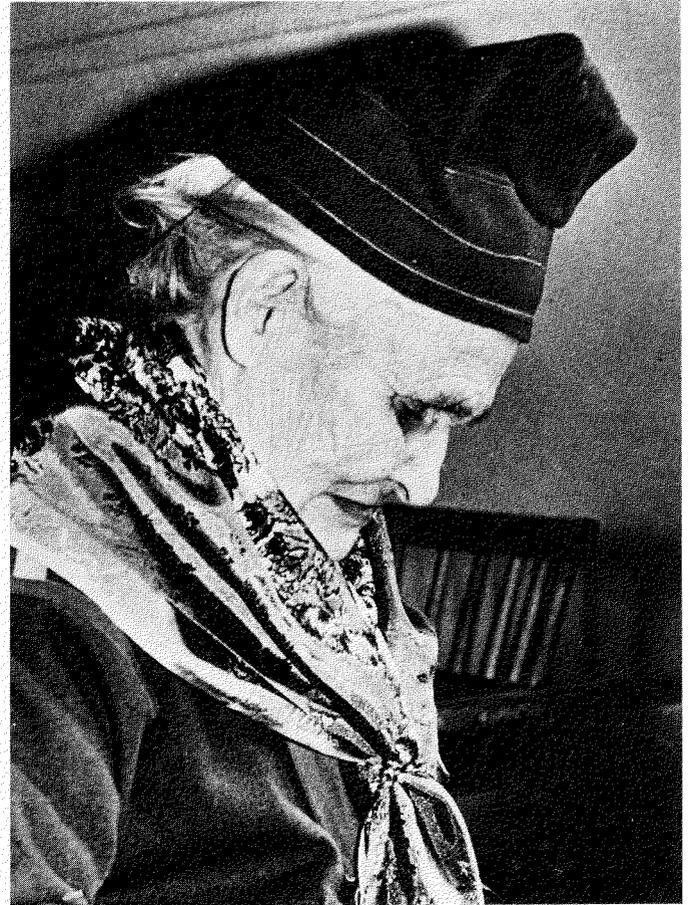


FIG. 14. Woman's cap, *matjuk*, from Gällivare. Photo: T. Svensson, 1975.



FIG. 13. Woman's cap, *duorran*, from Jukkasjärvi, Norsk Folkemuseum, Oslo, nr Sa 1670, collected in 1926.



FIG. 15. Man's cap, Karasjok-style. Photo: Ethnographic Museum, Oslo, 1918.

occasional events that are political to a certain degree are, for example, Sámi youth camps, Sámi teachers' conferences and Sámi women's conferences. The recently established Sámi parliament (Sameting) should also be mentioned. This institution was inaugurated in Norway in October 1989 and will eventually appear in Sweden and Finland. It is the first representative body of Sámi formally acknowledged. The presence of King Olav V opening the first session of the Sameting in

Kautokeino added extra symbolic power to the event. Without doubt Sámi costumes will play a significant role in the continuous assemblies of the Sameting, defined as the most important Sámi institution. Still internal, since they are exclusively native although very far-reaching in scope, are the Arctic Peoples Conference and the world-wide assemblies within the Fourth World community, World Council of Indigenous Peoples (WCIP).

In all the above-specified situations, the Sámi costume is very commonly used and as a feature expresses a feeling of community and distinctiveness among the Sámi. The Sámi



FIG. 16. Man and woman from Varanger, East Finnmark. The woman is dressed in a fur coat of reindeer and the traditional horned cap, *ladjo*. The man is dressed in *gakti* and the four-pointed cap, *savka*. Photo: Knud Knutsen, 1867, Ethnographic Museum, Oslo.



FIG. 18. Contemporary woman's cap from the Finnmark region, Norsk Folkemuseum, Oslo, nr Sa 3817.



FIG. 17. This picture from around 1900 shows four women wearing horned caps and a man in his typical four-pointed cap outside their tent. Photo: Ethnographic Museum, Oslo.



FIG. 19. Among the eastern Skolt Sámi distinct female caps depending on social status were used up until quite recently. This drawing shows a *pervesk* worn by unmarried girls. Drawing: Viktor Eliassen, Ethnographic Museum, Oslo.

costume may not be used by all delegates throughout the entire assembly, lasting for several days; for the sake of convenience it may be replaced now and then by common clothing. However, on the opening and closing days, which are the most significant since the greatest number of authorities and representatives of the mass media are among the audience, the Sámi costume is a predominant and very colourful feature, both among the political elite and among all grass-root Sámi present.

As far as external political encounters are concerned, varying formal fora for political activities dominate. Sámi clothing is an attribute frequently made use of in such different situations as court trials, in particular the ones referring to the aboriginal rights issue, or in meeting as delegates with political authorities or officials in order to negotiate or exchange information concerning Sámi affairs. These fora represent vital ethno-political arenas through which Sámi politics are channeled. Other ethno-political encounters for which the wearing of Sámi clothing makes sense are when serving as delegates in governmental inquiries, the latest of which are the well-known Sámi Rights Committees, presently at work in all the Nordic countries with Sámi populations, and participation in public debates about general Sámi claims. Finally, Sámi costume is used effectively during confrontations regarding more specific cases of exploitation; these mostly end up as negotiations about recompensation to the Sámi for suffered losses, because so far the Sámi lack effective means of vetoing proposed cases of industrial or tourist development. The choice of wearing the Sámi dress reinforces a Sámi definition of the situation, with its visual mark indicating cultural difference. Thereby the non-Sámi party will be fully aware of the fact that a current confrontation is not merely a common controversy of diverging interests, but a conflict to be resolved between actors representing two different cultures. It is probably no overstatement to maintain that the Sámi costume, with its non-verbal articulative strength, plays a role in all these formal and semi-formal ethno-political fora.

Spontaneous protest actions in the form of large demonstrations, with explicit statements presented on banners, such as "We were here first, we will not leave" or "Sámi power in Sámi land" are informal encounters expressing clear political messages. These demonstrations take place either close to the actual place for a proposed development or outside the Supreme Court building in Stockholm, such as the one during the largest court case ever to be tried on rights in principle, the land rights claims of the Taxed Mountains Case. Another example was the spectacular hunger strike in Oslo in front of the Norwegian Parliament during the Alta Case, with its unexpected and rather far-reaching implications (Fig. 21). The Alta Case represents a protest movement in which the Sámi tried to prevent a hydro-power development in Finnmark in 1979-80. This was the first large-scale mobilization of Sámi based on ethnicity. Needless to say, Sámi clothing has a definite place in such ethno-political manifestations. The visual nearness and reminder of an ethnically distinct minority group helps to create sympathy and public opinion favourable to the Sámi cause. To achieve such ends Sámi clothing is one in a set of indispensable traits to be emphasized in such situations of direct cultural contact.

The discussion of relevant contexts would be incomplete without attention to the use of native clothing in urban settings. For Sámi living in a capital, such as Oslo, far away from common Sámi habitations, the question remains, to what

extent is Sámi clothing a useful cultural element? Although there are about 5000 Sámi in Oslo, about 1% of the total population, they remain extremely marginal and mostly non-visible as a group in such an urban setting. The contexts considered appropriate, therefore, are chosen with great care. They are either safe Sámi situations, such as more or less closed festival occasions, the admittance to which the Sámi fully control, or important political and cultural manifestations. Among political events the Alta protest, lasting for several months, now stands as the most conspicuous occurrence, having great impact on the inhabitants of Oslo. In those days the Sámi costume was a very common feature on the streets of central Oslo. Some Sámi, who had been living in Oslo for years, then started to wear Sámi clothing more openly, thereby expressing their solidarity with the Sámi political cause (Ulfrstad, 1989).

Other political occasions are the National Meeting of NSR (the National Union of Norwegian Sámi) in 1985 and countless meetings with national or communal authorities. Concerts in one of the existing large auditoriums presenting genuine Sámi music, *yoik* — both traditional vocalizations and more modern forms making use of jazz- or rock-inspired accompaniment — are popular events where the use of Sámi costume is considered appropriate. So are Sámi crafts exhibitions and such unique opportunities as the world premiere of the first



FIG. 20. The East Sámi subsisted on freshwater fishing together with small, semi-domesticated herds of reindeer. This picture shows a group of Skolt Sámi in typical surroundings. The two women to the left in the boat wear wives' caps, whereas two other women farther to the right wear widows' caps. Photo: probably c. 1900, Ethnographic Museum, Oslo.



FIG. 21. In autumn 1979 the Sámi chose a new strategy in protesting against a hydro-power development in the Alta River in West Finnmark. The Sámi put up a typical Sámi tent, *lávvo*, in downtown Oslo close to the Norwegian Parliament and seven young Sámi went on a hunger strike for several weeks. The banner reads: "No to governmental and parliamentary decisions above our heads!" Photo: Elisabeth Sletten, Ethnographic Museum, Oslo.

Sámi action movie, *Veiviseren (Path-finder)*, with its dramatic legendary motif, a film nominated for an Academy Award in 1988. Many Sámi attended this premiere show, most dressed in their finest costume and adornments, for this was an exceptional festive occasion in which the Sámi played the main part throughout. This was a situation that no doubt reinforced both pride and self-respect among the Sámi. Consequently, even in urban settings far from core areas of Sámi habitation, it is by no means inappropriate to wear Sámi clothing; as predicted, however, its use there is far less frequent.

The Communicative Aspect of Clothing

Having identified specific contexts in which ethnically defined clothing is used, it is clear that clothing becomes a medium through which meaning from a native point of view is transmitted (cf. Kuper, 1973). The meaning conveyed refers primarily to identity, which may be divided into cultural, social and regional sub-identities. In terms of ethnicity there is a clear linkage between type of clothing and culturally defined identity. As an ethnic marker distinct clothing is a most effective material symbol (Graburn, 1976:24). The clothing manifests both *a sense of belonging* to a particular culture and *exclusiveness* — i.e., only members of a distinct ethnic group, predefined in a sociological sense, are supposed to obtain and wear a specific type of clothing. Many Sámi will, for instance, react negatively to the wearing of Sámi clothing by non-Sámi, even in cases where the latter will do it with the sole purpose of expressing solidarity with the Sámi minority. Quite a few Sámi even felt indignant when the Norwegian prime minister, Gro Harlem Brundtland, visited Masi in Finnmark a few years ago dressed in the local Kautokeino clothing, although her intention mainly was to pay respect to a different culture within the nation (Ulfrstad, pers. comm. 1988). In cases of non-Sámi marrying Sámi, the position among the Sámi is more ambivalent; in most cases, however, the use of Sámi clothing by a person culturally adopted through marriage will be accepted. The Sámi costume is a symbol of Sáminess, equally significant as the recently adopted Sámi flag. Sámi clothing, therefore, represents a very distinctive mark of ethnicity, and as such with its emblematic strength it ought to be protected from misuse. This could be substantiated by the following apt statement by a Sámi:

The use of Sámi costume gives us a feeling of community with other Sámi, it also shows that such community is desirable. To non-Sámi we show to whom we belong and that we are proud of being Sámi. We dare to show that we are Sámi and bearers of the Sámi culture [Kuoljok, 1979, quoted in Fjellström, 1985:346; author's translation].

The communicative power of traditional clothing is especially appreciable in political life, in which it becomes a most effective symbolization of ethnic unity in games of power. In emphasizing the potential of clothing, Weiner and Schneider (1989:3) maintain that human actions that make clothes politically and socially salient represent important domains of meaning, to which we should pay increasing attention. To view clothing as a force of unity is valid for the Sámi, the Inuit and other peoples in the northern Fourth World; it shows equal strength in Swaziland and several other decolonized African states (cf. Kuper, 1973). Traditional clothing and the use of native language are both essential factors in building up a united front in ethno-political encounters, as well as in disputes occurring in the legal arena, because they function as recognizable ethnic markers emphasizing culture difference.

In order to legitimize aboriginal claims such diversification is necessary. How much of a clothing style needs to be Sámi in order to convey this particular meaning? In some cases the highly distinguished cap alone will suffice, as among many women; in other instances the characteristically pointed shoes together with woven shoe ribbons are satisfactory to indicate unequivocal cultural identity to outsiders. If a Sámi man is nicely dressed up in a suit for a formal event or is appearing in court, where one has to wear a lawyer's black gown, simply a narrow tie woven in a pattern similar to the shoe ribbons or textile belts will designate cultural belonging. The point here is that wearing Sámi clothing in its entirety is not required; if the intention is to bring forth the idea of ethnic identity, easily identifiable parts thereof will serve the same purpose if properly applied.

In Greenland the Inuit have recently adopted a white, hooded parka-type coat that is commonly used to express unity in various official situations and public events. This coat is light, supple and well adapted for indoor wear; moreover its design is completely inspired by the traditional hunter's clothing, thus showing clear ethnic characteristics. In various public fora this parka visually differentiates native Greenlanders from the non-native, mostly Danish, population in Greenland.

The reasons for wearing Sámi clothing are either to accentuate Sáminess, both politically and culturally, or to call for attention. On the other hand, to use Sámi clothing in cities like Oslo or Stockholm may take some courage, because one may be met on the street by negative reactions, sometimes even attitudes of racial discrimination, especially if alone. To avoid this predicament Sámi in urban settings may refrain from wearing native clothing too frequently (cf. Ulfrstad, 1989). In certain public arenas, both urban and rural, a feeling of stigmatization may develop (Eidheim, 1969). However, as a result of the increasing cultural awareness and ethnic pride among the Sámi in recent years, this earlier notion of a stigmatized identity has decreased considerably. The former policy of Norwegianization/Swedenization has been abandoned, and the authorities are now trying to meet Sámi demands and aspirations. The newly raised status of the Sámi language in the form of a Sámi Language Act (Ot. prp. nr 60, 1989-90), together with the proposals for new legislation by the Sámi Rights Committees aiming at formalized improvements for the Sámi as an indigenous minority in both political and legal terms, are significant parts of this process of change. Proudly wearing the Sámi costume on frequent diverse occasions reflects this general process of ethno-political development and cultural revitalization (Svensson, 1987, 1988).

Regional diversity is fairly extensive regarding Sámi clothing; each parish has more or less its own fashion in both shape and embellishment. However, this does not mean that one can accurately identify the home of an individual from the type of clothing. This caution can be elucidated by one family who lives in Jokkmokk. The woman comes originally from Gällivare and she continues to wear distinct Gällivare clothing, whereas her husband comes from Vilhelmina, with its markedly South Sámi clothing style. He and their son wear a Vilhelmina coat; the three daughters, on the other hand, have adopted the Gällivare coat. In consequence, nobody in this family will wear the readily identifiable Jokkmokk clothing, in spite of the fact that they have been living there a long time and that all the children were born and raised in Jokkmokk.

The same can be said about the great number of Sámi from Karesuando, in the North, who experienced an involuntary

dislocation in the 1920s following an authoritative decision to remedy overpopulation in the northern districts. These people were resettled in Central and South Sámi areas and still, in the second or third generation, continue to wear Karesuando coats. Evidently, place of family origin means more than actual identification with their local milieu and its specific clothing style.

Clothing, or parts thereof, not only communicates ethnic identity or other status manifestations. It may also convey messages of sentiment, such as, for example, in the case of parents disapproving a marriage union. Traditionally, in Kautokeino such disapproval was expressed during the wedding by means of the parents turning their distinguished belts, adorned with fairly large square-shaped silver buttons, inside out (Hætta, 1975:233).

Internally, the elaboration of ornamentation may, moreover, indirectly express local prestige. In Karesuando, for example, the men's coats are as a rule more lavishly decorated than women's coats. This conspicuous adornment may be used as a symbol of boasting — women could signal their sewing skill to impress others by means of having their husbands and sons wear exaggeratedly decorated costumes (see also Porsbo, 1988).

The shape of Sámi clothing is not static; in order to meet modern requirements and aesthetic tendencies it may vary according to changes in fashion generally. The women's coat in particular has tended to follow the directions of fashion concerning length of skirt; occasionally even miniskirt models have been adopted (Utsi, 1986). Also the basic colour of the coat may be replaced by small-patterned fabrics, to which the traditional strips of adornment are attached so that the clothing looks unmistakably Sámi. Furthermore, new clothing design has been developed by a few creative designers among the Sámi, who make fashion clothes based on Sámi colour and shape but which are free from traditional constraints (Fossbakk, 1987). It is important that such new clothing design maintain a notion of being ethnically specific, although it is worn more freely than the Sámi costume proper.

One of the most active fashion designers in Sámi clothing is Rose-Marie Huva, a well-known Sámi artist and crafts worker from Jukkasjärvi, in Swedish Lapland, who specializes in tin-thread embroidery. She was recently chosen as the first Sámi to design stamps showing Sámi-specific clothing motifs. The stamps were issued in spring 1989 and show one woman's chest piece with collar from Jokkmokk and one man's belt with typical belt-purse from the South Sámi region, all embroidered by tin threads in characteristic Sámi patterns; both show pointed details in Sámi clothing (Fig. 22). According to SAMEFOLKET, it is believed that these stamps and the information connected to their issue through diverse media will help to spread information not only about Sámi clothing

but also about the Sámi culture using the motifs of the stamps as point of reference (Heikka, 1989).

The symbolic power of these stamps depicting Sámi clothing is further strengthened by the term *Sápmi* — the Sámi land — added to the stamp beside the national designation "Sverige." This unusual addition was suggested by the artist, and after some deliberation the idea was finally agreed upon by the Swedish postal authorities. *Sápmi* indicates the Sámi living in three different Nordic countries, to whom national boundaries have little meaning (Fig. 22).

In a series of stamps featuring various folk costumes, Norway issued in the same year a stamp showing a young Sámi dressed in Kautokeino man's costume. This stamp, however, was not designed by a Sámi and is not engraved. Consequently, it is not equally distinguished (Fig. 22).

CONCLUSION

In this paper special emphasis has been put on the symbolic study of clothing. Clothing is viewed as a social fact having definite communicative power. The assumption that clothing has communicative power relates to established theory in ethnicity studies where ethnicity is viewed as a socio-organizational phenomenon with its own dynamic of boundary maintenance and communication of ideas and identity manifestations across such ethnic boundaries (Barth, 1969).

With this assumption in mind, inter-ethnic relations on diverse levels of interaction appear as the predominant contexts for inquiry. Clothing functions as a visible symbol of cultural identity, and the actual meaning thereof refers to both values and identities. In other words, the manifestation of basic values and specific identity in concrete interaction contributes to the consolidation of the form an inter-ethnic relation takes (cf. Schneider, 1987). Clothing is only one of many symbols reflecting ethnic identity. To reinforce the meaning of symbols such as clothing they must be used in communication, both inter-ethnically and internally. If we restrict ourselves to Sámi illustrations of inter-ethnic confrontations, as, for instance, the Alta Case or the Taxed Mountains Case, it is no overstatement to assert that clothing conveys certain rhetorical power (cf. Schwartz, 1979). This has to do with the deliberate wearing of native clothing to strengthen and emphasize the idea of cultural diversity as a completion to the juridical argumentation. Usually it is its visual plainness that makes Sámi clothing rhetorically forceful; clothing states a non-verbal fact that cannot be questioned, although it has nothing to do with jurisprudence as such.

The analysis of clothing in this symbolic sense will have little import unless it connects both to given circumstances, i.e., ecology, and to traditions or customs, which refer to culture. For the sake of recognition and approval, the distinctiveness of any clothing, symbolizing identity in inter-ethnic relations, must be based on such background factors. And these latter determinants may even be modified as the clothing is tried out symbolically in various inter-ethnic contexts.

Ethnic-specific clothing represents so much more than simply clothes for protective purposes. It forms an essential part of a group's cultural history. For the Sámi minority this is obvious, as shown throughout this paper. Moreover, the issue of clothing is of great concern for the Sámi themselves. In contrast to the development of tourist art in many Fourth World areas (Graburn, 1976), native clothing is not a response to commercial promoters from the outside but retained and modified



FIG. 22. Stamps issued in 1989 showing Sámi clothing details. Photo: Ann Christine Eek, Ethnographic Museum, Oslo.

exclusively by the Sámi as an ethnic marker, although certain new traits are inspired from the majority society. The use of such distinct clothing is increasing with the growth in cultural awareness and pride. At the same time, the careful but continual modification of the costume shows the vitality of this material object. Nothing could be more appropriate, therefore, than to end this exploration by quoting Susanna Jannok Porsbo (1988:79), herself a Sámi and a distinguished scholar and curator in the field of clothing: "I think we should use Sámi clothing so that our clothing traditions will be transmitted to new generations. Let that be part of our Sáminess!"

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