

# Orientalism or cultural encounters? Tourism assemblages cultures, capital, and identities.

Brit Kramvig

What challenges lie in the indigenous tourism project? What is the significance to consider when using culture as a basis for business development? What basic paradoxes and challenges will be met when one wants to achieve growth in Sami tourism and the creative cultural industries? It is believed that Sami culture has an unredeemed potential as a product and attraction in the new and major initiatives for tourism in the northern areas of the Nordic countries. The autonomy and participatory rights of the Sami people are provided through international conventions, and the national government's recognition of the right to participation makes it difficult to develop the products of Sami tourism without doing so in collaboration with Sami actors and institutions.

This effort has been an important element of the ongoing decolonization in in Sápmi. 'Decolonization' is a concept gathering a multiplicity of practises relating to different actors, communities, institutions as well as cultural projects concerned with Sami people's rights and efforts to define themselves and shape their own future. In many areas of Sápmi, people hold on to nomadic lives and the knowledge traditions that follow from herding, hunting and gathering. Traditional knowledge practises and livelihood, are performed differently due to new political conditions and regulations. Thus, there is a pressure from growing extracting industries, expanding cities and villages, constructions roads, windmills and electricity-lines, as well as increasing mobility's into Sápmi. In this complex and messy situation many look to tourism as an opportunity– not only as business activities per se, but also as ways to practice the knowledge of nature, and gentler ways to utilize the land and in new way engage in traditional cultural practices. This entails some form of exotification and commercialization of culture and identity that people perceive and struggle with. This also then entails the emergence of new tensions – both internally and externally.

On the one hand, tourism on it's best, gives access to the articulations of self-respect and pride in one's cultural background, it gives the possibility to keep on to knowledge and make a living by doing handicraft (duodji), music, theatre, filmmaking and design performing Sami traditions, and at the same time cope with contemporary issues and ways of knowing. On the other hand, this effort entails a growth of new forms of ownership, where important

element of local identities and cultures are resources used in products, objects, performances and events, these are transformed becoming products for a market. Some of these products are directed out of Sápmi, others produced for a more local audience or consumers. In this article I will argue that these products often come with turbulence and passions creates new areas of conflicts and debates, and new encounters. However, this is not only a debate that ensues within the Sami communities, that by the way are hardly never Sami only. When new actors seek to establish themselves in this area or seek to adopt important Sami symbols for commercial purposes, it creates conflicts at the minority-majority interface, along with new inter- and intra-ethnic ties.

In this article I use the category *Ultima Thule*, to highlight the travelling that for centuries have taken place on the territory of the Sami indigenous people. Tourists enter in complex relationship with the communities they travel through and fuel into both colonial encounter's but possible also contemporary decolonization. In addition I argue that the Sami tourism create new and ecologically-based methods of production and products, new conversion brands, new arenas for claiming autonomy and recognition of the traditional knowledge that provides effective articulation of ownership and belongingness. Still, to sell otherness relies on colonial imagery from where dilemmas emerge.

## Ultima Thule – the journey towards the end of the world

We know the term *Ultima Thule* from the very first travel descriptions made by the very first tourists who travelled North and then also to Sápmi. These travellers were explorers and expeditioners who journeyed towards, what for them were the end of the world. The first written records from Sápmi were made by these early, mostly European explorers. Travelling, discovering, documenting, and claiming new lands and resources were part of a European need for expansion – a need driven by capitalism, technology, and religion. Said (1985) has argued that the records made by the Europeans were not based on the empirical realities of the land these travellers entered. As Said points out, we should instead read these records as expressions of a collection of European aspirations and desires, repressions, initiatives, and projections. The “others” constituted mirror images for detecting something in one's own self, the entire population or civilization. The Sami's were, like other indigenous people of the world, described as wild, unruly, and uncivilized, and their religious beliefs were seen as an expression of barbarism that had to be overcome. The first expressions of “civilization's” entry into Sápmi often came with the construction of churches followed by the establishment of trading posts. Afterwards came the establishment of military fortifications, educational institutions, trade routes, et cetera.

The fascination for indigenous peoples – for the noble savages – has been described as deeply rooted in the Western modernity project. The authentic “we” that the West lost access to as a result of modernity’s disintegrating effects could be recovered as a nostalgic vision of the past that could be obtained in contact with others.

The “otherness” duality can be seen as a prerequisite for the colonial projects, and disciplining the Sami people in terms of law, religion, education, and language. They were part of *the good will*, where the otherness should be civilized and the Sami people were thus ensured access to the benefits of the modern welfare state, which was about to emerge at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. The first colonial era started as early as the 1500s. In the 1800s, the major powers of Europe expanded even more. Recent research has shown that Norwegians also participated in this expansion, even though Norway has never seen itself as a colonial power (Kjerland and Rio 2009). Likewise, the term *colonization* has not been a working category to describe the Norwegian intervention in and annexation of the land of the Sami people, to which they still do not claiming private ownership towards. Land were used by different *siida* or a flexible communities of kin and others – or Sami villages; that migrated on the east-west lines before the national borders were set on the north-south lines, crossing and closing down the traditional migration routes, by then also access to pasture, land, resources, secret places (*sieidies*), kin and communities.

## Decolonization in Sápmi

The first joint Sami congress was held in Trondheim on February 6th, 1917.<sup>1</sup> This was the start of collective articulation of the challenges faced by the Sami people and their demands for recognition, political participation, and rights. The movement for Sami rights was not seriously placed on the international agenda until the *Stilla* civil disobediences in the period of 1979 to 1981 and the hunger strike outside the Norwegian Parliament. These events made the Norwegian state’s maltreatment of the Sami visible to both national and international publics. In the wake of these events, in 1980s and the 1990s, the consequences of the colonial processes were brought into the national as well as international public, the Sami political movement became connected to the international indigenous movement and the young people who made themselves aware of a suppressed history meant that Sami ethnicity was increasingly relevant (op.cit.). The Sami political revival that began in the 1960s (Eidheim 1971) has in the decades that followed led to an articulation of what constitutes significant Sami values and efforts to identify how these values can be made significant in the everyday lives as well as on the political scene of the Sami people (Hirvonen 2008, Kramvig and Flemmen 2010). A

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<sup>1</sup> This early political mobilization are today celebrated as Sami Peoples Day.

new Sami nation emerged – along with the pride in indigenous values, cultural expressions and new symbols (Stordahl 1994). In this process, reindeer husbandry, significant different cultural expressions such as joik and doudji, and the language became significant venues for the articulation of Sami community and identity.

These processes have been painful for many people. At times, they have created struggles and conflicts about how to refer to the past, present and to places. Families as well as places have been subjected to several reinterpretations, and “forgotten” Sami pasts are retrieved and again made the subject of often turbulent debates. This makes the Sami objects fragile because they contain highly condensed, and for many, valuable, repressed, and painful knowledge, experiences and lines of stories. The challenge in today’s Sápmi is, among other things, related to the effort to reclaim and revitalize Sami traditional culture and knowledge, as well as to explore how to live in the contemporary. These efforts are central on an international political arena such as the UN Permanent forum on Indigenous Issues and the ILO-convention No. 169 of the Indigenous and Tribal people. On a national level it’s done through the construction of Sami institutions and the development of autonomous administrative units in areas such as environmental and resource management, culture, education, and health. In addition, the same efforts are made in people’s everyday lives, in the challenge of recapturing the Sami’s traditional knowledge, and in the challenges related to self-articulation in a turbulent and complex landscape . In recent theoretical thinking, the concept of *decolonization* has been introduced to highlight the ways in which indigenous people meet and seek to renegotiate the previous colonial structures and all of its paradoxes. Kramvig & Flemmen (2008) and Ween & Lien (2012) highlight how decolonization affects the everyday relations within local communities. Ween & Lien (2012) are concerned with how the processes of decolonization draw attention to and play off essentialized ethnic identities, serving to deflect attention from concurrent bureaucratic processes, such as environmental regulation, often with adverse, recolonizing tendencies (op.c. :93)

Kramvig & Flemmen (2008) are concerned with how the responsibility to recapture and respectfully manage the Sami’s traditional knowledge is something the individuals must take responsibility for and find solutions to. We need to approach an object as something people act towards and with (Star 2010:603). Its materiality derives from action, not from prefabricated stuff or ‘thing-ness’. Kramvig & Flemmen (2016) argue that these actions are multiple, and (some) Sami objects therefore come with multiple and conflicting stories. These objects differ in the sense that they do not travel easily from one place to another. Decolonization’s, should be considered as an ongoing process and locally situated and diverse practices. For Ahmed (2000) post-colonialism is about rethinking how colonialism operated in different times in ways that permeate all aspects of social life. It is hence about the complexity of the relationship between the past and the present. Encounters are meetings that are

not simply in the present: each encounter reopens past encounters. We need to ask how contemporary models of proximity reopen prior histories of encounters.

## Sami creative industries and politics

The Sami tourism and culture industries, which makes use of the same materiality and objects associated with the Sami revitalization process, are interwoven in the political. Sami artists and cultural actors, regardless of whether they are musicians, writers, filmmakers, festival organizers, or entrepreneurs in the growing fields of tourism and culture, articulate and explore new Sami forms of expression. These artistic and cultural actors establish themselves as entrepreneurs offering creative products but even more play a prominent role as guides for Sami adolescents and as tutors for the future of Sami communities. At the same time, the Sami cultural expressions and art have been performative elements in politics ever since the start of the political movement. The cultural expressions contribute to and become arguments in the articulation of respect for cultural differences. This has the potential to form the basis for the articulation of indigenous autonomy and political rights. In addition, tourism could be considered a hybrid practice, involving heterogeneous elements, hotels, restaurant, travel-companies, tour-guides, buses, boats, headphones, films, camera, people, fabrics, music and images enabling a re-direction to other networks and flow between inside and outside of what is defined as tourism specific (Certeau 1988). Interventions are found in the expectations imposed by the market, by the local and global industrial cooperatives, and by the financial investors who set goals on innovations, growth, and company operations. This leads to the necessity of simultaneously addressing a multitude of considerations. Quite possibly, the range of tensions for the Sami participants is greater than the ranges faced by other cultural actors, although the challenges of making any culture into an industry are similar (Olsen and Kramvig 2009).

## Theoretical considerations on indigenous tourism

Both tourism and the development of cultural industries have a basis in commercialization and consumption. They entail highlighting and facilitating cultural expressions, places, and traditional knowledge that is extracted from everyday practices and made available to the market (Viken 2006). This implies a movement from everyday practices into a space where traditional knowledge can be presented in ways that create a demand and a willingness to

pay. These are the cultural arrangements that are necessary for making tourism an independent phenomenon as well as for making a perceived significance out of certain social phenomena (Olsen 2002:160). While at a global perspective we see that ethnic consciousness is strengthened as part of a more existential orientation, to a growing extent we also see that what constitutes the basis for ethnicity also constitutes the basis for commercialization. Cultural identity comes to simultaneously reflect both affect and interests, or emotion and commodities. In this field, culture, identity and neo-liberal interests have been complied in new ways (Comaroff and Comaroff 2009).

Research on indigenous tourism has examined whether tourism represent an opportunity for economic independence and cultural revitalization of their traditional knowledge or whether it represents a threat to indigenous communities through cultural degradation and hegemonic expropriation of vulnerable cultural expressions (Graburn 1976, MacCannell 1989, Butler and Hinch 1996, Halter 2000). Recent studies reflect on the active involvement argue that active involvement enhance economic sustainability and for reel contact (Butler and Hinch 2007). In this article, I set out to investigate whether or not postcolonial theory has the potential to redeem the understanding of the more fundamental paradoxes where the actors within the Sami tourism and culture industry operate. Edward Said's book entitled *Orientalism* (1985) is a classic work within postcolonial studies. Said describes how European writers have acted as cultural victors by authoring the narratives that for centuries managed to constructed "the Orient" as the mirror image of "the West". During the colonial expansions of the 1800s, the production of knowledge about the Orient was monopolized by the West. These contributions should, according to Said, not be seen as knowledge of the East, but rather as a part of the West's own self-understanding. In addition, Said reflects on how these performances have imparted deep and lasting imprints in the Orient's self-understanding. Gayatri Spivak (1999) is inspired by, but is at the same time in contrast to Said's dichotomous project. If the Orient's self-understanding is also imbued with Western perspectives, the objective cannot be a quest for purity, or – as in our case – a "real" sense of Saminess, when otherness inscribed. On the contrary, the starting point must be based on respect for the contradictions embodied and articulated by the "colonized". Ambiguities and contradictions must be brought into the analysis and be respected.

There is a need for commercial actors to act on Sami objects on behalf of this knowledge and complexity. In addition, this assumes that the others – i.e. those who purchase Sami cultural products – are familiar with and have respect for the complexity of contradictions that Sami cultural expression are created from. This complexity sets conditions for a variety of arenas of tensions, which I will return to later in the article.

## National strategies and international agreements on indigenous people and indigenous tourism

Tourism based on Sami nature and culture is viewed both by the Norwegian Sami Parliament and by the Norwegian national authorities as a promising starting point for entrepreneurship as well as for developing new ecologically and culturally sustainable industries for Sami communities. Among other places, this ambition is reflected in the government's strategic planning document entitled *New building blocks in the North – the next step in the Government's northern strategy* (2009)<sup>2</sup>, which addresses strategies for the northern areas. The document states the following: If indigenous communities shall manage to cope with global processes of change without having to give up their own culture and industries, favourable conditions for business development must be facilitated in smaller communities.

Culturally-based industries within tourism, trade, small industry, arctic food, design, et cetera are described as industries that can ensure a positive development. The tourism industry highlights that culture and adventure are included as increasingly important motivational factors for travellers in a market where tourists want a greater degree of tailoring with short, but also more experience-based tourism products. Sami cultural expressions are given legal protection through the Norwegian ratification of international conventions. The ILO Convention No. 169 provides indigenous people with a special status, where their culture, lifestyle, and traditions must be protected (Minde 2008). The convention highlights that indigenous people have “the right to continue to exist with their own identities and the right to determine their own way and pace of development”. This legal protection applies to all areas of society, including entrepreneurship programmes, tourism, and the development of other cultural industries. Mattias Åhrén (2010) discuss to what extent indigenous peoples have the right to own/or determine over their collective creativity. His doctoral thesis concludes that indigenous people have a right to be free from utilization of their cultural elements that seriously harms their cultural identity. The challenge become to judge upon whether and in what situation a use cause harm (Åhrén 2010:277). These various documents do, however, implicate some dilemmas. On the one hand, cultural identity is given a specific status and protection. On the other hand, cultural identity is viewed as a basis for new business developments.

The attempts to resolve this within a Norwegian context look to ensure that the development of Sami tourism is based on international law considerations, and that the Sami administrative agencies, organizations, and industrial actors are

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<sup>2</sup> Chapter 7, point 7.2.

involved. This reflects an attempt to anchor Sami tourism products, organizational structures, and programmes in collaborative efforts with the Sami Parliament and other Sami actors that have knowledge of Sami traditions. Butler and Menzies (2007) argue that the goal of having commercial activities in indigenous communities built on sustainability and the indigenous people's choice requires tying traditional ecological knowledge (TEK) to development plans. For TEK to be maintained, one must be aware of and ensure that the relations between groups of indigenous people and their land are safeguarded. In addition, the knowledge that people have built up over time – knowledge about the land and its resources – must be used to create an ecological and culturally sustainable form of development.. Butler and Menzies (2007) continue to argue that the inclusion of TEK in planning and developing tourism can decolonize and support indigenous group autonomy and cultural revitalization, and at the same time encourage economic development. However, what planning tools does this require, and will it solve the fundamental paradoxes inherent in this field? I will address this essential question later. First, I will introduce a selection of cases that in a variety of ways illustrate the multitude of challenges and paradoxes that unfold at a time when Sami cultural expressions are commercialized in a number of different ways.

## Sami cultures and natures: encounters of commercialization

Over a period of two years I worked with seven Sami tourism companies to develop educational programmes and new products, along with establishing a joint web-based information and booking portal.<sup>3</sup> All the companies were small-scale family businesses. They were responsible for a variety of functions, such as marketing, product development, sales, financial management, budgeting and accounting, networking and organizational work, and implementing all the elements of knowledge that is expected of the host. Several of these companies were built up around old mountain lodges. Many companies worked to identify how to reorient former operations into new markets and market needs. A keyword for them was *innovation* or perhaps *cultural orientation*, which is a more precise term that describes the challenges they worked with. In short, this was the way to produce knowledge about new commercial adaptations, and at the same time maintain traditional practices and the community's value-based orientation. For the actors specifically, this meant spending time reflecting on whether or not they should let the tourists know where eagles, falcons, and other rare birds of prey build their nests. Should they mark or let the tourists know about the Sami sacrificial sites? What would

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<sup>3</sup> This was a NFR Regin project owned by the companies themselves, the Finnmark County Council, and the Norwegian Research Council. The management team consisted of associate professor Arvid Viken from the University College of Finnmark, the tourism operator Tore Turi, and me, who at that time was employed in a research position at Finnmark Research Centre.



the consequences for this be? Should they reveal where the good fishing grounds or cloudberry fields are located, or give travellers information and therefore access to other resources that everybody agreed belonged to the community? Would this increase the tourist's adventure and thus the product's attractiveness? There was no consensus on this matter, and the various operators had different strategies for meeting these challenges.

This entailed that the Sami tourism operators had to have a double awareness and a double set of practices. They had to be aware of the preferences of tourism operators, public tourism agencies, and visitors, and at the same time manage these preferences in line with the basic local value-related orientations and practices in the administration of land. This tension was highlighted through stories of how other contractors in the field had stepped over the threshold by filling the boat with fish, showing a *Sieidi*<sup>4</sup> or a *Sáiva* lake<sup>5</sup>, or telling stories about how a *lavvu* or a *goahhti* is traditionally organized and have their sacred and sacrificial sites.<sup>6</sup> These stories formed the basis for promoting their own views on how much of what was valuable, fragile, and sacred, could be sold, by whom it could be sold, and who would have the overall responsibility to clarify, and possibly sanction violations of what were local, tacitly ethnic, and administrative practices.

In a project where we examined gender equality in the everyday life of Sami-Norwegian (Kramvig and Flemmen 2010), we talked with a mother and a daughter from a reindeer-herding family that hosted tourist groups as an additional business during those periods when the reindeer-herding economy was in a downturn. They set up a *lavvu* where they hosted the tourist groups and served traditional Sami food. As the woman said:

... I remember that we got guests at the farm, and he [her husband] was going to participate. However, [this was] just before they were leaving for the mountains, then he had to go. It was right in the middle of the spring migration, and the flock stood and hopped on the mound and were ready to begin. Then my daughter and I had to take responsibility for feeding the guests that came here. So they asked us if we could tell [stories]. And we could then talk without being affected. Then I learned that Aina [the daughter] had thought about that part, that she had thought of what it would be like to be a woman involved in reindeer herding, and then I cried.

In this situation, the presence of the tourists provided an opportunity to articulate important, but fragile knowledge and opinions, because the situation

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<sup>4</sup> A *sieidi* is a sacred stone (in northern Sami language) that indicates a sacred sacrificial place, or *bassi* in the northern Sami language.

<sup>5</sup>The-*sáiva*-lakes have two bottoms. This meant that they functioned as a link between this world and the other parallel world and served as a place where the shaman or *noiaide* could go to be advised by the ancestors.

<sup>6</sup>Árran, or the fireplace, is just one of the sacred places in a *lavvu*.

was open. The latitude for experimentation flowed from the openness that prevailed from of their distant and fleeting relationships with the tourists. Aina could use the openness of this situation, saying aloud that she had thought about choosing a life as a reindeer herder. Thus, she could articulate the argument among a group limited to herself, her mother, and a handful of others. The tourists' presence gave Aina an opportunity to present the position of a reindeer-herding woman. By doing this, she can also more closely examine the meaning of that position. Aina's mother witnessed this performance – a performance that brought forth a loss of connection to reindeer herding that she herself was feeling. Earlier in the conversation, the mother had talked about her experience of loss and the shame of not having the knowledge her own mother had. Thus, she lacked the knowledge that a woman in a reindeer-herding family should have. The interaction with the tourists and appearing as a reindeer-herding woman in the eyes of others helped her to gain insights into what it means to be a reindeer-herding woman. Formulating this loss also makes the shame a collective experience and thus part of a collective responsibility. This is why this situation can be described as a postcolonial moment because it can reconcile past injustices (Verran 2002). In this specific context, the moment takes place in the arena of tourism, where the tourists are confronted as *the others* of the dialogue still participating as witness in the ongoing decolonization. But this is a double-edged sword. The fact that the Sami women continue their traditional knowledge and receive recognition for this knowledge is necessary for their knowledge to survive. At the same time, this is a survival that occurs through the presentation of culture. It is the most intimate and sensitive aspect of cultural identity that are expressed in these relations, and are made available to those who buy a seat in the *lavvu* and access to the stories. When traditional knowledge, whether it is related to nature or culture, is used in new relations and networks, culture, identity, marketing, and reputations are brought together in new and very complex ways. Cultural differences are in circulation, which at the same time and in ambiguous ways give access to similarities.

Comaroff and Comaroff (2009) point out that ethno-commercialization opposes the mainstream economic rationality. This is partly because the differentness can apparently be reproduced and sold without losing value. The reason for this is that the value of the commodity, which is the culture, identity, and differentness do not decrease in price due to mass production. The authors argue that, on the contrary, mass circulation confirms ethnicity, both in general and in particular, as in the case of the mother in the *lavvu*. This contributes to ethnic incorporation, and makes the status of the ethnic body a source and a means of identity. These are examples of what Comaroff and Comaroff regard as “commercial ethnicity”, which they believe is in rapid growth in many parts of the world. Without doubt, this opens up for new and (perhaps) more ecologically-based methods of production and products, new conversion

brands, new arenas for claiming autonomy and recognition of the traditional knowledge that provides effective articulation of ownership and belongingness, while often happening in the absence of other options. To sell otherness “relies heavily on colonial imagery that is inherently (if implicitly) racist” (Mathers and Landau 2007:253). The dilemmas that emerge, and the costs over time of strategies that implicate the commercialization of traditional knowledge and ethnic identity, may turn out to be complex challenges.

## The price of exotification

A confirmation is taking place in Guovdageaidnu and there are tourists visiting the village. This is a day of celebration, and all Sami wear the Sami national costume called *gakti*. I attended the service. The church gallery buzzes with the sounds of voices and flashes from camera rain down over the assembly of people below, with their bowed heads and their hymnbooks. The tourists do not stop to participate in the worship, but instead they take pictures and walk in and out of the gallery. I am a tourist like them, yet I feel a creeping sense of irritation at the constant disturbances of what for many is an important religious and ritual event. It gets even worse when the service is over and the congregation is leaving the church. I feel a bit like a movie star. Below the church steps, there are several layers of tourists ready with their cameras. They want to capture the moment – those moments that are currently found on many postcards. Feeling ashamed, I slide away in my black coat. The hoard with their flash lamps is not accosted or expelled. In Guovdageaidnu, there is simply no tradition for expelling people. Being a bit dazed, I walked down the hill from the church and ask myself whether or not intervention in a public, but important religious ritual is something one must live with if one wants to attract tourists to Sápmi. How should restrictions or limitations on consumption of cultural events be established – and by whom?

Indigenous tourism, or ethnic tourism, always involves a certain separation or fixation followed by the necessity of exotifying the other. For culture to sell, market actors must view the products as attractive, and the marketing practices must raise the interest or the desire that drives tourists to Sápmi, make a difference in a highly competitive international tourism market requires clarity in communication, and it is usually done by adopting the most exotic facets of Sami culture. The tourist brochures from Sápmi contain many Sami jackets and lots of reindeer. The tourist organizations have, among other things, been at odds with Sami institutions because they wanted to use the terms Lap or Lapland, but locally *lap* is seen as a term filled with the prejudices and shame of the colonial past. These terms, compared to *Sami* and *Sápmi*, are more widely recognized in Europe. Commercialization, which satisfies demands and remains engaged with market needs, will inevitably balance between

exotification and banalization. This is one of the fundamental dilemmas of indigenous tourism.

Annually, around 500 000 tourists visit Rovaniemi in Finland. A large number of products and experienced manufacturers have emerged in the area. Rovaniemi markets itself under the collective term *Lapland*, a town in the wilderness. The adventure products cover a wide range of activities, from boat trips to tours driven by huskies, skiing and the ice hotel to the Santa Claus village, in addition to a variety of activities that lean on Sami cultural expressions. Many controversial products – ones that have been criticized for their limited respect for Sami cultural expression and Sami autonomy – have emerged in Rovaniemi (Saarinen 2001). As recently as 2008, this resulted in protests and news reports about the tourism industry's abuse of Sami culture. Sami youth organizations protested in Rovaniemi, under slogans such as "Burn fake" and "Respect our Culture". They pointed out that Sami cultural expressions were abused, and that many Sami tourism products were neither made by the Sami nor had any reference to or respect for Sami gakti and their local patterns<sup>7</sup> (Sivertsen 2009). The news report that broke the tipping point for the Sami youth organizations was a feature on NRK Sámi Radios<sup>8</sup> that described a Sami baptism adapted for tourists as a kind of initiation process where the tourists had to kneel down and had a knife pressed against their neck. In addition, Finns conducted this "ritual" in *fake* Sami-styled jackets. The Sami youth called for a change, where they pointed out that "to showcase authentic Sami life is the best experience for tourists". They said, "this use discriminates against our people, and we can no longer accept the use of non-native Sami's in the tourist industry", and pointed out that this added to the creation of stereotypical images of Sami culture, which was no longer acceptable.

Since Finland has not ratified the ILO Convention 169, the legal rights of the Sami are less tightly integrated with existing legislation when compared to legal provisions in Norway. From a historical perspective, this has allowed for greater space for exotification within the Finnish tourism industry. It was the particular way in which Sami identity was fixated on and presented that served as the focal point for the protests of the Sami youth. Sivertsen (2009) describes how the (urban) Sami youth are search for means to express identity and culture in ways that are flexible and relevant to their ongoing challenges. In addition, cultural flexibility has been described as one of the overarching values that guides everyday Sami practices (Kramvig 2005). This flexibility tend to be lost in the creation of commercial expressions and the products. This becomes a part of the public arena, or the incorporation of Sami identity that young people must negotiate their own cultural expressions in relation to. This discomfort was explicitly expressed through the demonstration. The complex

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<sup>7</sup><http://www.tv2nyhetene.no/innenriks/sinte-samer-varsler-aksjoner-2231109.html>.

<sup>8</sup> 04.11.2008 NRK Sámi Radio.

assembly that postcolonial theorists like Spivak (1999) argue for, one that lays the foundation for shaping future policy, is lost in negotiations when indigenous people continue to be portrayed as exotic characters who belong to a lost past. At the same time, there are reasons to question whether the Sami right to self-determination over what can be sold and who can sell it, actually solves the fundamental dilemmas implied by Ethnicity, Inc., like capital interests entering and articulating themselves and their affairs in a Sami world, in everyday Sami life, and in work of self-articulation of the Sami. There is a constant risk that all forms of commercialization, including those that the Sami people themselves are involved in, must lean on the exotification of belongingness, culture, identity, and boundaries.

## Commercialization and violations

There have been several public encounters the latest years regarding the commercial (and violating) use of the Sami national costume; the gakti (Åhrén 2010, Kramvig & Flemmen 2016). One of the latest cases are the dispute around the Bergen based toy and costume company Ruben Treasury, that import and sell “Sami costume, including hat, belt, gloves and boot covers for ladies<sup>9</sup>”. Social media have become an area for debate around such objects. The artist and academic Maria Kvernmo went public with a critic established a facebook-group “for those that do not feel honored by Rubens toyshop Sami costume”. She told that she had contacted the owner of the shop to inform that Sami felt offended by the “fake costume” and that it was offensive and disgraceful for the Sami people. The owner reaction to the critic was the opposite, that he did not meant to offend the Sami people, on the contrary it was meant to honor the Sami.

“I’m in the costume business, a business for people that want to celebrate different people, times, heroes, Hollywood-stars and to make parties around specific theme. These are costumes, not copies. They are not meant to be dresses, but used as entertainment for a night party....I do hope that you can consider these costume as an honor and not a disdain against your culture, as with the Scottish, germen, Irish, Arabic, French etc... The costume is made fun and play and to create good vibration on party events”<sup>10</sup>.

And in facebook dialogs, he expressed that “he had never heard of any that used this costume to offend anybody”. The president of the Sami Parliament comment that she considered this as an unworthy approach toward the Sami culture, and that she did understand that many enacted upon this. She argued

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<http://www.rubens.no/VarevisningDetalj.aspx?varekode=EFF30-501090-40-&hkat=1&kat=10&grp=106>

<sup>10</sup> Rubens update on facebook, downloaded 090915  
[https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story\\_fbid=10153354655152559&id=356766977558](https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=10153354655152559&id=356766977558)

that the indigenous and minorities ceremonial dresses often is appropriated as carnival costumes, and that ceremonial clothing's represent a genuine culture and are not entertainment<sup>11</sup>.



This spank encounters that went in different directions, both a debate among Sami on how (again) to approach the ongoing tendency of appropriation of the Sami gakti and other objects of importance with references to the ongoing indigenous debate on this matter. But also a debate with tendency towards utterance of racist comments as well as questioning the Sami as indigenous. Still other voices argued that Sami should not make this critic, confirming the public Norwegian stereotypes of Sami as “whimper and without self-irony”.

My argument is that it becomes demanding for the individual persons that take on rising the critic again and again. And that the need for political actions, regulations or guidelines need to be debated in relation to tourism. There is a need for commercial actors to act on Sami objects on behalf of knowing the postcolonial condition, the multiplicity, but also the difficulties of coming to term with the past, and how the colonial past still are enacted differently in social situation. In addition, this assumes that the others – i.e. those who purchase Sami cultural products – are familiar with and have respect for the

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<sup>11</sup> Nordlys “Det skjærer I øynene å se på dem” downloaded 090915  
<http://www.nordlys.no/samisk/det-skjarer-i-oynene-a-se-pa-dem/s/5-34-204510>

complexity of contradictions that Sami cultural expression are created from. This complexity sets conditions for a variety of arenas of tensions that need to be known and respected.

## Summary

Indigenous tourism, or adding cultures and identities as input factors in economic activities, creates many new interconnections and new paradoxes, which I have sought to open up and touch upon in this article. The link between identities, culture, and industry creates new value conversion chains that are woven together with demands for autonomy and self-determination, or that expresses a sense of belongingness and the revitalization of (partially) lost traditions and knowledge. This often happens in the absence of alternatives in marginalized Sami villages, especially in connection to reindeer herding, which is an industry with one of the lowest average incomes. The economics of culture and identity can be seen as the economics of difference and desire, where affect and interest – the emotion and merchandise – are linked together in new ways. According to Comeroff and Comeroff (2009), this situation offer the possibility of highly uncertain political, economic, and ethical impacts. This uncertainty is a prerequisite for neo-liberal economics. At the same time, we see that the legal tools achieve a completely new status in both the political and social life, and on a scale that never before existed. However, will these tools be sufficient to ensure that indigenous cultures and identities will be managed in sustainable ways at the interface with international market actors? Indeed, this is an open-ended question that lacks a clear answer. Indigenous people take and are given the right to participate on an equal basis in the new economic arena, including the right to sell their otherness. The impact this will have in the long run remains to be seen.

We probably need to have competent advisory bodies and actors that can provide advice to companies. In addition, there may also be a need to open a debate if common guidelines are needed on how to use the traditional *gakti* and other Sami objects, how to manage ritual sites, and how to ensure that other elements with references to traditions are both respected for their diversity and not transported into commercial products that are hurtful and invasive to the Sami people. In addition, we need to create the tools for land management that account for traditional ecological knowledge (TEK) and can be implemented in the tourism industry and in the formulation of guidelines for tourists that visit indigenous communities. The use of uncultivated land can entail operational conflicts and pressures on public resources. Sami tourism operators are familiar with this and are striving to maintain a good working relationship with other local interests, such as reindeer herders, local hunters, and fishermen, and to take into account the maintenance of population compositions, endangered areas and species. In addition, it is emphasized that ethical judgements must be the basis for deciding which elements of the Sami cultural heritage that can be



commercialized and offered for sale. At the same time, all the Sami actors in this arena must focus on ensuring cultural sustainability. Not everything *can* and *should* be sold. In addition, tourism operators must account for the needs and preferences of the customers and the arrangements necessary for the introductory sales of the products and the satisfaction with the products. These considerations are not necessarily congruent.

A diversity of interests and assessments are being built into business decisions and development perspectives. This expertise should be made visible and recognized, and should be an important argument for making the local Sami tourism industry responsible for the future development of Sami tourism. In addition, it will be a challenge to renegotiate the forces that pull towards orientalism – towards an exotification of the native's traditional knowledge. The concept of decolonization, seen as becoming – as an ongoing process open up to acknowledge the specificities of each localities work on building respectful and sustainable economic indigenous enterprises. How can innovation programs, built upon indigenous knowledge look like? And how do we balance between the danger of exotification and quest for autonomy

In in this article I have use postcolonial theory as a possible inroad. Many would claim that colonialism is very much ongoing in Sami areas; other would claim that decolonization are a better concept. Places difference so do communities of people and ongoing discourses. Orientalism is ongoing and so is post-colonialism as framed by Ahmed (2000). Different past are in the presents – and ad to the complexity involved in tourism. Encounters are meetings that are not simply in the present: each encounter reopens past encounters. Achieving the political ambitions of the north requires more systematic work, expertise at all levels, and an institutional anchoring. Through this, we can ensure the development of new knowledge and new commercial areas with the capacity to address the challenges faced by the Sami community. In addition, it will be necessary for all Arctic communities to find new and sustainable ways to live their lives in a time of major climatic and geopolitical challenges.

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