

Culture



Sámi Literature and Handicraft as Means of Communication

Tom G. Svensson

Volume 4, Number 2, 1984

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1078267ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1078267ar>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

Canadian Anthropology Society / Société Canadienne d'Anthropologie (CASCA),
formerly/anciennement Canadian Ethnology Society / Société Canadienne
d'Ethnologie

ISSN

0229-009X (print)

2563-710X (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this article

Svensson, T. (1984). Sámi Literature and Handicraft as Means of
Communication. *Culture*, 4(2), 43–53. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1078267ar>

Article abstract

In this article various forms of expressive culture are treated. Different literary expressions as well as handicraft and art in modern form illustrate the general argument stressing the communicative aspect of ethnically defined art forms. Ethnic arts among the Sámi definitely add a significant dimension to their development of efficient means of ethno-political articulation. To achieve this aim it is necessary that the art producers unite the styles of cultural expressions from the two cultures concerned, that of the majority society and that of the ethnic minority. In this context the distinction between verbal and non-verbal communication is also discussed.

Sámi Literature and Handicraft as Means of Communication

Tom G. Svensson
Ethnographic Museum
University of Oslo, Norway

In this article various forms of expressive culture are treated. Different literary expressions as well as handicraft and art in modern form illustrate the general argument stressing the communicative aspect of ethnically defined art forms. Ethnic arts among the Sámi definitely add a significant dimension to their development of efficient means of ethno-political articulation. To achieve this aim it is necessary that the art producers unite the styles of cultural expressions from the two cultures concerned, that of the majority society and that of the ethnic minority. In this context the distinction between verbal and non-verbal communication is also discussed.

Dans cet article, des formes différentes de culture expressive sont traitées. Des expressions littéraires de même que des objets d'art modernes démontrent l'argument général, soulignant l'aspect communicatif des formes de l'art ethnique. Des objets d'art ethniques des Sámi ajoutent décidément une dimension significative à leur développement d'un moyen effectif d'articulation ethno-politique. Pour parvenir à ces fins, il faut que les artisans unissent les styles des expressions culturelles des deux cultures en question: celle de la société majoritaire et celle de la minorité ethnique. À ce propos la distinction entre les communications verbale et non-verbale est aussi discutée.

In northern Fenno-Scandia, including the Kola peninsula, the Sámi have maintained a traditional way of life, with certain variations, for a very long time. All together, the Sámi number 55,000 — 60,000 people, of which the great majority live in Norway. Their basic means of livelihood is either reindeer pastoralism in different forms or small scale farming and fishing. Throughout the 20th century they have experienced growing pressure on their ecological niche, due to resource developments caused by industrial society. The emerging conflict has reinforced ethnic awareness among many Sámi, one aspect of which is discussed in this paper¹.

In the anthropological discussions concerning expressive culture there is great emphasis on various aesthetic manifestations. Art objects produced by culture groups that can be distinguished from similar objects produced by other culture groups are identified as *ethnic art*. Art and skilled handicraft, dance and music, as well as literature could all be included in a wider conceptualization of ethnic art. For many years, though, analysis of style and text prevailed in the discussion of ethnic art. Recently, however, more attention has been given to the communicative aspect of diverse aesthetic products. In a commendable way, Nelson Graburn and his associates explore how handicraft and arts, in particular, function in ethnic minority

situations (Graburn, 1976). Regarding literary forms of expression, William Murphy, in his review article, argues for a shift in emphasis from text to context, *i.e.* to literature viewed as a communicative process. Although he deals primarily with oral literature, his basic idea of literature as a tool of communication may be cogent for written literature as well (Murphy, 1978). In the growing field of symbolic anthropology great emphasis is laid on metaphors and metaphoric usage. This study of metaphor may be considered a special variant of a research strategy dealing with literature as means of communication; in any respect it should be applicable for the study of ethnic art (see, for example, Sapir and Crocker, 1977).

In no way does this new approach imply that a more rigid analysis of style and text is abandoned; style and theme belong to the contents of the message being communicated. Basically, there is a communication of values and ideas, and that which is communicated must attain a certain standard. In other words, artistic representations must adhere to 1) an aesthetic that is normative for the members of the ethnic group, and 2) general aesthetic norms prevalent in the larger society. It is particularly important for any member of an ethnic minority group engaged in ethnic art to strive for this standard.

It is appropriate to distinguish between verbal communication of ideas, *i.e.* various literary forms of expression, and that which is non-verbal, in this special case, handicraft. The distinction may not always be so simple, though; a single art object may convey a message consisting of both verbal and non-verbal elements. The small bag made of tanned reindeer hide with some blue cloth added to it, which is decorated by tin embroidery, represents a traditional Sámi artifact (Ill. 1). Its form, material, and technique of manufacture, as well as its utilitarian function, refer to a traditional usage, a wrist-bag commonly used by Sámi women. When a particular symbol, like *sarakka* (a kind of spiritual midwife), taken from the original Sámi mythology is adjoined to the decorative part, the sign symbolizes something which must be transferred to verbal categories in order to be fully comprehended.

Returning to literature, the basic form of verbal expression, there are four points that remain to be made. Although they specifically relate to Sámi expressive culture, I believe they can be applied to ethnic minorities in general. First, there is the question of *literacy*. The acquisition of a written language, either the native tongue, Sámi, or the language of the larger society, Norwegian, Swedish, *etc.*, makes the relationship between the Sámi

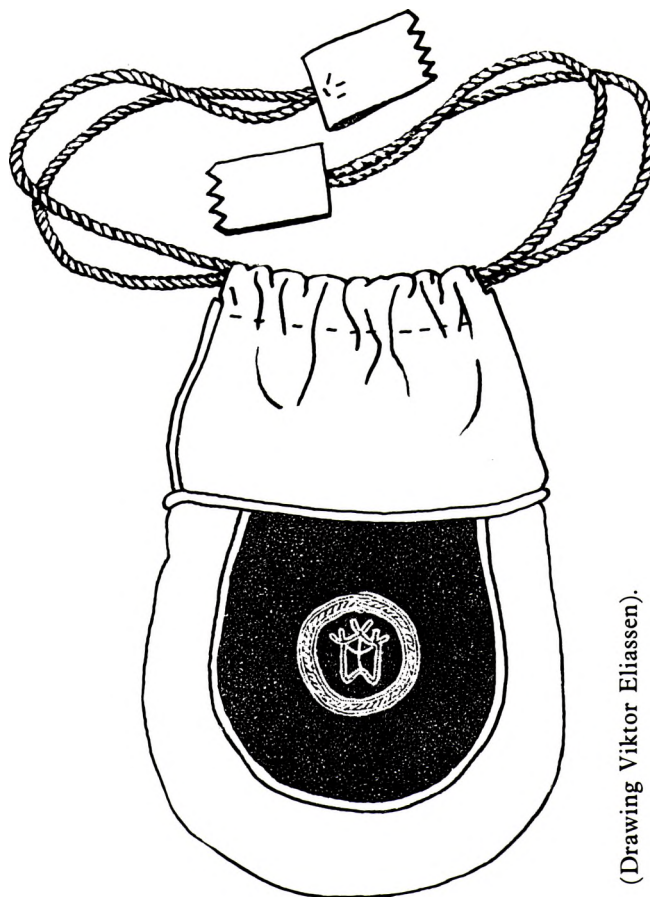


Illustration 1

minority and the authorities of the larger society literate. This relationship is consequently more complex than it was at the time when literacy was nonexistent². Literacy is not confined to the ability to read formal statements presented by the authorities and to respond to them in written form; it is also a pre-requisite for literary activities, such as novel-writing and poetry. These literary products reinforce the literate relationship between the two parties even further and have a positive feedback of the Sámi as a means of strengthening group solidarity both ideologically and emotionally. They also increase insight into the Sámi and modulate and enrich Sámi political argumentation.

Second, Sámi writers fall back on a set of *aesthetic elements* derived from the Sámi traditional way of life: mythology, *yoik* tradition, legendary forms of expression, and a specific thought structure. In order to be efficient, in particular as a means of external communication of ideas, these elements must be fused with *Scandinavian literary tradition*. Many of the literary works being produced currently bear clear signs of such blending. This fusion of different traditions can be compared to the well-established *negritude*

authors and their incorporation of French classical tradition (see, for example, Madubuike, 1975).

Third, we have to consider the *language variable*. That which is written in Sámi is, with few exceptions, restricted to internal communication. For any minority group, however, it is of vital importance that literature in various forms is produced in its own language. Creative works in letters, such as novels, short stories, and poetry greatly increase the versatility of the language. It becomes more dynamic and can better serve as an asset in ethno-political relations. On the other hand, to be identified as ethnic art, literature written in non-Sámi languages must be based on Sámi thought structure and Sámi specific motives. With ethnically defined meanings, such literary works aim at an internal as well as an external public.

The last point I want to clarify has to do with the concept *ethnoliterature*. By ethnoliterature I mean two types of literary expressions; first, original forms, for example, the Sámi *yoik* (song form) tradition; second, renewed verbal forms, including those adapted to literary tradition prevalent in the dominant society. Analogous to ethnopolitics, all literary works that have a definite function in poly-ethnic situations, I maintain, should be referred to as ethnoliterature. It is the relational aspect that is significant for a more precise usage of the term. As a contrast to that, any literature related to a specific culture could be termed ethnic literature. I think we will gain in accuracy if we do not confuse the two terms by using either one as it fits, as has been done frequently in anthropological writings. In the following, I will be occupied predominantly with ethnoliterature.

Literature

For convenience, Sámi literature may be divided into the following three parts, each representing a significant form of literary expression: autobiographical narratives, poetry, and modern novel-writing. Certainly they differ in form, but as means of expressive communication they function similarly. Each part will be treated separately by means of introducing a few significant writers among the Sámi.

JOHAN TURI (1854-1936)

Without doubt Johan Turi must be considered the Sámi literary pioneer, using a close autobiographical narrative form throughout his works. To a large extent his works reflect the common man's conception of his own culture, a kind of native theory of culture. By far his most important work is

Muitalus Sámiid Birra from 1910. Many consider that book to be the most significant written in the Sámi language to date. It functions both as a literary work and as a cultural historical document, and consequently it should also be of great interest to ethnographers. The fact that Turi's book has served as a source of knowledge for several generations of Sámi, however, is much more important; selected parts thereof, for instance, have been used as compulsory reading in the Sámi schools.

Turi's strong influence on his own people is evident, not the least from the fact that he is frequently referred to with particular regard in circles of young Sámi. Now and then specific sentences from Turi may be cited in order to emphasize further the message one wants to communicate. Such quotations may be used in official writings to the authorities on various levels as well as in legal argumentation in court. They can also occur when a few reindeer herders gather around the campfire for coffee when herding. Many Sámi have a clear remembrance of certain passages of Turi such as this one:

I have heard tell that the Swedish Government will help us all they can; but they don't really understand our life and conditions, because no Sámi can explain just how things are. And the reason for this is that when a Sámi enters a closed room, he does not understand very much, when the wind doesn't blow in his nose. His thoughts cannot flow when there are walls and it is closed over his head. Nor is it good for him to live in the dense woods, when the air is warm. But when a Sámi is out on the high mountains, then his brain is quite clear, and if meetings were held up there on one of the high mountains, then possibly a Sámi could state his case quite well.

Obviously this passage contains quite a bit of irony. The very message, with its positive conception of the dilemma caused by culture contact as experienced from the point of view of ethnic minorities, is, however, unambiguous.

There are not many such pointed, quotable passages in the book; basically, it is a straight description of the different cultural phenomena which characterize traditional Sámi culture. But, occasionally, striking statements like this one appear and, of course, it is these formulations coloured by an ideological undertone that offer a source of appropriate quotations in modern times.

As a writer, Johan Turi has an extremely high symbolic value to the Sámi. The primary reasons for this are that he wrote in Sámi and that he held to a topic easily identifiable for the individual Sámi.

That which Turi describes in a narrative form is the culture of the reindeer Sámi, the way of life that is affected by the larger society to a far greater

extent than are other Sámi sub-cultures. Inasmuch as reindeer herding and the way of life attached to it represent a uniting force particularly on a symbolic level for many Sámi regardless of their life style, Turi's narration also constitutes a source of strength for maintaining ethnic identity and community far into the future.

Johan Turi's book is not unique in its informative and symbolic value. We find many examples of native writings which are similarly illustrative. Suffice it to mention Tomas O'Crohan's famous autobiographical narration, *The Island Man*, written in Gaelic. This is a comprehensive and very informative relation concerning the island way of life along the Western seaboard of Ireland, a region where that which is specifically Irish is most clearly marked off from mainstream Anglo-Irish influence.

Before closing this part I think it is appropriate to say a few words about Turi's drawings. His simple, rather primitive sketches also describe quite extensively the Sámi way of life. To all who know this life style from the inside, in the main the Sámi themselves, these pictures are utterly expressive. Because of their simplicity these drawings

have also been an ever recurring source of inspiration to schoolchildren in their drawings, as well as to adult craftsmen. The light stroke of his pen is infallibly reminiscent of the figurative decoration which at times is added to handicraft made of horn or wood.

PAULUS UTSI (1918-1975)

Paulus Utsi is outstanding among Sámi poets. His lyrical style is simple and ordinary, using clear and unmistakable themes. In their form his poems remind one of the traditional song form, *yoik*, and certainly the *yoik* tradition has served him as an important source of inspiration. It is also interesting to note that the revival of the *yoik* tradition beginning in the 1960's, in a way coincides with Paulus Utsi's début; he published single poems in the Sámi paper *Samefolket* from 1964 on. With a sure, laconic style he manages to say a great deal concerning the immense, almost universal problems that seem to be the destiny of aboriginal peoples at present. At the same time an easily recognizable Sámi specific sense of irony appears. This ironical undertone is blended with an



Illustration 2. This illustration shows a typical migrating group, a *sii'da*, consisting of three families at their campsite down in the winter pasture. As we can see, people are engaged in various activities such as watching the reindeer, cutting wood for the fire, slaughtering a reindeer, and driving away with *pullas* in a *rái 'do* (caravan). Despite its awkward perspective this simple drawing conveys some accurate ethnographic information about the Sámi culture.

unequivocal expression of bitterness characteristic of ethnic minority groups always on the defensive. A short and precise poem about the two essential items, food and dwelling site, may serve as an illustration:

His dwelling site and his bread
he always abandons under fear,
for a Sámi and his tribe would
never offer resistance.
If they only knew
how our wounds fester.
No antidote
can cure these wounds.
Tries himself blowing his wounds
but is powerless,
when the limbs, filled with pus,
already are decaying.
Tries to strengthen himself
with unfamiliar means
which only gather rust.

The development of hydro-electric power in the rivers and lakes in the Sámi land has for many years been severely felt by the Sámi. If several types of exploitation such as hydro-electric power, industrial forestry, road construction, etc., by the dominant industrial society are combined, certain Sámi communities may be threatened by complete extinction. The future may look quite grim, particularly for young reindeer herders who hesitate to engage fully in reindeer husbandry since they feel they do not have enough assurance regarding their basic land rights. The land rights issue has been one of the main points in the Sámi political program for years. When it comes to Sámi specific articulation, the poet Paulus Utsi, with extensive experience as a reindeer herder himself, has played an important role.

The last river to be developed is the infamous Alta river in northern Norway; a development that publicly has caused more attention and general debate than any other. More than ten years before the Alta case, however, Paulus Utsi wrote this striking poem about the new mountain water. The last two strophes are:

Hands of men dam up the waters;
the water is rising, presses the Sámi;
the water has flooded the reindeers' food,
cloudberry swamps, sedge-grass meadows.
The fish has left its course.

The lake is pressed by hands of men,
rises under weight and pressure.
Shores, forelands become islets.
The water washes the stones on the shore.
The wave rinses birch and bushes.

Paulus Utsi wrote his poems in Sámi, and for years they have functioned as effective means of communication within the Sámi group. His achievement has inspired many other Sámi to write poems themselves. During the 1970's we find an increasing number of Sámi of all generations, not the least children, who publish lyrical pieces, especially in the different Sámi papers and journals. These poems deal with everyday situations, thoughts and ideas representative of the common Sámi, and finally, minority problems. Accordingly, a kind of revitalization of something Sámi in a new expressive form is developing.

Paulus Utsi's essential message must also reach non-Sámi public. All of his poems have been translated into Swedish and are well known in various circles of the larger society. He took an active part in the Sámi movement, reciting his poems both for a Sámi public and for others. His most important recital took place in Stockholm in 1974 when he read a few poems in the greatest assemblage of leading Swedish poets ever to occur. On that occasion he received final recognition as a poet among poets, something of which he felt very proud.

On the whole it is impossible to think of Sámi poetry without the *yoik* tradition. *Yoik* is the original form of verbal art expression. Although the *yoik* does not always consist of words, even the non-verbal, rhythmic lines of singing contain a description, the meaning of which must be translated into verbal terms. The *yoiks* are predominantly laconic; similarly, poems like the ones by Utsi are usually short and precise, in spite of their far-reaching and essential themes.

This *yoik* tradition has been revived in the last two decades. At the same time *yoiking* has experienced considerable renewal. The Finnish Sámi *Nils Aslak Valkeapää* was the first to make use of instrumentation as background effect to his own *yoiking*. In the beginning, he confined himself to guitar accompaniment; later on, he developed his staged performances, where he was joined by a jazz quintet—a kind of jam session based on diverse traditional *yoik* themes. Since this style of performance is more in line with what people generally are used to, *yoik* has also gained great popularity in the larger society. Improvisation is an important element for *yoik* and jazz alike; consequently, *yoik* in its modern context has adopted an apt form of regeneration which has a great appeal to many young Sámi in particular.

Besides his contribution in reviving the *yoik*, Valkeapää also writes poetry, frequently illustrated by his skillful pen. His cultural achievements,

therefore, are quite versatile, and among Sámi he is considered one of the leading cultural figures.

Many other young Sámi have followed the lead of Valkeapää; one is the *yoik*-singing group *Daednugádde Nuorat* (the youth of the Tana river brink), which appeared with its first LP-record in 1973. On that record the *yoik*-song with the most powerful content is *goatto-aenan* (my homeland), the first poem Utsi wrote conveying a clear, political message. It was published in *Samefolket* in 1968 and deals with the dilemma experienced by many of those who are forced to move away from their original milieu. They may be physically absent, but in their hearts they still remain very much in the Sámi land. The poem ends with the pronounced appeal:

Cling to the life you have
inherited
with all your being
— But the rights to your land
you have lost.

Yoik, being used in minority political matters, has gained importance. In 1980, for example, when the Alta case was the subject of very frequent public debates, the Norwegian entry in the Melody Grand Prix was a short, *yoik*-inspired tune, *Sámi Aednan*, (the Sámi land). That song did not have any success in the competition which is for different popular tunes; nevertheless, it focused considerable attention on the basic issue at hand, namely the Sámi struggle for improved land rights, and extended this to a wider international scene.

Thus, *yoiks* as well as poems, serve as means of communication to increase insight into significant Sámi problems for Sámi, and especially for non-Sámi. At the same time they may inspire the Sámi to resist industrial developments, perceived as severe threats to the maintenance of natural conditions essential to the Sámi culture.

Utsi's poems are unceasingly topical; they bear the impress of a certain timelessness. The paper Charta 79, edited by the Sámi movement formed specifically in connection with the Alta case, bears clear evidence of that. One of its issues devoted two complete pages to the problems Utsi takes up in his poetic works; problems, that once again, have new actuality due to the Alta case (Charta 79, 1980: 4-5)³.

The struggle for better land rights is a recurring theme also for those minor poets who follow the lead of Utsi. The court has been chosen as an arena for testing basic original rights. The taxed mountains case, between some local Sámi communities in the south Sámi district and the Swedish state, concern-

ing rights of ownership to vast areas of land in the mountainous region of Jämtland is, without doubt, the most extensive case to date. Oscar Åhrén, from the disputed area, has epitomized the conflict in a brief but very striking way in his elegy on the judicial decision. Primarily Åhrén writes small, humorous short stories and concise, pungent pieces of prose. One could say he captures a Sámi form of humour, the contours of which appear quite subtly. His elegy begins:⁴

Black hair	Black hall
Black hat	Black men
Black coat	Black documents
Black prospect	Black ones read
— Judge —	— about us —”

There is not one Sámi who cannot grasp Utsi's message; it is just as easily comprehensible as, for instance, *yoiks* about persons, which are still, despite lack of words, easily recognized by all who are in possession of the necessary code. But the message is also very clear and easily intelligible for the larger society. There is no mystification concealing the full implication of the message. This the Sámis know, and thus they can make use of Utsi's lyrical material for quotations in official statements, etc.

Paulus Utsi, as well as Nils Aslak Valkeapää and Oscar Åhrén, communicate with, and get responses from, both a Sámi public and a public of the larger society. For the message to be communicated effectively, it must bear distinct, Sámi-specific features referring to form and content. In other words, the poetic work must have a thematic content that represents the Sámi way of life; at the same time, the form of wording should adhere to the thought structure typical for Sámi. The statement made at Paulus Utsi's untimely death sums up the importance the Sámi attach to his poetic achievement:

Paulus Utsi was and is our own poet —
our poetic voice externally and internally.

The Art of Modern Novel-Writing

ANNOK SARRI NORDRA (1932-)

The most prominent of Sámi writers using the novel as their basic means of expression is Annok Sarri Nordrá. Her novels are characterized by a psychological overtone. The role dilemma experienced by many Sámi, who, for one reason or another, are forced to leave their original milieu, is treated with great detail and sensitivity. This topic is very touchy, but it illustrates an important aspect of the Sámi minority situation. It is for this reason

that such a dilemma, resulting from the continuous contact between the dominant society and the ethnic minority group, should be given full attention even in a well composed artistic form; an example is Sarri Nordrå's trilogy about Ravna published between 1973 and 1981.

When teaching and training in the mother tongue is far from adequate, which is often the case in minority school systems (the Sámi school being no exception), students may acquire only partial competence in the two languages, for example, Sámi and Swedish. This general dilemma, caused by a handicap in communication, has been studied by sociolinguistics (see, for example, Ringbom, 1962, Hansegård, 1968). In analogy with such semi-language competence, it may be accurate to state that the enforced migration many Sámi have experienced recently could lead to a kind of semi-cultural competence. As an adult, one is not competent either in the Sámi culture or in the diverse patterns of the life of the larger society. In particular, this is valid for those who come from reindeer herding backgrounds, people who are used to living in a harsh, mountainous environment. In such cases, the contrast to the newly acquired life style is the greatest. The dilemma appears in full strength when a person wants to participate wholly in both ways of life, and instead, falls in between.

The leading theme of all three novels highlights various personal difficulties resulting from the sharp contrast between the two life styles. It is a matter of entering a successful career in the dominant mainstream society and at the same time maintaining full acceptance as a Sámi in the original environment. Many Sámi end up at the breaking point between the two highly incompatible cultures.

The title of the last part of the trilogy, *Farewell to Sáivo* (1981) reveals a message of its own. The term *sáivo* belongs to the Sámi mythology; it represents the life hereafter frequently reproduced on the shaman drum with a highly conventionalized reindeer and a Sámi tent (*kåhte*) (Ill. 3). To say farewell to *sáivo*, in other words, is to break with the old traditions in order to break out of the predicament. The entire cycle of novels is directed towards this final and conclusive message, which perhaps is a bit unacceptable for many Sámi.



Illustration 3

Even if Sarri Nordrå's novels are interspersed with certain biographic material one should not be

mislead into believing that what she relates is atypical. Many Sámi have, through the years, had to tackle problems similar to the ones reflected by Sarri Nordrå. These problems do not concern all Sámi who choose to move out. Certainly not! But they are valid for many of those who aspire to attain full competence in the two cultures. For those who migrate and choose assimilation, on the other hand, such a role dilemma will be felt less severely. With her last book *Annok* Sarri Nordrå goes further in contributing to an internal debate among Sámi, dealing with the essential question regarding the right to remain Sámi without having to play a definite role.

Sarri Nordrå maintains an intimate contact with her Sámi readers, and she often makes tours among Sámi to introduce her own books and recite from them. On such occasions she was urged to write a book for children. Both at the Sámi Folk Highschool in Jokkmokk and at the Nordic Sámi Institute in Kautokeino, such a request was conveyed. Her fairly short novel from 1977 about a boy who wanted to leave his mark meets this demand to an extent. It may not be a children's book, but it is especially aimed at young readers.

ERIK NILSSON MANKOK (1906-)

Another writer, both modern in stylistic experimentation and original in his use of polemic topics, is Erik Nilsson Mankok from the south Sámi region. In his writing he pleads the cause of the differentiated Sámi, as he prefers to call them, that is, non-reindeerherding Sámi. He initiated the forming of a counter organization among Sámi, the so-called Storuman group, which primarily aims at working for the interests of non-reindeerherders, a category neglected by the formal organization SSR (The Swedish Sámi Union). He is also one of the few who has attempted, untiringly, to induce an internal debate among Sámi in Sweden, a debate which is articulated in a highly artistic way. Besides various ideological pamphlets, Mankok has written two novels, very concise as to style and thematic content. The first one, *Mitt lassokoppel* (My Lasso Coil), (1962), takes up the delicate problem of the conflict between wealthy reindeer owners and the poor herder proletariat. This problem, narrowed down to a local level, is then related to the minority-majority complex, often depicted with apposite satire. His attack on the larger society, and particularly its authorities and bureaucratic apparatus, becomes more explicit in his next novel, *Infryst breddgrad* (Frozen Latitude), (1968).

Mankok chooses to experiment stylistically quite a bit; for him it is important to express himself in Swedish very closely to the way Sámi think in Sámi, *i.e.* to utilize the thought structure distinctive to the Sámi language. This proves extremely interesting but has led to mutual difficulties in communication. As a consequence of this, he has few readers among Sámi. His supplying of specific messages, therefore, may not be very effective, although it holds distinct qualities measured by the aesthetic norms current in the larger society. Nevertheless, Mankok's style of prose is definitely artistic and is used in a most original way. The question is one of relevance; in order to present problems referring to the north calotte you have to develop and make use of a "calotte" prose, as he himself phrases it⁵. He has also been awarded literary prizes for his personal, stylistic art. His style is often cryptic, as this passage from his first novel shows, but he brings out very essential problems:

They spend several thousands on the boring for copper here, says Lorenson.

Certainly there is not only copper here, says Gabdek.

There is zinc all the way to the front. And iron.

Gosh, Nicanor!

— Actually all of this is ours, says L.

— It is ours, we should have royalties. Royalties on the ore.

— They cannot take over the calotte, where we round up the mass (of reindeer).

— And impede the mass. The mass comes before fishing. Fishing is before farming. And farming comes before the mine. And the shaft.

— In the black score, he. It is impossible to stop the state. We have tried in the organization.

— The "lasaron", says N.

— The "lasaron".

We are the lasarons. We hold a bridgehead.

— But we have to work down the mass.

Mankok writes in Swedish and has had considerable problems being accepted by the commercial publishers. His works have been published by himself, which is a severe constraint. Small editions and limited marketing reduces the possibility of making these books well known, especially in the wider society. His books are found in many Sámi homes; however, it is generally agreed that they are extremely difficult to read.

At the age of thirty Mankok ceased working as a reindeer herder and began to study. He ended up taking a M.A. degree at Uppsala University, majoring in sociology. But having completed his degree he refrained from entering an academic career. Except for this interlude he has lived his entire life in the mountain world in the southern

part of Lapland. Accordingly, he is a south Sámi, a word he dislikes and regards with irony. That term has no meaning to him; neither has the concept south Sámi language. These distinctions he considers inventions made by learned scholars for their own convenience. The language issue is important to him, and he has worked out a grammar for his own dialect and has offered language courses. On the other hand, he has always preferred to write in Swedish, the reason being that he wants to reach the public of the larger society as well. He aspires to synthesize the Sámi minority situation in the form of literary prose, a kind of writing which bears signs of his training in sociology and other social sciences.

As a sedentary Sámi living in Lapland without a reindeer herd of his own, formally speaking, Mankok has a weak position as a Sámi. And it is exactly this injustice, which many Sámi have experienced for years, that he wanted to assail in his assiduous contributions for debate as well as in his novels. New laws have been established by the authorities in order to reform and improve the conditions of the reindeer Sámi. But for Mankok and his equals nothing seems to be ameliorated. Or, as he says himself:

According to the new Reindeer Husbandry Law of 1971 I have no fishing right, no hunting right, no right to build a turf hut. Then surely something is wrong! My own rights inherited from my fore-fathers, it should not be possible to sweep them away just through a law. (Mankok, 1981:12).

In summary, all six writers mentioned here are related to a community of the reindeer Sámi subculture. Four of them maintain a clear connection to the community even as adults, whereas Annok Sarri Nordrá and Nils Aslak Valkapää are more marginally attached, primarily through their experiences in childhood and youth. This basic experience is frequently utilized in their writings. The reindeer Sámi culture provides a strong symbolic value for the Sámi in general; this is clearly reflected in the literary products discussed above.

An important question to ask as an anthropologist is, are these literary works read by Sámi? We know they are read by others; both Sarri Nordrá and Paulus Utsi have attained a certain position in the general circles of writers. Their books are also found in many Sámi homes, as are the works by Mankok. It can be confirmed that the interest in Sámi writers is increasing among Sámi. Now and then some of the Sámi authors also make tours to the area of Sámi habitats in order to introduce their works through recitals principally to a Sámi public,

as Sarri Nordrå did at the Sámi house in Kiruna in 1981.

The present establishment of the Sámi association of writers, *Sámi Girječáldid Saervi*, from 1979 is also an act that underlines the significance of the literary way of expression. This association, which is joined to the Nordic Council of Authors, works specifically for the production of literature in the Sámi language. Finally, it may be stated that different forms of literature are at present in a phase of dynamic development, which in a decisive way contributes to the vitalizing of Sámi culture in general.

Handicraft

Expressive culture by means of handicraft is one important aspect of non-verbal communication. Most of the leading Sámi craftsmen have developed such preeminence in creative power that they could be correctly viewed as artists. Their main occupation is certainly handicraft, but occasionally their creative ability and imagination carry them over to the field of art. At the same time they all base their artistic work on a traditional form of handiwork, and, undeniably, it is the link to the handiwork tradition that adds an ethnic specification to the more creative artistic products. The craftsmen were all brought up in a cultural setting where handiwork was a vital and respected skill. It was the era when things necessary for the Sámi household were manufactured, and the materials used were usually taken from nature, for instance antlers, bone and hide from reindeer, and wood and roots, primarily from birch trees. In addition, tin threads and cloth were used.

For those working with the joint material use of wood and antlers, the line of development is easy to depict. Craftsmen like Lars Sunna and Lars Pirak still make handiwork, but basically they produce very refined handicraft. In addition Sunna has made a sculpture of wood and antlers picturing the Sámi shaman, *noaide*, whereas Pirak paints both in water-colour and oil and carves rather abstract figures in wood.

Rose-Marie Huuva and Maj-Doris Rimpi, specializing in tin thread embroidery, make traditional items belonging to the Sámi costumes. When they make more monumental decorative works for a public building, for example, a church or a hotel in the Sámi core district, it is a matter of well-developed handicraft. Finally, they both make pictures combining water-colour technique with tin embroidery showing motives frequently symbolizing Sámi life and ideas.

When it comes to items made of birch roots, the evolving line from handiwork to art may not be that smooth. The connection between the original utility forms made as handiwork and more refined forms of handicraft is unproblematic. On the other hand, is it possible to produce art by means of root binding? Even the very best items will most likely end up at the border line between handicraft and art. Products, however, whose forms are completely subordinate to other aesthetic experiences perceived by the onlooker, could also be classified as art. The magnificent round, low-edged baskets, for instance, that are derived from the original cheese form, *teivo*, become fine art rather than handicraft when they function as pictorial experiences hanging on a wall. The very shape will then become less significant, whereas that which is emphasized has to do with colour shades of the root material, variation as to coarseness of the roots, and finally the way the different techniques of root-binding have been adjusted to attain diverse patterns. If the end product is particularly successful it exhorts the viewer to a more imaginative and free interpretation. In such case, I believe, even root artifacts have broken the border towards what is considered proper art.

Root-binding, though, is not reproducing art, contrary to the development of the other branches of Sámi handicraft. Nor can it become such an art form, since the material used sets clear constraints. Root-binding arts have no metaphoric qualities; all

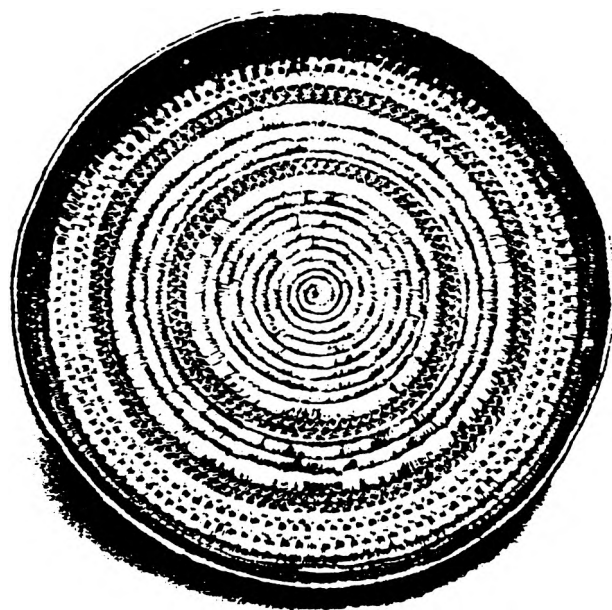


Illustration 4. This art object is made of very thin birch roots using various binding techniques characteristic for the Sámi way of root binding. Ellen Kitok Andersson, Jokkmokk. Photograph: Elisabeth Østmo.

the time it is a matter of objects, even if they are of high aesthetic quality and unequivocal originality. As the art object is developed, as to ideas as well as from a purely aesthetic point of view, it approaches the level of fine arts. To such objects a new dimension is added; they represent something more than merely shape. For that reason it may be correct to view certain parts of Sámi root binding as examples of ethnic art (see Ill. 4).

This distinction, as well as the connecting line from handiwork to handicraft and finally to art, may be outlined analytically by art critics and anthropologists. Far more important, however, is the fact that an active root binder, like Ellen Kitok Andersson, understands this connection in the same manner as does her public consisting of both Sámis and non-Sámi⁶.

Summary

In summary, Sámi art practitioners create various art products, which are directed primarily to the larger society but also to many Sámi. The art products have particular informative value since they communicate to other people ideas about the Sámi way of life, its basic values and specific technology, *i.e.* insight into and respect for a minority group. To the Sámi in general, this communicative effect reaffirms and strengthens their own cultural values at the same time as it increases their self-esteem. Certainly, this will have positive implications for the art practitioners, inspiring them to produce more creative art work which is ethnically defined. The number of craftsmen will gradually increase, partially due to the symbolic support they receive from the Sámi group, but also depending on the extended demand for Sámi art work from the larger society. A niche, the importance of which is constantly growing, for quite a few Sámis is thus established. Consequently, the art practitioners will form a vital group of Sámi, implicitly taking part in the minority-political struggle of the Sámi.

What they produce, I maintain, should be defined as ethnic art. As I see it, ethnic art is a work of art that derives informative power from an ethnic point of view. The expression of a particular aesthetic is included in this conception. Not all forms of art produced by Sámi, for instance, are ethnic art. The particular message of the art work must adhere to something specifically Sámi, concerning both form and contents. The same is valid for literary works.

To sum up very briefly, the ethnic art discussed in this paper is constantly in a stage of dynamic

development. The style of prose and poetry as well as that of different forms of handicraft shows clear vitality; it does not simply preserve traditional values. In order to maintain successfully the force of the ethnic art being produced, however, a cautious adjustment between continuity and change is required. Otherwise the communicative power of the art products may be impaired. The ethnic art forms among the Sámi certainly are characterized by such qualities. Inuit and many other aboriginal groups uphold a correspondingly high level in their ethnic art (Graburn, 1976).

NOTES

1. An earlier version of this article was read at a student seminar at Oslo University, March 1982.

2. This relational point is discussed by Ulf Hannerz in a recent paper (Hannerz, 1982). In more general terms Jack Goody has explored the implication of literacy in formerly pre-literate cultures (Goody, 1977).

3. While writing this paper I received a notice that Charta 79 has been discontinued.

4. This poem was originally published in *Samefolket*, 1976:12. The entire poem is reproduced in English in Svensson, 1978.

5. The north calotte, *Nordkalotten*, in Scandinavian, is a term referring to the arctic and sub-arctic region of Europe including northern Fennoscandia and the Kola peninsula.

6. This line of development has been dealt with in full detail in a special study of Sámi root-binding which has been carried out in the period 1972-81. The monograph lays primary emphasis on the active root binders and only to a lesser extent on the objects being produced. The communicative importance of handicraft, discussed in this paper, is also pursued quite extensively (Svensson, forthcoming).

REFERENCES

- CHARTA 79
1980 Charta 79, Oslo Nr 4-5.
- GOODY, J.
1977 *The Domestication of the Savage Mind*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- GRABURN, N.H.H., ed.
1976 *Ethnic and Tourist Arts: Cultural Expressions of the Fourth World*, Berkeley, University of California Press.
- HANNERZ, U.
1982 *Livet med och utan skriftspråk. Kulturteori för komplexa samhällen Rapport 3*, Stockholms Universitet.

HANSEGÅRD, NE.

1968 Tvåspråkighet och halvspråkighet, Stockholm, Aldus.

MADUBUIKE, I.

1975 The Politics of Assimilation and the Evolution of the Novel in Senegal, African Studies, Vol. 18:2.

MURPHY, W.P.

1978 Oral Literature, Annual Review of Anthropology, Vol. 7.

NILSSON MANKOK, E.

1963 Mitt Lassokoppel, Vilhelmina.

1968 Infryst Breddgrad, Vilhelmina.

O'CROHAN, T.

1937 The Island Man, Oxford, Oxford University Press.

RINGBOM, H.

1962 Tvåspråkigheten som forskningsobjekt, Finsk tidskrift 6.

SAMEFOLKET

1976 Samefolket, 1976:2.

1981 Samefolket, 1981:12.

SAPIR, J.D. and J.C. CROCKER, eds.

1977 The Social Use of Metaphor, Philadelphia, University Pennsylvania Press.

SARRI NORDRÅ, A.

1973 Ravnas Vinter, Oslo, Cappelens Forlag.

1975 Fjellvuggen, Oslo, Cappelens Forlag.

1977 Gutten som ville sette spor etter seg, Oslo, Cappelen Forlag.

1981 Avskjed med Saivo, Oslo, Cappelen Forlag.

SVENSSON, T.G.

1978 Culture Communication and Sámi Ethnic Awareness, Ethnos, Vol. 43.

n.d. Asa Kitok och hennes döttrar – en studie av samisk rotslöd, in press.

TURI, J.

1910 Mitalus Sámid Birra, English version "Turi's Book of Lapland, 1931, England, Jonathan Cape Ltd.

UTSI, P.

1970 Dikter, i Bygd och Vildmark, Lulea.