



The Sami and the Inupiat

Finding common grounds in a new world



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Thank you

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Abstract

This thesis is about the meeting of two indigenous cultures, the Sami and the Inupiat, on the Alaskan tundra more than a hundred years ago. The Sami were brought over by the U.S. government to train the Inupiat in reindeer herding. It is about their adjustment to each other and to the rapidly modernizing world they found themselves a part of, until the term indigenous became a part of everyday speech forty years ago. During this process they gained new identities while holding on to their indigenous ones, keeping a close tie to nature along the way.

The thesis is based on a four-month fieldwork in Alaska during the summer of 2009, and is the second part of a Masters project. The first part is a film, *Sami footprints in Alaska*, which explores how the reindeer has affected the Native Alaskan more than a hundred years after the Reindeer Project of the 1890s.

Table of Contents

1. Introduction	...7
Background for the project and interest	...7
Alaska	...9
Nome	...10
The Reindeer Project	...12
2. In the Field	...17
Methods of data collection	...18
Access denied	...19
Access	...21
The People	...22
How I was perceived	...23
Anonymity	...24
3. The Sami and the Inupiaq, together in tradition	...25
Globalization	...25
Self-reflexivity	...28
Sami and Inupiat reflexivity	...29
Claiming rights the western way	...31
4. A Meeting on the Tundra	...33
The Herder	...34
The Reindeer Act of 1937	...36
Finding identities along the way	...37
Symbiosis	...40
5. From Lapp to Sami, Eskimo to Inupiaq	...43
The Indigenous Politician	...45
The Baiki Journal	...46
Bob the outsider	...47
6. Conclusion	...51
Bibliography	...53

Photos

Photo 1: Photograph of map in Visual Cultural Studies hallway. Taken by Kristine Nyborg

Photos: All photographs were taken by Kristine Nyborg during the summer of 2009. Alaska.

1. Introduction

Background for the project and interest

My grandmother is not a Sami. She is 89, raised in Tromsø, which is in Sapmi, by Sami-speaking parents from Sami families, stands at about 150 cm with squinty eyes, but is not Sami. After I moved to Tromsø I found hard evidence of her Sami heritage and confronted her about this, yet she firmly believes she is not Sami. Even when admitting to being related to well known Samis in Norway, she can't admit to having any Sami blood flowing through her veins. So my grandmother is not Sami, but I am.

I lived most of my adult life in North America, fascinated by how Americans see themselves. Their identities are so diverse, varied in a way I had never experienced in my own country of Norway. I would meet people of Norwegian descent, and they would approach me with an awe and glee because of my heritage, which was difficult for me to comprehend. Since I speak English with a convincing American accent, people assumed I was American. So when I met people and told them I was Norwegian, I often got the response: Me too! After further investigation it turned out more often than not that they indeed were of Norwegian descent, but had never visited Norway, and one person even thought Norway was the capital of Sweden. Despite this, they felt Norwegian. It was where their ancestors came from, and this helped them define themselves in the melting pot of cultures that is the USA. Upon meeting a "real" Norwegian, they felt an even closer tie to my culture, "our" country and me. I found it weird.

After moving to Tromsø, and discovering the facts of my own background, I suddenly understood why Americans have a tendency to obsess over their heritage. During my life I'd been this person: white Norwegian girl from an upper-middle class background, and a little more restless than my friends. I never liked this identity much; I didn't feel like I fit in. But when I discovered my grandmother had a Sami background, it allowed me to place myself in a different box of identities than before. I could now be a white Norwegian girl with an upper-middle class background but descended from the nomadic Sami peoples. This allowed me to explain my adventurous spirit to my friends who didn't understand my need for traveling around. For them it was sufficient evidence that I was different, and at the end of the day we could all agree on that being the reason.

One of my adventures led me to Alaska. In 2007 and 2008 I spent about a year in the wilderness learning, photographing and writing about nature and the people who live with it. I was told several times during my stay of the Sami people who had come through 110 years ago. They were hired by the American government to teach the natives how to herd reindeer, and the reindeer are still being herded to this day, based on the same teachings the Sami brought with them. I was curious to see what the Sami had left behind in Alaska, a place so far away yet so similar to their own home.

When it came time to choose fieldwork, the topic of the Sami immigrating to Alaska seemed the obvious choice. By following in the footsteps of the Sami I saw an opportunity to learn more about my grandmother's heritage and learn about how the Sami had assimilated in Alaska. But as the fieldwork progressed I became more interested in learning how the Sami and introduction of domesticated reindeer could reflect how the Inupiat handled their own identity.

As a citizen of the western world I have been privileged in my lifestyle and experiences. I am writing this on an Apple computer designed in California and assembled in China. My tool for writing this is an Apple keyboard made specifically for Norway with Norwegian letters, like these: æ, ø, å. Only I am not using these letters as I am writing this in English, so I have set my computer to read the keyboard like it would an English one, like the one embedded in my laptop. My keyboard is also designed in California, with European directives, but assembled in Malaysia.

I am a 32-year-old female Norwegian citizen. I have lived a total of 18 years in my home country, and 13 years in various places of the United States. I have visited more than 15 countries spread over three continents, understand six languages and speak four. My boyfriend lives more than 10 000 km away, is of British descent and carries passports to Canada and New Zealand. I speak with him every day typing in a chat room on the Internet from my phone. On my phone, also designed in California and assembled in China, I read newspapers spanning four continents covering the news for the entire globe. This is my global village, accessible from the comforts of my desk.

The project evolved from trying to find the Sami footprints in Alaska into looking at how the Sami and Inupiat met and identified with each other through their common link to the flora and fauna, and further into how the Inupiat today still feel a close connection to the natural world while living in an increasingly globalized world.

Alaska

Alaska is the largest state in the United States of America. People first started arriving into Alaska from Siberia across the Bering Land Bridge around 10 000 to 25 000 years ago¹. Since then, people have populated the area, and after first contact with the western world these people were nicknamed Eskimo. In later years, people around the North Pole have been given the name Inuit, but according to the people of Alaska there are no Inuit in Alaska, but rather a complex, multiethnic society I have chosen to refer to in this project by the names they prefer themselves: Inupiat, Yupik and Siberian Yupik.

Traditionally the area has been occupied by the Alaska Natives who lived off the land as hunters and gatherers. Fur-trading Russians colonized Alaska during the 1700s. In 1867 Alaska was bought by the USA from the Russians for 7.2 million dollars, and became an unofficial territory of the States from 1884 to 1959, when it was made its 49th state.

Since first contact with the westernized world² the traditional lifestyles of the Alaska Native have declined. The colonizers moved in, first with churches and schools, then with reindeer, always looking for a way to improve the lifestyles of what they interpreted as primitive people (Chance 1990). What was once a culture of hunters and gatherers have now become more like their adopted culture in the Lower 48 states³. In every home is a television set where 100s of television channels can be streamed through satellite dishes attached to the wall outside. Even in places not reachable by car, plane or foot the lure of the television lights up the polar night. Streaming into cabins is live television from MTV's headquarters in Times Square, news updates from CNN and images of nature from the National Geographic Channel. On one of my visits with an Alaska Native I found her to be on holiday from her work. Despite having some of the best wilderness still left in westernized civilization outside her door, she spent all day inside, curtains drawn, surfing the Discovery Channel, The Nature Channel and The National Geographic Channel watching nature on the tube. But not all Alaskans watch television. There are still Native Alaskans living life at camp far into the flora and fauna of the state. These people are struggling to keep tradition alive through globalization pressures and handling the overwhelming reality of technology being integrated in their society.

¹ <https://genographic.nationalgeographic.com/genographic/atlas.html>

² I use westernized here referring to white settlers of the mid 1800s

³ The label people in Alaska use for the 48 U.S. states between Canada and Mexico.

Nome



Map of Alaska with arrow pointing to Nome.

Nome is a windblown city on the southern tip of the Seward Peninsula in northwest Alaska. Inupiat hunters used the area for its wildlife, but inhabited a less weathered place nearby Nome. It was founded by the arrival of “Three Lucky Swedes” who discovered gold on Anvil Creek. One of the “Swedes” was Norwegian-born Jafet Lindeberg from Kvenangen, who came to Alaska on the Manitoba expedition with the reindeer. After the establishment of Nome, the Alaska Gold Rush was a fact, and news of riches in the north drew crowds from the entire globe, leading to what has become the rapid westernization of Alaska.

Today Nome is the largest city on the Seward Peninsula. It is also the only place within hundreds of miles where one can purchase alcohol, as most of the villages are dry⁴ or damp⁵. There are more

⁴ no alcohol allowed whatsoever

⁵ alcohol can be brought in but not sold

bars per capita in Nome than any other Alaskan town, and there is a hospital, college branch and several schools. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, 3505 people call Nome home, and 51% of these are Alaska Native, while 37.9% are white. There are also more men than women⁶. Some come to Nome for the gold, some come for the infrastructure and some come for the alcohol. Most of my informants lived here.



Nome and the Bering Sea.

⁶ <http://factfinder.census.gov>

The Reindeer Project

Reindeer were introduced to Alaska through a Presbyterian minister named Sheldon Jackson, who upon visiting with the Native Alaskans found them to be of ill health and hungry. He decided to lobby the government to help these new citizens by importing reindeer from Russia along with herders to teach the upkeep. The first reindeer herd, 171 animals, came from Siberia in 1882, along with Chukchi reindeer herders. This herd was to become the foundation for what was to become a gross industry for Alaska (Vorren 1990:30). The Siberian herders and the Alaska Natives had been in conflict for a long time, resulting in the project to fail. So Jackson lobbied again, this time for money to fetch Sami reindeer herders from northern Norway. He put an ad in the newspaper of a Norwegian colony in the US:

To the Editor:

As you have access to the Scandinavian Lapland population in the United States and Canada, you will confer a favor by publishing the following notice in your journal.

Very respectfully yours,

Sheldon Jackson

U.S. General Agent of Education in Alaska

Men wanted to take charge of reindeer in Alaska.

In the introduction of domesticated reindeer into northern Alaska a few men are wanted who have had practical experience in the herding and management of reindeer. If any reader knows of a Laplander in the United States or Canada who has been brought up to the care of reindeer, and who would like to go to Alaska to take charge of reindeer, please communicate his name and address to Dr. Sheldon Jackson, Bureau of Education, Washington D.C. Also state condition of health, age, experience with reindeer, and wages asked (Jackson 1894:155).

Jackson received a letter from an ex-patriot Norwegian named William A. Kjellman. He had grown up in Alta and although not a Sami himself, he knew some Sami families and had helped with several reindeer handlings. He was given the job to travel to Norway and recruit Sami reindeer herders. 13 people signed up, mostly men, and together with Kjellman they traveled to Alaska. The New York Times wrote an article on May 13th, 1894 when the expedition arrived off the steamship:

Per Aslaksen Rist, sixty years old, is the eldest of the party. He is a typical Laplander in appearance, and looks as if he had just stepped from out of some pictorial geography. Like his companions he is much smaller in stature than the average American. All have light blue eyes and high cheekbones. The women are not likely to take part in any beauty show. The youngest of the group was a child three months old.

In an article dated November 22, 1892 the New York Times wrote about The Reindeer Project just after it had originally started. They then wrote an article about how an increased food supply in Alaska was needed to help growth of trade, but since overfishing and *ravages among the seals* had caused the *Indians* to complain, Captain Healy had brought over reindeer from Siberia to start the Reindeer Project. The article further explains how the reindeer would be a good introduction to Alaska, as it would supply the herder and his family with milk, food and clothes. The article closes with this paragraph:

The Indian carrier, the dog train, and the lately-introduced packhorse need to be supplemented by the reindeer, while as to food, it has been seriously represented that unless something is done for a new source of supply the natives may have to be supported by the United States Government, like the Indians of the plains when their buffalo were exterminated. The reindeer's skin will also furnish them the kind of clothing best suited to that climate and tents and bedding. Altogether, the human experiment begun at Port Clarence is of great importance to our arctic territory⁷.

It is important to understand how the settlers thought at the time. Someone who most likely had never set foot in Alaska, 7000 km away from what's being written about, wrote these stories in New York City. Besides being a part of globalization, this also shows how little the settlers respected the way of life in Alaska at the time. Under the banner of social Darwinism, the settlers were quick to disparage the ways of the Inupiat. Building schools, churches and promoting assimilation under the assumption that the way of the western world was a privilege that should be passed on to the less fortunate people (Chance 1990). My informants were adamant about this. To them, the settlers arrived in Alaska with the notion that because they could read and write they were superior to the Natives, thus had a higher understanding of food and nature than the local population did. They decided the native population should have another source for food, and hence set the whole world in motion to get it to them. When the Sami herders arrived, part of what made them work out so well

⁷ <http://query.nytimes.com/search/sitesearch>

was the fact that they were not white, they understood the nature around them and were able to survive in the arctic climate without help, as opposed to the white settlers who kept getting into trouble during cold winter months.

The first wave of Sami worked out so well that when the Gold Rush slowly started in the mid 1890s, miners often found themselves taken by surprise by the harsh climate, whereas the Sami were accustomed to the harsh weather conditions and didn't require any assistance. Dr. Jackson made another trip to Washington to lobby for more money for the Reindeer Project. At that time the contracts of the first Sami herders were about to expire and they were setting to move home. This time Jackson received enough money⁸ to go to Norway again and get what he needed for what was called the Alaska Relief Expedition, aimed at helping the miners with food and transport. In December 1897 Dr. Sheldon Jackson made the trip to Norway, and in 1898 he was on his way to Alaska with 113 men and women, among them 78 Sami, 537 reindeer and some dogs (Vorren 1990:67). Fritjof Nansen, the Norwegian explorer, was interviewed by the New York Times on December 28, 1897 and asked if he thought it feasible to bring that many reindeer across the Atlantic.

Reindeer, according to the noted explorer will eat little except the moss, which they find in the Polar Regions, starving to death before they will eat hay, grain, or any other food. It would be almost impossible to gather moss enough to be used to feed any number of reindeer in transporting them from Norway to Alaska. Should 500 deer be shipped, as has been suggested, Dr. Nansen believes that only a small percentage of them would live to reach Alaska.

The purpose of the second expedition was to arrive in Alaska and set up a reindeer station to aid the gold miners in the Klondike area who were starving. But the journey was delayed in Seattle, and by the time the expedition reached Alaska, many of the reindeer had died of starvation, and the reindeer expedition was announced a failure. After this, many of the members of the expedition broke their contracts and went to mine for gold instead, among these was Jafet Lindeberg, co-founder of the City of Nome. Others, mostly the Sami, stayed with the Reindeer Project and were placed in previously established reindeer stations.

The Sami herders were given the option to be paid in reindeer, which most of them did, and by the time they left the Reindeer Project, they had built a big enough herd to keep themselves in their

⁸ \$200 000 was set aside from the government according to the New York Times, Dec.19, 1897

lifestyle. Of the Sami on the second expedition, the Manitoba in 1898, there were 54 left in 1900 according to Sheldon Jackson's reindeer report of that year. 12 families had by this time returned home, three had died (Vorren 1990:184).

In the 1930s the Lomen brothers of Nome decided to get into the reindeer industry. They set out to make reindeer marketable meat in the Lower 48 states, which could compete with the cattle industry. Buying up many of the herds and hiring herders to take care of them, they managed to build such an empire that, according to the autobiography of Carl Lomen, the cattle industry became nervous and through lobbying in Washington the 1937 Reindeer Act came into being (Lomen 1954). This made it illegal for anyone but native Alaskans to own reindeer, which meant the Sami herders who hadn't married into native families, were forced to sell their animals back to the state. After this many of the Sami became disillusioned and left the state, some went into fox farming and others went to work with their old animals for the new, native owners (Vorren 1990:185).

Most of the Alaska reindeer are found on or around the Seward Peninsula, with the largest herd being out of the village of Teller, near Port Clarence where the first herd was established. There are about 10 active herds in Alaska today, with Inupiat families operating these herds. The animals are corralled⁹ twice a year, in the summer to mark the fawns and harvest antlers, and in the winter to butcher. The nomadic traditions of the Sami are gone, as are the skis and herding dogs. Today, herding is done by foot, four-wheeler, snow-machine, and helicopter. When local herders are asked about the Sami, or Laplanders, as they were known, I was told about a kind and gentle people who stood apart from the other settlers. The Sami had gained respect among the local population, a respect that still lives on in the narratives of today. Norman A. Chance uses reindeer in his book *The Inupiat and Arctic Alaska – an ethnographic development* as an analysis to how the colonization of Alaska changed the way cooperative labor and mobilization among kin was done during this time. Until that time the Inupiat were only using renewable resources, but the introduction of livestock altered their relationship with nature, as they now started owning parts of it. Their economy went from barter to cash, which eventually led the Inupiat subsistence to become dependent on western technology (Chance 1990:155).

⁹ The corral is the physical structure they herd the reindeer into, the Alaskans refer to this when they talk about marking fawns, cutting antlers and butchering

2. In the field



Reindeer herding in Alaska, summer 2009

In the end of November 2009 I started looking for Sami descendants in Alaska. I contacted Faith Fjeld, a woman known to me as the hobby historian on the topic. She's the editor of the magazine *Baiki*, the *North American Sami Journal*, and has lived in Alaska several times. She is herself a descendant of Sami people, but not the ones who traveled over on the two expeditions in the late 1800s. Faith suggested I contact her friend, the Traveler, who knew all about the Sami descendants in the area and had ties to the Sami herself. I got in touch with the Traveler, and she became my main informant. I also got in touch with the University of Alaska, Fairbanks' Reindeer Research Project, who agreed to let me tag along for the season's reindeer handlings. Before I left for Nome I delved into the archives of University of Alaska, Fairbanks and found Dr. Sheldon Jackson's reindeer reports. I also started reading up on old newspaper articles, where I came across the cited ones from the *New York Times*. In a way I did my fieldwork chronologically, familiarizing myself with the historical aspect first.

Methods of data collection

My empirical material was collected mostly by video camera, photographs, journal entries and notes I made to myself through a voice recorder. My main method was the video camera, my trusted technological friend through the fieldwork, although it was sometimes a distraction as well. I learned it takes longer for someone to warm up to being taped with sound than it does to being photographed. I used my still camera a lot while working with the reindeer, as I had to participate in the handlings and the herding, both processes involved physical labor, which made it difficult to film. I utilized participant observation, my most important tool during my time in Alaska. As many of my informants were quite weary of the camera at first, I found it very useful to sit back and observe their day-to-day life, which also allowed me to be better prepared for the situations I could film. Whenever I participated I always made sure to busy myself with helping my informants in whatever tasks they were doing, as I had learned from previous trips to Alaska that hard work is valued in their culture and allows access quicker. Doing anthropology in a place I was already familiar with made the process a bit easier, especially since I had been to Alaska with a still-camera before. I felt like I had an idea of how to approach the informants, and how to be allowed into their sphere. By the time I left, I felt like I not only had collected information on the Inupiat and the Sami, but also had learned more about myself and about living closely to nature. The Traveler had taken me into her sphere with open arms, and even included me in her family's celebration of Nome's oldest citizen, her mother, who turned 99 years old while I was there. The Traveler also took me on a *grand tour* as Spradley would have explained it (Spradley 1980:77), showing me the main features around Nome; the three roads leading out of town, only in operation during summer, the main street Front street on the edge of the ocean, three grocery stores, eight churches, five of which are spread over a three-block radius, and the act of waving at most people passed along the way, even if they are strangers. *Because maybe they're not*, the Traveler would say. I also learned that even though Nome's three roads are dead-ends some miles up, most people in Nome have cars because it gets extremely cold there during the winter months. After numerous trips *into the country*, as they called driving on the three roads, I learned that the people in Nome were also quite concerned with how fast the road was being cleared of snow as opposed to previous years. This method of observation gave me insight into the daily lives of the citizens of Nome and what was important to them in their setting, while making me feel comfortable and familiar being there.

Access denied

I had one incident where the video camera suddenly was unwelcome, after it being welcomed the first time I was at this house. My informant's cousin, who I'd been to visit before, suddenly flew into a rage. At that time I was still new in town and my informant, the Traveler, was taking me everywhere she went to help me get introduced. When we got there, the women were in the kitchen preparing the food, and the men were in the living room. At this visit we were to have native food, with the muktuk as the main attraction. Muktuk is the outer two layers of skin on a whale, and considered a delicacy in Alaska. As it is a very traditional food, only Alaska Natives with special permission are allowed to hunt the whale, and the only way to get some is by knowing someone who has access to the whaling community. It's eaten raw, has a rubbery texture and is difficult to chew, so they chop it into small pieces with an *ulu*, which they call the woman's knife. The Traveler was going to cut some up, so I safely assumed the position with my camera in the kitchen to film her in action, wanting to capture some of the old traditions in a modern setting. The Traveler is very good at explaining while she does things, so I was looking forward to what was to become a valuable lesson to me. All of a sudden her cousin became upset and yelled at me to put down the camera. Perplexed I lowered it and tried to explain why I was filming the Traveler, and assuring the cousin she wasn't in the shot. Here is an excerpt from my journal entry about that night:

I went to the Traveler's for dinner, and she served the most amazing smoked salmon quiche. After dinner we started talking about the events at her cousin's. I had taken up the camera to film The Traveler while she was cutting the muktuk with the ulu. The cousin was standing next to the Traveler also cutting and looked at me with stern eyes:

-Now, I've had quite enough of that thing.

I looked at her, and was a little puzzled by her tone of voice, but immediately lowered the camera. She meant business. The previous day I'd been there and filmed while they played smirts, and interviewed her friend about growing up in the village, and subsistence living. He was telling me stories, on camera, and I was filming him while she and her other friend were playing.

-I just wanted to film the Traveler's hands.

The cousin turned to the Traveler and mumbled:

-Now, what did I just say?

I decided this wasn't a battle worth doing, so I put the camera far away from the kitchen where the cousin couldn't see it, and rolled up my sleeves to help with chores instead. The Traveler's brother complimented me on helping, saying that's what I should be doing, and lingered around the kitchen. The other ladies had vacated, and the mood had noticeably changed after my altercation with the cousin. I felt bad for having caused an uncomfortable situation, so I spent the rest of the evening making sure I didn't sit still and helped smooth things over. The Traveler's brother also felt uncomfortable, and asked the cousin if some of her ulus didn't need sharpening. He looked at the ulu I was using to cut the muktuk:

-That knife needs sharpening.

-I'm ok, I said, thinking I didn't want to be more of a bother than I was.

-Let me see it.

He took the knife and a stone out of his pocket and started sharpening it. After he gave it back.

-Try now, isn't it much better?

I think he was trying to make the mood better, and making cooking easier for the women by helping with the one thing he knew how to do, sharpen the knife.

The Traveler talked about this situation tonight. Apparently her whole family had been appalled by how the cousin had spoken to me. I said it was her prerogative to ask me to turn off the camera, it was her house and her kitchen, but the Traveler insisted that it was the way she said it, which had shocked them so. That's why her niece and sister had stopped helping with cooking, they couldn't believe how the cousin had spoken to me. And it had set a bad tone for dinner, almost losing the Traveler her appetite, which she couldn't accept. But she didn't want to say anything then and there, she just wanted to let me know.

I found this situation very valuable, as it showed me how they deal with conflict and guest relations. Apparently the Traveler and her family were so taken aback by how the cousin treated a guest in her home, that they immediately quit helping in the kitchen and sat in quiet protest in the living room. Chance touches on this in his ethnography on the Inupiat in the pre-colonization. There was no structure of law in their society, so members were free to do whatever they wanted. But there were common goals and norms that laid out the ground rules for inclusion, with the security of sharing and cooperating. If someone proved to be unruly and couldn't be persuaded to conform by family or others, then the remaining alternative was to ostracize them, something that could be fatal given the unpredictable conditions in the Arctic (Chance 1990:122). To the cousin, who didn't know me very

well at the time, I may have been perceived as someone who came from the outside to exploit them and their knowledge. Maybe even perceived as a threat, much like that of the western colonizers. After getting to know her better, she became at ease with me around the Traveler, but I never tried to film her after that.

Since this incident happened early on during fieldwork, it allowed me to reflect on it during the remainder of my time in Alaska. I definitely approached each situation a bit more cautiously after that, always making sure my camera was welcome, even if I had filmed there before.

Access

Being a photographer by trade, I was used to carrying a camera around at all times already, so this did not present much of a change. It was, however, a learning curve dealing with sound, filming and informants while constantly having a piece of machinery in front of my face, making the gathering of information less personal. I documented whenever people would let me, in their daily lives, and during sit-down interviews, car-rides and culinary events. When I first arrived, the Traveler made it very clear to me that I could film her in any situation, and her easy-going persona underscored her seriousness in this. So as she took me on a grand tour of Nome and around, I filmed her driving, getting excited about showing me nature, having a picnic with her friend, everything we did together. This was great because I felt like I got an early start at getting used to having the video camera between my informants and I. From my profession I know that once I am comfortable, the people I am photographing get comfortable also, which allows for a more natural setting to document them. I filmed many interviews as it proved quite difficult to find Sami descendants that were still alive and knew they were descendants. Once I did find them, I sat down with them and asked about their feelings toward being part Sami, and how they felt this had affected their lives. I also asked how they thought the Sami had affected Alaska, and if the Sami were considered into the same category as Europeans.

I found that having done these interviews gave me a well of information to decipher while editing my film, and I gained a better insight into the lives of my informants by watching them over and over and over again. The process of editing the film I felt was almost as valuable as collecting the

material. I also followed around a few people, mainly the Traveler, in their daily lives, and filmed a great deal while walking around Nome looking for clues to the Sami's presence. When I stumbled upon a pair of tobacco-stained *skaller*¹⁰ hanging on the wall of Nome's oldest bar, The Board of Trade Saloon, the bartender let me interview her about it and it turned out she had grown up next door to Andrew Bangs, or Anders Isaksen Bongo as was his Sami name, in Unalakleet; one of the first generation Sami to have grown up in Alaska. Even if the Sami are not there in person any longer, they can still live on in stories.

The People

My informants ranged in age from teenagers to the elderly. Most of them were elders, as most of the young people were unaware of how the reindeer came to Alaska. In the beginning I read the phonebook to look for Sami names, although many of them were Americanized like Andrew Bangs' was from Aslak Isaksen Bongo, but the few I found and phoned didn't know if they were of Sami descent or just wouldn't tell me. Either way, it led nowhere, except for many conversations with people across Alaska. My informants are all of Native Alaskan decent, most of them Inupiat but some also Siberian Yupik. Once I was allowed access to someone I would try to repay them for their time by bringing fruit. Fruit is very exotic and expensive in Nome as it has to be flown very far. As some people get offended by being offered money (Spradley 1980:24), and alcohol has caused a great deal of damage to the culture (Chance 1990:123), I felt fruit was the safest option. I walked around and talked to people I met, and that way I got to know the community while finding out what they knew about the Sami. Many people knew about *skaller* or Lappboots as they called them, and some remembered meeting them or knew more about the history of the reindeer than others did. From this big sweep, I found my main informants, three men and one woman, who helped me find traces of the Sami in Alaska. The three men were all related to the Sami, and the woman had Sami relatives married into her family. I also spoke to a great deal of reindeer herders while helping with the corral, an 18-hour adventure in learning about how they use the animals today. I also spent 15-

¹⁰ Traditional Sami footwear, made from fur of a reindeer leg.

hours walking in on the tundra tussocks¹¹ behind 2500 deer. This was a light learning experience in how the Sami would spend days behind their herds, pushing them from one grazing ground to another. This is hard work, while beaten down by the Arctic sun and being eaten by mosquitoes. At the end of this day I was more tired than I've ever been, but it gained me great rapport with the locals and further established me as a *hard worker*.

How I was perceived

I received many roles during my stay in Alaska. At first I was perceived as the white girl there to study native people, which wasn't necessarily favorable. This role was hard to shake, and only after telling tales from Norway, explaining my curiosity in lost Sami heritage, and proving myself to be a hard worker was I accepted into their spheres.

As my time in Nome became longer, and my ties with the informants stronger, I was slowly let further into their worlds. After some time the informants appeared to understand my quest to understand them and the Sami, was just as much a quest to understand myself and my own Sami heritage. Our relationships seemed to be single stranded because our narratives became similar. I was a participant observer, but after some time I was also included as an entrusted member of their group.

To get to that point I felt like I was put to a series of tests. One of my informants said the only reason he decided to speak with me was because our stories were similar and we came from the same people, the Sami. Another of my informants kept testing my wits with sarcasm, something I'm very up for and our foundation became that of joking and laughing. With each member of my research I had a different identity, according to how they saw me. My main informant regarded me as family, I was her 'younger sister/ daughter' and I was quite happy to reciprocate this relationship. It created a comfort zone for us of mutual respect and understanding, which persists to this day. One of my informants I believe saw me as a little girl sitting at his kitchen table asking silly questions.

¹¹ Tussocks are small basketball-shaped mounds on the tundra close together

Another thought I was 40 years old (I'm 32), and called me 'that lady.' All of them were amazing in so many ways, and I feel they have become my extended family.

Anonymity

I have chosen to exclude the names of my informants to hide their identities. It may seem silly since I did not do this in the film, but since this paper is more about their identities and hence more personal, I feel they can remain anonymous here. In the film, only their first names are used, and it is mostly about how they feel the reindeer have affected their lives, and less personal. This is because I feel that since identity can be a touchy subject to the Inupiat it is better to leave it anonymous. The names I have chosen are from the identity I thought most prominent at the time I met them. Except for Bob, his identity was hard to determine, so I gave him a neutral American name.



3.The Sami and the Inupiat, together in tradition

The Inupiat see their heritage as an important factor in their lives. As westernization wedged itself into their society, anyone who descends from the western settlers don't speak much about this part of their heritage. No matter where their ancestors came from, it is always the Inupiat identity that is emphasized. One exception was the Sami settlers. The special bond as people living in close collaboration with nature, between the Sami reindeer people and the Inupiat hunter/gatherers, became strong enough for the Inupiat to consider the Sami as part of their world, as opposed to someone trying to change their world.

Globalization

If we see the world's identities as one big beach, then colonization, the movement of people, ideas and culture, such as airplanes, technology and television, can be a grand tsunami. This tsunami hit cultures in the 20th century with a force so big that once it retracted the people of the world had to rebuild. They took what they could in the rubble and formed what is today a modern human, one that can trace ancestry across the globe. The cultural mosaic that once existed has been globalized to a free flowing hybrid which surrounds us today (Friedman 2007:125).

In 2005 the National Geographic Society and IBM launched the Genographic Project, where any human being around the globe can for 100 USD get a kit in the mail with an instruction DVD and send their DNA to labs in Washington, D.C. What do they get from this? Well, they get to find out where they really came from, or to follow my previous metaphor, which part of the beach they originally belonged to. As of April of 2010, 350 000 people bought a test kit and found out their genetic history.¹²

Friedman cites John Kelly (Friedman 2007:126) as saying there's a growing romance with defending indigenous peoples/ first nation/ natives who are pummeled by colonization, or as I refer to it: the tsunami. This is evident by the number of people who have requested their DNA analyzed

¹² <https://genographic.nationalgeographic.com/genographic/lan/en/index.html>

by the Genographic Project. I think part of this is to blame on how much time we spend sitting in front of computers, forgetting our previous practical lives, living in direct contact with nature; when we were growing our food and fetching fish for ourselves. Consider this scenario. During the time we spend on the internet we learn of the destruction we've caused our planet, Al Gore lectures on melting ice in Antarctica and the next generation grows up thinking milk comes from the store. Depressed, we seek answers, and while surfing for these answers we find the Genographic Project, which can give us piece of mind in knowing that once upon a time our ancestors knew how to appreciate nature by the mere fact that they had to in order to survive. In an ever growing homogenous world, we get to find a piece which gives a sense of belonging, something slightly different than the modern mold we came out of.

There can be no ethnography of the global as such, because there is no such place, because the global only exists in its local effects (ibid 2007:119).

Friedman refers here to the compression of our global world into our homes through new media. We have access to all points of the globe from the comforts of our couch, and we can experience something happening on the opposite end of the planet, even if we are not physically there. He goes on to say: *Globalization is really a form of radical localization (ibid).*

Examining modern day Alaska, my informants live in houses, all have television sets, most have internet and all drive cars. Yet they don't need to request their DNA analyzed by a laboratory in their capital. They know where they're from, because their ancestors are only a century away, and only little parts of their DNA come from far away places like Norway. Yet the world has seeped into their living rooms through the globalization process, and Al Gore has spoken to them about melting ice in Antarctica. Their children grow up to think milk comes from the store, partially because they don't have any cows in Arctic Alaska, and they are also realizing the importance of knowing their origin. The difference to them is that they can actually remember the people who were hunters, gatherers and herders, they have that knowledge a generation away. They know how to prepare reindeer for food, its skin for clothes and antlers for crafts. This knowledge is still alive, and their realization of this makes them proud to be Inupiat. Globalization came to them, but most of them have hardly left the state, much less the country, so to them, globalization has had enormous local effects in that they have can be informed about the happenings in the world without actually leaving.

Friedman argues that globalization is something that occurs locally. You wouldn't have globalization if there wasn't a need to distinguish between local, or here, and global, over there. If one didn't know about the other, then the need to define the other would be superfluous. He says:

The self-defined citizen of the world belongs to the world, not to an in-between place, but to the world as a whole, i.e. as a single place (ibid:117)

In today's world the access to the world from our own home has allowed for the creation of a more homogenous society where all of a sudden the individual seeks to find back to their individual identities by means of a project launched from Washington, D.C. Through our increased knowledge about each other we bond and create a new culture based on our shared experiences, heightening the feeling of belonging.

Culture is shared to the degree that individuals are filled with the same or different cultural substance, i.e. the collective is a product of the similarity of its individuals. (ibid:124)

The National Geographic Genographic project allows participants to share their stories online, and here is a summary of IrisAnn's account of her experience in finding her individuality. Her mother was born near Wales and married an American soldier. When IrisAnn got her mitochondrial-DNA results she came back as Southwest Asian. Her mother's reaction to this was that she'd always felt there were secrets in the family, as IrisAnn's grandmother apparently had many Gypsy, or Romany, friends and had a dark complexion. After assembling stories with her mother, IrisAnn concluded that her grandmother was a daughter of a Romany woman. A year later her own mother died, but *it meant the world to her to finally know the truth.*¹³ The story of IrisAnn and her mother's quest to find answers to their family's secrets is one of many as a result of people having their DNA examined. Even though a person's DNA doesn't necessarily define who they are in terms of identity, it creates a way to set people apart from one another in an increasingly homogenized world.

As opposed to most of the Americans in the USA, the Inupiat already know their heritage, and in their narratives this is not something they have to go find. To them it is more important to bond over what they have left of their original culture; their way of life before the colonization started.

¹³ <http://migration-stories.nationalgeographic.com/story/13/>

Self-reflexivity

The Inupiat used to live as hunters and gatherers, in small earth mounds buried down into the ground. Much like the Sami *gamme*. Then came fur trade, and the Russians started gathering fur in Alaska, both by trading with the natives and hunting themselves. After the USA bought Alaska from the Russians a more westernized system was introduced to the territory.

Anthony Giddens' claim in *The Consequences of Modernity* is that identity is not something determined by outside influences, but rather determined by self-reflexivity, or the journey inwards. He argues through uses of modern psychology that in order for someone to be able to solve personal problems, that person must also be willing to confront their problems reflexively.

Modernity can almost be defined as the opposite to tradition. Giddens explores modernity as a juxtaposition to tradition, but says that they are closely intertwined; tradition gets reinvented by each new generation whom adopts it (Giddens 1990:37). In the case of Alaska, this generally slow progression of tradition being reinvented has come very fast. In the course of little more than 100 years they have been transformed from people living in harsh conditions, not having any contact with the outside world, to people living in heated houses, driving cars while talking on their cell-phones, and eating junk-food in front of the television. This has made what Ingrid Rudie refers to in her article *Livsløp som dimensjon i kulturell reproduksjon* as their physical memory, very prominent within them as their hunter/gatherer ancestors are only a century away.

Our modern narratives take us on a journey of self-discovery amongst many types of media that was previously unavailable, and this in turn opens up the world to us. We no longer have to rely on face-to face interactions and are constantly re-inventing new ways to interact in spaces, like the Internet, instead of places, like the town square (Giddens 1990:18). Who are we? We are allowed access to so much information that we are able to choose our own identities, according to what fits. The traditions of our ancestors have been pushed aside by modernity, and we must actively choose to take it back by using our own narratives and self-reflexivity.

The Inupiat have today started reclaiming their voices within their tradition. They are collectively steering their narratives through obstacles provided by colonization; obstacles like alcohol, bans on hunting, loss of language, to find their way back to traditions about to be lost. These traditions are

modified to fit in with their current lifestyles. In doing so they choose to ignore parts of their own heritage. As many of the Inupiat have ancestors who came as western settlers they have chosen to ignore this part of their personal narrative and rather focus their attention on their local Inupiat heritage.

Sami and Inupiat reflexivity

The Inupiat were traditionally hunter and gatherer societies, and power distributed to the families with the best hunting skills (Chance 1990:19). Narratives are drawn through reflecting on one's own history. In some cultures this history is written down, which leaves little room for reinterpretation. Before contact with the outside world, the Inupiat culture was void of script. First contact was with Danish explorer Vitus Bering who was contracted in 1741 by the Russian government to determine where Russia ended and America began (Chance 1990:30). Up until this point, history and culture was delivered orally through dance, song and storytelling, often about great hunters and their accomplishments, stories which are still told today. Rudie writes that as long as the narrative is a part of an ongoing oral communication process it can change alongside a shifting focus (Rudie 1995:67) The tradition of oral storytelling was hugely important to how the Inupiat remembered their ancestors, and also their relationship to their environment. Folklore about supernatural animals were passed down through generations, and kept them in touch with their ancestors (Chance 1990:103).

Up until contact with the outside world this was the common narrative of the people. After contact a multiplex of narratives entered the arena. Interracial marriages caused most Inupiat to have more than one repertoire to reflect their identity on, which then created different narratives for the individual Inupiat. For example, rather than coming from the great hunter who killed the polar bear with his bare teeth, a child of this new society now descended from the daughter of such a great hunter, and the westerner piano player at the local bar with lost ties to the natural world.

The incorporated knowledge becomes important to understand because it makes up an essential role in the collective memory of the society, a memory, which works differently than that of the written account. (Rudie 1995:60)

In this case the Inupiat have chosen to emphasize their collective memory as native Alaskans, hunters and gatherers, indigenous and dependent on what the nature brings. Whether their ancestors came from someplace else is largely irrelevant to them as their primary goal is to survive the Alaskan climate, which their repertoire as natives will allow them to do. Their collective identity as native Alaskans has had to adapt to the changes made on account of an influx of outside influences, but since they for the most part have stayed in Alaska the part that has remained the most visible is the one of Inupiat, native Alaskan. Their collective narrative is not written down before contact, so they rely on the collective memory of their culture handed down from their ancestors. Since they are technically in the same spot as their ancestors, only in different clothes, they find themselves longing for a world which is still there, only becoming more and more unavailable to them through modernization. They may have forgotten how to hunt, but they haven't forgotten that they're hunters.

As Alaska experienced a heavy migration of people seeking gold and fortune, their lifestyles started to change. With this migration wave came trade, schools, religion, houses, electricity, post, television and the Internet. During this time of change Inupiat narratives changed as well, helping them adapt their culture to this new influence from the outside. But all the while this adaptation happens, their ancestors narratives are still present in the memories of their bodies, an identity trait, Rudie argues, which cannot be chosen.

Interpretation of now in terms of the past, and the past in terms of now, contrasts new situations and guides the perception of the present (Rudie 1995:63).

These cultural changes, along with biological changes (inter-racial marriages), have shaped the Alaska native today. The focus on their status as indigenous has helped them shape the individual narrative as the people who were there first to the outside world, and the outsider influence is commonly seen as a hurtful culture and carried out with a lot of stigma. They have felt pushed aside in their own environment. Erving Goffman analyzes stigma in *Stigma – Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity*. He uses examples to show how stigma is used to ostracize a person from the environment that person is in, and create excessive stereotypes to keep that person excluded. This is what the term Eskimo is connected to today: the settlers acting superior and enforcing assimilation.

In *Betragtninger over kategorien indfødte folk*, Jens Dahl explores how the indigenous people came to be indigenous, by examining them within the category of indigenous. He writes *Who are the indigenous? In a historical perspective this is interesting, because this is of interest to everyone but the indigenous themselves* (Dahl 1996:25). Because human rights primarily belong within the repertoire of western thought, this has opened up for indigenous peoples to use this platform to think locally within the global system and fight for their own rights premised on western standards (Dahl 1996).

Claiming rights the western way

Frideman and Dahl both state that globalization happens locally, because this is where it is defined. If you didn't have the need to define something as local, you wouldn't need to define something as global either. Just like with the term indigenous. Dahl also says that the term "indigenous" was not in use before World War II and the end of colonization, a term invented by westerners and the UN (Dahl 1996:27). Before this, indigenous people were just people living within the political borders of a society which often stigmatized them. In order for the indigenous people to rise up and claim their culture back they had to go through some self-reflexivity and organize themselves in a western way to win back the rights to their native ways.

The Inupiat went from being hunters and gatherers, to being reindeer herders, the first step to westernization. From here their path went to colonization by the Americans and western ways were introduced. When reflecting over their heritage, the Inupiat are more likely to choose to focus on a Sami background than a western background, as the Sami has the same cultural status as them. Their collective memories and cultural narratives are so similar that the Inupiat collective traditions are not threatened by the Sami's collective traditions. The Sami were welcomed into their culture as likeminded people from far away, as opposed to the western people who knew close to nothing about survival in the Arctic and arrived there with dollar-signs in their eyes.

The Inupiat, although increasingly westernized, still long for their native ways of hunting and gathering. Yet, as individuals, they no longer have the knowledge to do so. Within themselves are identities from far away places, places that they have never been, alongside the Inupiat identity where they live. Because the pride of being Inupiat and Native is so strong in Alaska, people do not talk about their other heritages much, as this would be admitting to an "impurity." Rather they let

their European decent dust away on an inner shelf while nourishing the inner Inupiat causing an internal conflict, or a battle of identities. The Inupiat with a Sami background, however, claim their Sami heritage without feeling a sense of shame, because the Sami and Inupiat traditional ways of life are so similar they nearly go for one and the same.

While some of the United States' identity seekers contact the Genographic Project, the Inupiat know where they come from, but theirs is a different battle. To them, knowing where they came from can come as a curse as much as a relief, as their physical memory is so dominant in how they see themselves. Their personal narratives within the flora and fauna are so embedded they are not entirely free to pick and choose what they are.

In the following chapters I will look at how the Sami and Inupiat met and came to develop a mutual respect for each other. Then I will look at the status as indigenous today, and how it has changed in the last 40 years.



Two herders looking for reindeer. Stebbins 2009.

4. A meeting on the tundra

I am concerned with why the Inupiat seem to have a less stigmatized view of the Sami than they have of settlers from more westernized cultures.

According to Vorren, who mostly studied the Sami relations in Unalakleet and in the state of Washington, the two peoples didn't mix much in the beginning. The Sami and the Inupiat were a confrontation between two different cultures and ways of life. The Sami kept to their side of the village and the Inupiat to theirs. In the beginning marriage between the two was frowned upon, but after the Inupiat had received instruction in reindeer herding, this was no longer seen as a problem and marriages between the two groups commenced (Vorren 1990).

The meeting between the two started out by the Sami being the teachers of the Inupiat. Their instructions for the Sami were not only to tend the herds, but also instruct the Native Alaskans in the care of the animal. They were to be taught herding, sleighing, castration, marking, milking, lasso, tanning of hides, and making sleighs, shoes and harnesses. In return the Sami were to learn English and get paid in reindeer, food and tobacco (Vorren 1990).

Sheldon Jackson's reindeer reports characterized the Sami as not only excellent reindeer herders, but they had shown skills in other areas too, like carpentry, logging, fishing, hunting and even blacksmithing. This was to determine the foundation of the relations between the Sami and the Inupiat. The two groups started out as strangers. The Inupiat saw the Sami the same way they saw other outsiders, as people who had come to tell them what to do. But the Inupiat believe in hard work (Chance 1990:128), and after the Sami had proven themselves as such, they found a more common ground.

The Herder



Reindeer herding, Seward Peninsula. Summer 2009.

William Kjellman and Sheldon Jackson had, after the first expedition where one Sami couple and one Sami bachelor had stayed, hoped to establish a permanent Sami colony in Alaska where they could settle into reindeer herding as a good example to the Native Alaskans. The bachelor from the first expedition was the grandfather of my informant the Herder. I wrote this in my journal during my stay in Nome:

I contacted the Herder immediately on my arrival in Nome. I had found his name through my research, and speaking with him on the phone he sounded positive to my project and we made arrangements to meet. After many failed attempts, we finally met in his kitchen and he told me his story. His grandfather had been on the first expedition, the Kjellman expedition, as the youngest member. He was only 17 years old when he arrived there. After their contract had expired he was one of very few from the first expedition who elected to stay in Alaska. He married a local woman and kept reindeer. They had children, one of them the Herder's dad, and he kept up the family tradition. The Herder remembered being a good skier and an athlete in his youth. When he was in his late teens he and his

father were going to help move a large herd of animals a great distance. This took a long time, and through stormy weather and hard terrain he received high acclaim for his endeavors once he reached Nome. This was one of the few times he went reindeer herding, but his identity as an Inupiat and as a Sami is still that of a reindeer herder. The work of herding is considered tough labor, and hard work puts you high on the Inupiat social ladder. People within the Inupiat culture can be more impressed with a hardworking hunter collecting food for his family, and sharing with the community, than someone who has earned wealth through office work. This label, hard-worker, is one of high acclaim.

Even though the Inupiat seem to have an easy time letting things go, such as death, they are not lazy. They are always busying with something, and adults who got up late or in other ways didn't seem to have anything to do, would get comments like: *How do you ever get your work done?* If a person was lazy it would be publicly condemned and gossip would be born (Chance 1990:128).

The Herder was very concerned with what he called westernization. It pained him to see that Skidoos and Arctic Cats, or snow machines, replaced dogsleds and skis, and people were losing touch with the nature around them. He mourned the loss of his culture to the west while breathing air from an oxygen tank, and wearing a hat with a Sami flag. I found the Herder fascinating, because with his disdain for what all the western culture had brought to his people, he was still a product of it. He doesn't see his Sami heritage being any more western than his Inupiat heritage, because he considers the Sami an equal culture to the Inupiat, and the combination of the two to be what he calls a *tough breed*. He is also an elder and has lived long enough to see how the western culture has infiltrated and changed his culture during the past 70 years, which includes electricity, television, cars, snow machines, air travel, and plumbing. When he was growing up, these things were hard to come by, thus most people didn't have them. To him, westernization is equivalent with fast progression of things unnecessary, and even though modern medicine is keeping him alive, it was the modern lifestyle which put him there in the first place. To him, the respect for his culture is lost in the dissemination of the western culture.

I find his identity is heavily rooted in nature, based on his experiences with the reindeer as a young man. This along with what Rudie refers to as the physical memory of his ancestors weigh heavily into his construction of who he is (Rudie 1995). Like Giddens claims, identity is also a part of a self-reflexive journey, and his disdain for modernity is a juxtaposition to the traditions he holds so in such high regard (Giddens 1990) .

The Reindeer Act of 1937

After the Sami had established their presence in Alaska they had also managed to acquire quite large herds. It was estimated about 13 300 animals, or 19% of the total reindeer herd of Alaska, between six families with 20 members. (Vorren 1989:218)

September 1, 1937 the United States Congress passed the Reindeer Act stating no non-native person were allowed ownership of reindeer. Carl Lomen, the head of the Lomen Company, which was the largest single white ownership of reindeer in Alaska, speculated this was because reindeer meat had become a very successful consumer meat and started competing with the cattle industry, hence lobbying against it had started in the Lower 48. (Lomen 1954)

The Sami were immigrants according to the law, and hence were forced to sell their herds back to the government at between 3-4 dollars an animal. After the sale of the animals, many Sami returned to Norway to start a new life there with the money they earned. Others went into gold mining, and some even went into farmed fur, but in many ways they felt like they had been robbed by the very people who brought them there (Vorren 1990:184).

The Alaska Daily News Magazine published on December 5, 1982 an article written by journalist Maria Brooks, where she spoke to two of the Sami descendents from Unalakleet, Mary Bahr and Andrew Bangs:

Andrew Bangs said: But what could we do when our government took it (the reindeer herd) away? We didn't wish to give up our animals. My father didn't wish to fight against the government. We had worked hard, we had a nice herd with reindeer and then we had to give them away. After the animals were gone, we just remained in the village. Our people started getting old. My father said he wished to die here, because this was his home. We had to travel to Nome for work and come back again. We had a wonderful time while my father was alive, when all our people were alive. But they became old, you see. Not all of them where young when they arrived here.

Mary Bahr said: They took the reindeer from our people. What they paid was too little. I don't think that was fair at all. But our people said: 'We don't want to make any commotion around it. We will remain calm.' Our people always managed somehow. They never begged the government for money, like they do now. My parents, my father wasn't young anymore. He couldn't have kept it up anyway. But of course, the younger generations... (Vorren 1990:185).

After this event, people who had married into Native Alaskan families could continue herding, but only a few Sami had stayed with reindeer, and of them even fewer had married native. Instead, as afore mentioned, they found other occupations.

Finding identities along the way

“We’re not really a pure race anymore,” one of my informants told me.

This is true in terms of genetics and DNA, but in terms of personal narratives I found the Inupiat to be quite proud of their native heritage, and still quite “pure.” Stories from other places did not seem to figure into their personal narratives like I had experienced in the Lower 48¹⁴. During my 12 years living there I found people to be very up-front about their family’s background and upon discovering my Norwegian heritage would tell me about their great-grandmother from Norway who had passed down such culinary adventures as lutefisk. In Alaska I found people to be quite unwilling to talk about their family’s heritage. I attribute this to two reasons. One, they are not a product of as large of a multiplex of immigrants like their countrymen in the Lower 48. There, cultures from all across the world have converged to make “the land of opportunity,” blending cultures and creating a cultural melting pot. They have that in common, their ancestors all came from someplace else. In Alaska the ancestors also came from someplace else and married into native families, their descendants in turn remained where they where. The descendants I spoke to all had outside influences in their heritage, yet the biggest influence remained native Alaskan, hence the pride remained with their roots, deeply grounded in the Alaska tundra.

These cultural changes, along with biological changes (inter-racial marriages), have shaped the Alaska native today. The focus on their status as indigenous has helped them shape their individual narrative as the people who were there first, and the outsider influence is commonly seen as a hurtful culture carried out with a lot of stigma. In my time there, I felt like there was a common yearning for the old life, a collective longing for times past, despite the Inupiat being well integrated

¹⁴ The term Alaskans use for the lower states of the USA

into the Western society. It felt like it wasn't something they actively longed for, but rather a longing that was already built in (Rudie 1995:60).

My informant, the Traveler, was very tied to the Sami heritage. Although not a Sami herself, they married into her family, so her cousins were Sami. I found in Alaska a lot of talk of cousins. When I first arrived there I thought people must have many children in order for there to be so many relations, but I soon discovered that the term cousin applies to anyone in a family, they don't use second or third cousin, just cousin. This is also evident in the Sami communities, according to Tove-Lill Labahå's article *Slektsmønstre i et samisk perspektiv*. She says the Norwegian farmers and the Sami are among other things separated by their differences in kin. Unlike the farmers, the Sami family doesn't have a set size (Labahå 2004:379). So in the Traveler's eyes her cousin being part Sami made part of her family Sami, which in turn made her connection to the Sami even stronger.

The Traveler's life had consisted of many moves, the longest to the opposite end of the country where she married a Jewish man and converted to Judaism. She later divorced and moved back to Nome, but in the many years in between she had a variety of experiences, which let her reflect on her impulses and draw on her hereditary memories to help build her narrative (Rudie 1995:58). Jean L. Briggs describes in her article *From trait to emblem and back: Living and representing culture in everyday Inuit life* one of her informants ease in moving flexibly between trait thinking and emblematic thinking, not because he is trying to prove something, but because he's comfortable with it and that's how he wants to live (Briggs 1997:233). I think the Traveler feels the same way about moving through her identities, as an Inupiat, as a modern person, as a Jew, as a woman, as a mother, as a bi-cultural, as a person who talks to animals, she is comfortable with all the aspects of herself and is free to change in between. But the core remains that of a native woman with close ties to nature. And again, like the Herder, this aspect of her identity lies in her physical memory, but she has a more reflexive relationship to her adopted cultures, and doesn't exclude them from her repertoire. She has experienced an array of different identity options, been able to reflect on them, yet still finds herself drawn back to the tundra (Rudie:58).

She often described things she *had* to do, like going berry picking, or eating native food (lots of fish or seal, often raw) and going out *into the country* as if she had no control over wanting to do these things. One time, while filming her, we went to the cabin she was renovating. She went outside, and

I heard her talking so I rushed to the door to see and film who she was talking to. She came back through the door as I got there, and I asked:

-Who were you talking to?

-I was talking to a squirrel, he came to say hello.

The Traveler had interactions like these with nature numerous times. It never felt forced, like she was trying to humor me with it, but rather like she wanted to reconnect with the part of her life she had left behind when moving to the Lower 48. It felt like she was a woman about the tundra, used to communicating with the animals as they were just as much her friends as any person would be. The feeling I got of how the Inupiat saw nature was of something they were in love with, something they wanted to treat with care and worship, nature was what sustained them.

The western settlers did not have the same relationship to nature as the Inupiat. They came, dug tunnels for gold, killed wildlife for fur, and trampled all over the tundra. The impression I have of the western colonization was that of a bully, taking what he wants and leaving a gushing wound behind. This seems not to be the case of the Sami however. Among my informants, most were of Sami decent, and none had any difficulty speaking of their ancestors from northern Norway.

I have never heard a bad word spoken about the Sami. They didn't come here to take anything away, they came here and added to our culture, added to what we already know, the Traveler said.

When I met her, she was working at the Lutheran Church in Nome but was attending the Covenant Church, saying she did this because there was no synagogue in town. She had also grown up wearing *skaller*, a footwear other informants referred to as Lappboots, but the Traveler consistently called them *skaller* because she knew that is what they were called in Norwegian and wanted to honor their name. She also knew the term *Lapp* had become derogatory. During her upbringing she had eaten rice mush, a porridge made from rice and milk commonly had in Norway. These little trinkets of culture alongside stories from her parents about those gentle people who brought the reindeer were enough for The Traveler to find closeness to the Sami people. I was sometimes under the impression that she played on this knowledge to impress me, but after I got to know her better realized she is very good at mirroring and sharing other people's enthusiasm.

Symbiosis

I have established that the Sami came to Alaska to teach reindeer herding to the Native Alaskans, and my research has focused particularly on the Inupiat. Although skeptical in the beginning, the Inupiat soon came to the understanding that the Sami, albeit from the opposite end of the world, were quite similar to them in terms of relationship to nature and respect for it. This in turn helped the two cultures get along, and according to my informants, they got along better than the Inupiat did with the white settlers, who mainly had come north to mine for gold. Some of the Sami married into Inupiat families and were allowed to continue with reindeer herding after the 1937 Reindeer Act, while others either moved away or found other sources of income. The Herder sees himself as part Sami, and part Inupiat, while showing disdain for the western culture he feels has invaded his own. He shows clear signs of being proud of his Sami background, wears a hat with a Sami flag and speaks about being a *tough breed* based on his mixed background. Yet the Sami are the very product of westernization, brought over by global processes set in motion by the very western culture he despises. And he is a direct product of this.

The Traveler's take on being native Alaskan is slightly different. Every day she gets up and has her cup of coffee, a bean discovered in Ethiopia, but now mostly grown in tropical America. She loves cheese, drinks soy milk and speaks English with hardly any accent.¹⁵ During the time spent in the Lower 48 she grew closer to her Inupiat identity and her background became increasingly important to her. A big part of this may be that she was living in New York, a stronghold for western thought, at the time when the indigenous label first started to get a stronghold (Dahl 1996). To her the status as a native is very emotional, because she has a lot of feelings around how she was raised in the modern society. She grew up in an American school system, and is not fluent in her native tongue, Inupiaq. When she first learned the story of the Sami's travels to Alaska, she remembered the shoes she wore as a child, Sami *skaller*, and found another culture with a similar plight to her own. The fact that there were Sami who married into her family strengthened the ties she felt with the Sami.

One thinks of identity whenever one is not sure of where one belongs; that is, one is not sure how to place oneself among the evident variety of behavioral styles and patterns, and how to make sure that people around would accept this placement as right and proper, so that both sides would know how to

¹⁵ Most native Alaskans have a slight accent to their English, due to their native tongue Inupiaq

go in each other's presence. 'Identity' is a name given to the escape sought from that uncertainty
(Bauman 1996:19).

The Traveler wasn't sure of where she belonged, went searching for it, only to find it in the very place she started.

One of my informants told me a story about his mother. She is an elderly woman, and cannot walk very far on the tundra anymore. But every summer around July she has to pick salmonberries¹⁶. So he takes her to his helicopter and flies her to the top of a particularly good berry-picking spot, and sets her down. Then he makes a sweep of the area to look for dangerous wildlife like bears, before setting the helicopter down on the tundra to wait for her to finish. In past Alaska, every season provided some sort of food. Summer was greens and berries, the salmon came up stream and birds would lay eggs. It is the most important season for harvesting food, to make sure they are provided for during the winter. She grew up in this tradition, her grandparents were pre-modern Inupiat, so if she doesn't go berry-picking in the summer, she knows she would lack some food during the winter, referring back to Rudie's notion of a physical memory (Rudie 1995).

Identities are about questions of using the resources of history, language and culture in the process of becoming rather than being: not 'who we are' or 'where we came from', so much as what we might become, how we have been represented and how that bears on how we might represent ourselves (Hall 1996:4).

The Traveler has the unique advantage in her identity building that she has been allowed to observe other identities; that of a native woman, then the city woman, the converted woman and back to the native woman, and can feel at ease with her selection of who she chooses to see herself as. She is comfortable in her own skin, and shows an understanding for the other cultures which surrounds her. She knows about her German descent but chooses not to talk about it because as she said she doesn't know that much about it. She also seems happy to be a product of the westernized progression, dealing with it as something in the past, while focusing on emphasizing her own culture today.

¹⁶ it's almost like a cloudberry, and the same as the Norwegian *multe*

5. From Lapp to Sami, Eskimo to Inupiat

Today it's very difficult to navigate along the mishmash of terminology in regard to indigenous people. A term that works for one group, may not work for another within the same group, as is the previously mentioned case with the Inuit being accepted by indigenous in Greenland and Canada, but not in Alaska.

Until recent times the Sami of Sapmi have been known to all as the Lapps or Laplanders. Even scholars used this term until about 30 years ago, when it was changed to Sami. Today the word Lapp is considered just as derogatory as Nigger is to a person of color in the United States. In Alaska politically correct terminology has become a little more complicated. The scholarly world has agreed to call the native Greenlanders and native Canadians Inuit, a quite fitting word as this is what they call themselves. On the other hand, a term which also umbrellas the Inupiaq, Yupik, Siberian Yupik and Aleut of Alaska is more difficult.

As the settlers trickled into Alaska, the Eskimos who lived there welcomed them with their sharing nature and good mood. Over the next century, the Eskimo experienced marginalization, and all their ancient knowledge about how to survive in Alaska started fading away. Out with the dog sled in with the horse. Out with the harpoon, in with the gun. Out with the kayak, in with the steamboat. It was a long list of replacements, and a long list of settlers' failed attempts to survive the harsh existence of the north. The Sami were a product of this as Dr. Sheldon Jackson was convinced the *Eskimo* were starving as the Caribou had changed their grazing patterns and neglected to visit an area, something they do with regular intervals. This is not to say that Dr. Sheldon Jackson didn't save lives with his reindeer project, I'm sure he did, but it is probable the Alaskans would have found ways to survive as they always had. It is only in this generation the Native Alaskan people have raised their voices and demanded a say. It took nearly five generations for them to break with their silent condemnation, raise their voices and say: ENOUGH. Now politics have entered the indigenous arena, and native corporations have started governing the land, the flora and the fauna.

The Sami have had a similar story. Until recently they were governed by the Norwegian government, but after more and more Sami started organizing politically the Sami Parliament was

born and had their first meeting in 1989. Through politics, the Sami have met the modernization on its own turf and slowly started regaining rights and their culture back.

The indigenous of Alaska seem to be headed in this direction also. Even though there is at the time no politically correct term, besides Alaska Native, to umbrella the ethnic diversity of the state, they have started using their individual names for themselves; Aleut, Athabaskan, Inupiaq, Siberian Yupik and Yupik. It seems that with the loss of one stigmatic word, a culture is given the opportunity to rise again. That doesn't mean that the Alaska Native isn't stigmatized by several generations of settlers, but it seems they are moving in the direction toward cultural freedom.

A little over 30 years ago another event changed the course of how we saw indigenous people. As they became more active on the political arena, so did the terminology of their names. The founding of such groups as International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs (IWGIA) in 1968 and World Council of Indigenous Peoples in 1975, helped fuel how indigenous people see themselves, a term used on people who are the original descendents of an area, and who were marginalized by the government as a result of colonization (Dahl 1996:27).

After the 1970s it has become more acceptable to be indigenous. The multicultural collective between the indigenous peoples has created a foundation for them to act together as a group against stigmatism in their surroundings. They have found common ground in a mutual pressure from the outside to conform, and have answered this by joining forces for the betterment of their culture. New cultures are born in this, for example the indigenous festival in Northern Norway, Riddu Riddu, which was established in 1991 as a way to express and develop Sami and other indigenous groups culture and identity.

Before people were labeled indigenous, they were hunters, gatherers and nomads. The indigenous of today are these people's children's grandchildren, and they are often still hunters, gatherers and herders, but some are also plantation workers, anthropologists and politicians (Dahl 1996:29).

The Indigenous Politician

The Politician is a state senator in Alaska. He runs for elections on the basis of his status as an Inupiat, and uses his European descent as a compliment to this. Since he is only part Sami, being part European doesn't affect his status as indigenous, as both Inupiat and Sami fall under this category. The Politician uses this to his advantage. He sees it as an opportunity to boast about his ancestors being worldly while at the same time keeping his indigenous identity intact. He sees it as an advantage to have grown up with stories passed down to him about far away places with electricity, adding to his repertoire as a hunter, gatherer and reindeer herder. He attributes this to why he left the village to get a medical degree and a law degree, on top of his pilot's license. His father told him growing up: *You need to go out there and get yourself an education, because things are changing and they are changing fast. But once you are done with that you come back, because your mother and I did not raise you to export you.* He did, and is now one of the key political persons in Alaska fighting for native rights. The Politician is a product of globalization, and has found a way to embrace this to his advantage and to also further the cause of the indigenous in Alaska. To him, being indigenous is not just an identity but also part of his business.

The global understanding of the indigenous' rights to natural resources, the vitalization of their language and culture, along with the entry onto the political arena is helping the Inupiaq not only keep with their traditions but also remake them into a more modern model, but not a modernized one.

In describing the term indigenous, Sidsel Saugstad puts it like this:

In my opinion the indigenous label aims to define the unclear relation between a modern phenomenon, the state, and a special type of traditional society which isn't expressed in the founding of the state. ... But the term has apparently become modern in another way, it has become fashionable (Saugstad 2001:34).

Saugstad is by this referring to the increased interest in the indigenous both academically and culturally. It has changed from my grandmother's time with Sami stigma, which led to her denial, and to my generation with an increased interest in the indigenous, of belonging and acceptance, two generations later.

The Baiki Journal

Báiki: The International Sámi Journal was first published in 1991 by editor Faith Fjeld and co-editor Nathan Muus. It covers the Sami community and affairs in North America, which is estimated to be about 30 000 people. Faith Fjeld is an American from the Mid-West, and had always felt a close connection to the indigenous people. She traveled to a Native American reservation and lived there for a while, before discovering her own roots in a Sami community near Røros. It was then she decided to delve into her heritage and start the magazine. The magazine covers a wide array of topics on being Sami, particularly on being Sami in America. The articles are written by a spectrum of writers, from journalists to retired Sami living in Seattle, to renowned indigenous authors. The magazine also has art, either as photographs or traditional art, sometimes reinterpreted. Each month it carries a theme and a title. One of the titles is: *Living in Two Worlds* (Issue 31, Spring 2009), which included an article by Liz Carlson on the North American Sami, whether they were colonizers or colonized. It concluded, the author part Sami herself, that whether or not the Sami were colonized or colonizers, their descendants still have to *acknowledge and explore these elements* so they can begin the process of healing. The magazine is very unofficial, and carries an aura of propaganda, but is largely focused on the quest for identity and identity management through self-reflexivity. Most of its readership is in the Lower 48, and only one of my informants, the Traveler, keeps a subscription. The others know about the magazine but don't feel like it's useful to them, further emphasizing that they have no need to explore their heritage further as they are quite at ease with the identity they already have. Other titles of the magazine include *Relating to the World* (Issue 21, Spring 2000), *Reindeer and Subsistence* (Issue 22, Spring 2001), *The Sami: Reindeer People of Alaska* (Special reindeer project edition), *Following the Reindeer* (Issue 19 1999), and *Our Ways of Knowing* (Issue 30, Summer 2008). This last one has an article and photographs of descendants of the reindeer project going to Sapmi to meet their *cousins* as they refer to them. Once there they were dressed up in *kofte*¹⁷ and welcomed into the Sami community by all their relatives. Again, Labahå's example works of the Sami family not keeping a limit on its members, however distant they are.

Baiki is published inconsistently as it is the pet project of Faith Fjeld and her co-editor Nathan Muus, but the overall theme reflects a readership seeking knowledge about their ancestors way of

¹⁷ Traditional Sami costume

life. This, again, does not concern the Inupiat for the most part as their indigenous ancestors are only a generation away. When the Traveler would tell me a story about something in her culture, she'd often conclude by saying: *I grew up with that stuff*, as if that was proof enough that she had significant authority on the subject. The Herder did the same thing, he also would often conclude by saying he'd grown up with it. This is not the case for most of the readership of Baiki. They, for the most part, have grown up around the consumer society of the Lower 48, and in doing so, lost their connection to the flora and fauna that surrounded their ancestors, and are actively seeking to reconnect with their family's past.

Faith Fjeld has helped many people in their quest for self-reflexivity, as is evident by the letters published in the magazine from thankful subscribers. Now, 20 years later, she is unofficially one of the foremost researchers on the subject of Sami in America and has helped many people find their heritage.

Bob the Outsider

The only example I found where an Inupiat was conflicted about his identity during my fieldwork was Bob. Faith Fjeld had once met in on an airplane, and helped him find answers to his questions about his Sami ancestors. He was one of the first people I met during my fieldwork. I found him to be a very wise man, reflected and careful of his words; he told me about his past and how he came to learn of his Sami background. Into his adult years he found out that his mother had come to this world by a traveling Sami herder, a man who later moved to Seattle and started a family there. Apparently his grandfather was sterile and Bob speculated that he'd asked this traveling herder if he could be of assistance. Thus his grandmother and Bob conceived his mother. Having thought his entire upbringing that he was a full blood Inupiat, he could never quite put together why he felt different than the people around him. He grew up in an Inupiat community, and even though he always saw himself as an Inupiat, the Inupiat saw him as something else and he never quite understood what that was, it was as if they could see it in his physique. A physique I didn't find to be any different from the other Inupiat I knew. This made him feel pushed out from the community. When his mother told him the story of how she came to be, with that the pieces came together. He could now place his heritage and the Sami was the piece that was missing. He experienced a similar

feeling as his countrymen of the Lower 48 once finding out about their background; that he could place an explanation on why he'd always felt different.

When he went into the military he was considered a minority, yet this time an Inupiat, which was the identity he'd tried to have since birth, so again he was an outsider, but now for what he'd tried to be an insider for earlier. He said about the military: *When the black guys weren't around they picked on me. Or the Italian guy because he was a little short*, he said. All of his life he'd felt like an outsider, and he feels closure through finding out his mother's background as a half Sami. For him it felt like it answered a lot of questions about who he was, why he and his sister looked a little different. He met Faith Fjeld, and she helped him find his real grandfather. He then explored his heritage, and even visited an uncle, son of his herder grandfather, in Seattle. When I first met Bob, he came with a whole folder of information about Sami history, the Reindeer Project and his family. I also lent him some of the books and literature I had in English. Bob would pick me up in his car, and we would drive around talking about what it meant to be one person of many parts. He didn't advertise his Sami background, he was still an Inupiat, but he was comforted by it, knowing that he was now a person who knew where he had come from.

He would not let me film him. On the first drive we went on, there were some reindeer along the road and I pulled out my video camera to tape them. Bob watched me for a while, then turned to me and said: *You're not going to use that thing on me*. Each time I saw Bob I brought my video camera in case he changed his mind, always in a bag, never visible. He never did. At the end of my stay he explained it was because he was shy and rather not be public about his heritage.

Bob felt at first stigmatized by his own group, then stigmatized by his military unit for the same reason his own group failed to include him.

Because of the resent progressions within the indigenous label, Bob can now keep his head high when he walks down the street, regardless of cultural heritage. The most important part to him is that both the Sami and the Inupiat heritages are indigenous, labeling them together against the western colonizers. Historically they went from being people living on the tundra, not carrying a label as either Eskimo, Inupiat nor indigenous, along came the colonizers and labeled them as Eskimo, forced them into schools and churches, and progressed them into modernity, until the change came in the 1970s where they were given a label as indigenous. This in turn took the two

peoples, the Sami and the Inupiat, out of their original meeting point on the tundra, to the political arena, where they joined forces with the other indigenous peoples in the world, giving them a joint niche and a forum where they can post their demands (Dahl 1996:27). They got rid of stigmatizing labels and started fighting their governments for rights to practice their cultures on the land their ancestors came from.

Dahl pulls up the example of the Inuit in Canada. In the 1970s they started negotiations with the government for rights to land, but to build a case had to hire western lawyers, anthropologists, and biologists to document the Inuit hunter's resource management (Dahl 1996:32). The Inuit there uses the western system to fight the western system for their rights to practice their traditions the way they used to.

As previously stated, indigenous became fashionable within the modern arena, like with Baiki, and eventually more indigenous people were to be seen on the political arena. This minority representation, like with the Politician, within the government, has helped the indigenous establish themselves as a force to be reckoned with and allowed them access to the flora and fauna so they can retrieve some of their lost traditions. This has opened a path for people like Bob to feel more confident in their own skin, regardless of race.



Reindeer. Stebbins, Alaska, 2009

6. Conclusion

When I went to Alaska with an idea about finding Sami descendents of the Reindeer Project, I knew I wouldn't find them in a group, surrounded by their herd and walking around in their *skaller*. Modern times have changed that, and cultures have merged so much it is almost impossible to determine who comes from what background. I didn't find a very strong Sami presence in Alaska. Instead I found people with indigenous identities. It wasn't important where their heritage stemmed from, it was important that they could live with modernity and tradition side by side.

The Inupiat were in Alaska when the Sami came, they lived as hunters and gatherers. Together with the Sami they found a common identity with the nature, and as modernity progressed around them, so did the realization that they had this identity. As the globalized world has given them modern technology, they still have this identity intact. Their physical memory of being people living in a tight relationship with nature is still a dominant factor in their lives, even as their other identities, as that of a politician or a worldly woman, enter the arena.

It was based on this core identity, of their close ties to the flora and fauna, that the two peoples first met and accepted one another on the tundra more than hundred years ago. Since then the world has decided to label the indigenous people, the indigenous have entered the political arena and fought for their rights as the original people on a land. The Sami and Inupiat tied a bond first on the tundra, then in a common political plight against their colonizers to regain the control of their land and traditions.

I have in this paper asked why it is that the Sami and Inupiat got along better than the white colonizers, and how it is that people of Sami decent are more willing to speak about their Saminess than the Inupiat who are of white decent are willing to talk about their ancestors. I have attributed this to the two peoples sharing fundamental knowledge about nature, and once labeled as indigenous they found common grounds in the fight to protect their traditions, despite the Sami being brought there by the oppressors, and in a way a product of modernity themselves.

Goffmans self-reflexivity and Rudie's physical memory both factor into the Sami and the Inupiat finding themselves. In the modern world they can choose one part of their identity, like that of a politician or a globetrotter, but the most dominant identity will remain the one that longs for trips

into the flora and fauna, the one embedded in their physical being, and these base identities are very similar with the Sami and Inupiat. To descend from white settlers devalues the Inupiat status as indigenous, but descending from the Sami keeps it intact.

Finally the modern world assigning them both a label, indigenous, lets them meet once more in a different arena to help each other keep their traditions alive.

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