

**Photographic Portraits as Dialogical Contact Zones: The Portrait Gallery in *Sápmi* –*****Becoming a Nation* (2000-) at the Arctic University Museum of Norway**

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The point of departure for this essay is a series of eleven contemporary photographic portraits of Sámi people in large formats presented in the exhibition *Sápmi – Becoming a Nation* (2000-) at the Arctic University Museum of Norway, in Tromsø.<sup>1</sup> The photographs were commissioned by the curators, and they were shot by documentary photographer, photojournalist, and filmmaker Harry Johansen (b. 1958). Working mainly as a freelance photojournalist, Johansen, who himself is a Sámi, was developing his photographic practice in the middle of the ethnopolitical uprising that took place in Norway from the 1970s onwards.

Located in the first room of *Sápmi – Becoming a Nation*, the colour photographs set the scene by presenting a portrait gallery in a half circle (see Figure 11.1). Entering the room, museum visitors are enclosed by oversize, full-body or -breast portraits of six women and five men photographed at different places and in diverse environments. The unframed photographs, mounted on wall panels, are more than life-like in size. By highlighting each of the elevated photographs in the soft-lit room with a single spotlight, the presentation draws the visitor's attention up towards the faces of those portrayed, making it almost impossible not to meet their gazes.

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<sup>1</sup> The Arctic University Museum of Norway was formerly known as the Tromsø Museum and Tromsø University Museum.

<Insert Figure 11.1>

**Figure 11.1** Overview of the portrait gallery in *Sápmi – Becoming a Nation*, featuring Harry Johansen's photographs. Photo by June Åsheim. Courtesy Arctic University Museum of Norway

In a display case placed under each photograph, one or several objects chosen by the people portrayed are on display, for example, a book or other everyday objects such as a tool or garments. A sign placed on top of each display case states the subject's full name, occupation, place of origin, and residence. No additional information is given, either about the subjects, the photographer, the photographic situation, or the objects on display.

By referring to the photographed subjects' occupations and focusing on how they inhabit different societal spheres, the photographs signal that Sámi people are heterogeneous. Leaving out essentializing icons of Sámi identity, which museums and academies have contributed to creating in the past and the present, the presentation challenges visitors to recognize the people's ethnic identity through an analytic approach, for example, by making the audience imagine what kind of relationship exists between the portrayed subject and the corresponding objects on display (Ragazzi and Nerici 2019, 140–41). However, some of the sitters wear Sámi clothes and symbols, and the Sámi flag positioned next to each subject's name anchors the photographs and identifies the subjects as Sámi. On a panel placed between the portraits, a statement taken from the 1971 Sámi Cultural Program is presented. It contextualizes the photographs by pointing out how Sámi identity and Sápmi as a concept are understood from a Sámi perspective: "We are Sámi and we want to be Sámi, no more, no less than other peoples. We are one people and we have our own land, our own language, and cultural and social structure."

The noticeably upfront and objective style of the photographs points to both the classical portrait tradition and a broader turn in photography and art that took place in the 1990s, when ethnographic-inspired practices and deadpan approaches marked an aesthetics of indifference (Vinegar 2009, 858) characterized by a commitment to an antihierarchical organization of universally valid facticity operating as a total affirmation<the meaning here is unclear>.

Johansen's contribution to *Sàpmi – Becoming a Nation*, which I suggest could be considered an artistic intervention, thus brings up the question of representation and politics in ethnographic museums in general. In the wake of the crisis of representation, which began in the 1980s, the emphasis on the relationship between the aesthetics of ethnographic photography and the forces of domination and repression have challenged curatorial conventions in ethnographic museums. Hilde Wallem Nielssen (2014, 71) has, for example, demonstrated how past display techniques, such as dioramas and the uncritical use of photographs, kept “the past alive in ways that may work against and even undermine contemporary perspectives in the display.”

Bearing this in mind, I discuss how Johansen's portrait gallery works in the context of Sámi exhibitions at the Arctic University Museum of Norway. Does it succeed in breaking or challenging problematic curatorial conventions? And to what extent does it conform to the intention of the curators,<sup>2</sup> who wanted the photographs to represent Sámi culture through a multitude of different identities? By expanding the concept of the contact zone, first defined by Mary Louise Pratt (1991, 34) as a “social space where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power, such as colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths as they are lived out in many parts of the world today,” I suggest that

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<sup>2</sup> Ivar Bjørklund, interview with author, March 25, 2019.

photographic portraits can make audiences recognize the subjects presented in exhibitions on a more fundamental and existential level.

### <1>**The Performativity of the Photographic Portraits**

There is a notable, powerful presence in each of the images in *Sápmi – Becoming a Nation*, for example, in the photographs of the young schoolgirl Marja Kristiine Eriksen Partapuoli, the odd-job worker Tor Aikio, and the artist Annelise Josefsen. Partapuoli is photographed while standing on a desolate road in a spring-winter northern landscape, or *gidádálvve*, as the season is called in the Sámi language (see Figure 11.2). She is dressed in everyday clothes and a bicycle helmet and carries a backpack. She holds her bicycle, seemingly about to leave for school in the morning. Her portrait conveys curiosity. Her gaze is directed inquisitively towards the camera. Partly smiling, she also expresses a kind of reservation, as if she is holding something back or is overwhelmed by being photographed.

<Insert Figure 11.2>

**Figure 11.2** Harry Johansen, portraits of Karen Ellen Marie Utsi, Johan Larsen, and Marja Kristiine Eriksen Partapuoli. Photo by Hanne Hammer Stien. Courtesy Arctic University Museum of Norway

Tor Aiko, in contrast, does not face the camera but seems caught up in his own mind (see Figure 11.3). He looks down, as if not noticing the photographer's presence, or wilfully ignoring it. His portrait appears to be taken outdoors during summer or autumn. Aiko is wearing a T-shirt and a slouch hat decorated with souvenirs or tokens. His skin is rough and perhaps darkened from spending a lot of time outdoors. The caption describes him as an odd-job worker,

something that the slouch hat also indicates. Significantly, Aikio chose a book to be exhibited in the display case that corresponds with his photograph. More precisely, it is a book by his namesake, the Sámi author Matti Aikio (1872–1929), who wrote about his “bohemian” life as an artist in Kristiania (the old name for Oslo) in the late nineteenth century. Aiko thus hints at a more cosmopolitan identification; he flirts with the idea of being an outsider – maybe not only in society at large but also within the Sámi community.

<Insert figure 11.3>

**Figure 11.3** Harry Johansen, portrait of Tor Aikio. Photo by Hanne Hammer Stien. Courtesy Arctic University Museum of Norway

Unlike Aiko, female artist Annelise Josefsen meets the photographer with a confrontational, decisive gaze (see Figure 11.4). The portrait projects an image of playful contrasts. Standing in a quarry, she wears a sheath dress and appears to be ready to go to work at any minute. Placed in the foreground of the photograph, a hammer, a chisel, and a pair of working gloves may signify the demanding labour of an artist. The portrait not only challenges conventional representations of (Sámi) women but also of female artists and women in general.

<Insert Figure 11.4>

**Figure 11.4** Harry Johansen, portraits of Anita Dunfjeld Aagård (*left*) and Annelise Josefsen (*right*) <left and right correct here? YES, it is correct.>. Photo by Hanne Hammer Stien.

Courtesy Arctic University Museum of Norway

One of the portraits stands out because the subject is not presenting a frontal view. The photo shows reindeer owner Karen Ellen Marie Utsi sitting on a snowmobile in a calm winter landscape (see Figure 11.2). While the snowmobile seemingly moves away from the camera, Utsi looks back, as if she is about to disappear into the white, monochrome landscape. The photograph draws attention to the fact that the portrait series repeatedly emphasizes the subjects' occupations – either through their environment or through objects in the photographs.<sup>3</sup> Farmer Johan Larsen, for example, was photographed in front of his tractor holding a pitchfork (see Figure 11.2), and teacher Anita Dunfjeld Aagård was photographed sitting in front of a map with a children's book in her hands (see Figure 11.4).

This contextualization of the sitters relates to the tradition of ethnographic portraiture. But it also references the classical portrait tradition and the work of contemporary art photographers inspired by the so-called ethnographic turn of, among others, the *Neue Sachlichkeit* of the 1920s (Rutten, van Dienderen, and Soetaert 2013; Ekeberg 2009; Foster 1995). Rineke Dijkstra, for instance, explores transitions and identity formations in her photographic portraits. Johansen's Sámi portraits, in a sense, recall Dijkstra's large-scale photographs, which capture subjects at unguarded moments with revealing poses and gestures that correspond to the passage of time as experienced by the human body.

Arguing that all photographic portraits are performative, Peggy Phelan (1993–96, 35–36<not in Refs Now in Refs>) specifically associates this performativity with the human body.

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<sup>3</sup> Taken together, the series depicts a journalism student, an inshore fisher, a reindeer owner, a social-assistance worker, a retired farmer, a retired salmon fisher, a sculptor, a teacher, a cultural worker, a former sailor, an odd-job worker, and a pupil.

Photographic portraits strive at all times to create an inner form that reproduces the body of the portrayed so that it appears as a “real” body, she argues. In an attempt to create a present and real body, subjects stage themselves as images. Per? Does this work? Phelan, the portraits in *Sápmi – Becoming a Nation* can be understood as a space where the self-examination of the person portrayed, and the photographer’s examination of the person meet. But this meeting is also influenced by the larger context of the exhibition.

### <1>*Sápmi – Becoming a Nation*

Exhibitions at the Arctic University Museum of Norway largely reflect the museum’s collections and the main fields of research that museum staff conduct. After passing exhibitions on Arctic geology and wildlife on the first floor, visitors encounter two large exhibitions on the second floor: the relatively recent *Sápmi – Becoming a Nation* and the more than forty-year-old *The Sámi Culture* (from 1973). The latter was curated by ethnographer Ørnlv Vorren in close collaboration with renowned Sámi artist Iver Jåks, among others (Snarby 2018, 66; Kvist 1998; Vorren 1972).<sup>4</sup> The introduction to *The Sámi Culture* states that the purpose of the exhibition is

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<sup>4</sup> Ørnlv Vorren received a master’s degree in geography and ethnography from the University of Oslo in 1944 (Storm 2007, 218–220). In 1949, he was hired in a joint position at Tromsø Museum and the Teacher’s Training Collage in Tromsø. That same year, the Department of Sámi Ethnography was established at the museum, and in 1952 Vorren’s position as curator became full-time. He was appointed head curator in 1959 and professor in 1971. During his career at Tromsø Museum, Vorren took on different positions: he was bursar, acting director, and director, and after the establishment of the university in the early 1970s, he also took part in the

to document Sámi culture and to show how the Sámi form a distinct Fenno-Scandinavian ethnic group with roots that go back to the region's prehistory.<sup>5</sup> Since *The Sámi Culture* and *Sápmi – Becoming a Nation* are exhibited side by side, they appear to be interconnected, even though they derive from different decades and different scholarly discourses. Before I discuss the differences, I'll situate the portrait gallery in the museum context.

*Sápmi – Becoming a Nation* has a multifaceted overall design, which the curators characterize as a multimedia presentation (Eidheim, Bjørklund, Brantenberg 2012, 105). By presenting different kinds of materials and mediums such as photos, texts, objects, books, sound, films, and videos in a collage-like way without explanatory captions, the exhibition invites visitors to connect and interpret the material themselves in an ongoing dialogical process (Ragazzi 2008, 105).

The room where the photographic portraits are located works as an introduction to the exhibition, which is organized into four interconnected rooms. Each room is dedicated to different themes, starting with the rebuilding of northern Norway during the postwar decades, moving through the politics of "equality" and Norwegianization, to the awakening of the

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development of teaching social and ethnic relationships and Sámi languages in the Department of Sámi Studies and the Department of Languages and Literature.

<sup>5</sup> The main narrative of *The Sami Culture* comes from a book with the same title as the exhibition, first published in Norwegian in 1957 by Vorren and Ernst Manker and later translated into several languages (Fonneland 2019, 125–26).

ethnopolitical and cultural movement and the Áltá-Guovdageaidnu Action.<sup>6</sup> It ends with the institutionalization of Sámi organizations, the establishment of the Sámi Parliament, and a description of the diversity of Sámi cultural expressions that existed at the end of the 1990s.

The first object that visitors face is a red-coloured map marking the territory of Sápmi, which overlaps a green-coloured map of Norway, Sweden, Finland, and Russia. The map is followed by a short explanatory text recognizing Sápmi as a distinct nation: “*Sápmi* is the Sámi term for the Sámi homeland and society. This is a nation with no national borders, but with a common language, and a shared history and culture.” By using the term *Sápmi* in the introduction, the museum takes an explicit stance in a political discussion regarding the Sámi as an Indigenous people with rights to their own language, history and culture, as well as land and water.

This is the information that frames the portraits in the introductory section. Within the exhibition as a whole, the portrait gallery works both as a way of depicting or representing the inhabitants of Sápmi in a more general matter and as a materialization of the presence of Sámi individuals – subjects – in contemporary society. The portrait gallery also stands in contrast to the other Sámi exhibition, in which no Sámi individuals are presented whatsoever. In light of the text that appears in the introductory room – which, on the one hand, defines Sápmi as a nation based on a common language and a shared history and culture and, on the other hand, gives

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<sup>6</sup> The Áltá-Guovdageaidnu action (ca. 1978–82) was launched against the construction of a large dam across Áltáeatnu (the Áltá River) in Sápmi/northern Norway. It grew out of an unexpectedly broad movement of solidarity in civil society – Sámi, Norwegian, and international – in which Sámi artists played an important role (Hætta 2020, 10).

voice to the Sámi people, who are struggling for their rights and want to be able to define their own identity – the photographic gallery makes the tension between the representational level and the presentational level of the exhibition explicitly present.

### <1>**The Portrait Gallery**

The idea for *Sápmi – Becoming a Nation* came as a critical response to *The Sámi Culture*. Conversations about a new exhibition on Sámi culture started at the Department of Sámi Ethnography (which no longer exists) at the Arctic University Museum of Norway in 1996 (Eidheim, Bjørklund, and Brantenberg 2012, 114–15). At that time, department staff consisted of four curators: Ivar Bjørklund, Terje Brantenberg, Johan Albert Karlstad, and Dikka Storm. In addition, a visiting professor at the department, Harald Eidheim, took a central role in the discussions as the first person to put forward the idea of a new exhibition. These five became the core project group working on *Sápmi – Becoming a Nation*.

The curators generally criticized *The Sámi Culture* for being outdated both in form and content and particularly for ignoring the growing ethno-political discourse at work at the end of the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s (Eidheim, Bjørklund, and Brantenberg 2012, 103; 2002, 128–29). This ethno-political discourse and mobilization centred on the difficult situation of the Sámi minority, their oppression and marginalization. After the Second World War, the Norwegianization process and the modernization of northern Norway made Sámi people even more marginalized than they had been before the war. In the course of the 1960s, more Sámi people got involved in Sámi political issues, particularly young people who were fighting for Sámi rights, taking up Sámi languages and cultural expressions, and trying to articulate the diversity of Sámi identities (Bjørklund 2000). According to Harald Eidheim, Ivar Bjørklund, and

Terje Brantenberg (2012, 103), several of the people involved in the making of *The Sámi Culture* were Sámi and politically active, but this was not reflected in the exhibition. They also criticized the exhibition for excluding cultural expressions that flowed from the ethno-political movement, such as music, poetry, visual arts, and theatre. Instead, *The Sámi Culture* was given a conventional fact- and object-oriented form, with little room for interpretation. They maintained that the exhibition reproduced the “wide gap between notions which prevails among Norwegians concerning the life of Sami and their actual position in national and international affairs, as well the creative cultural and ethno-political development which has taken place in the Sami world since the middle of the previous century” (Eidheim, Bjørklund, and Brantenberg 2012, 99). Thus, the portrait gallery in *Sápmi – Becoming a Nation* was a direct result of this critique of *The Sámi Culture*. The aims were to represent Sámi individuals in a way that reflected “a variety of occupations, life careers, opinions and conflicts, which gives shape to the dynamic relationship of Sami to the larger world during the latter half of the twentieth century” (Eidheim, Bjørklund, and Brantenberg 2012, 106) and “to produce a picture of the Sámi as actors who do not operate outside time and space, but who are actively participating in modern society” (Fonneland 2019, 129). NB!!! This quote is also taken from an article writing in English and cannot be changed!

The choice to commission Harry Johansen to take the photographic portraits was conscious, Bjørklund explained.<sup>7</sup> The curatorial team wanted to work with people who had different positions within, in their words, “the Sámi-Norwegian discourse”, and to create a space for self-representation, acknowledging the multicultural audience of the museum (Eidheim, Bjørklund, and Brantenberg 2012, 97, 100–1, 105). Johansen’s experience as a photojournalist and documentary photographer and his situatedness within the Sámi-Norwegian discourse made him **< an appropriate >** choice, even if they considered other photographers.<sup>8</sup> But what position did the photographer hold in the project?

### **<1>“All I Wanted Was for Them to Appear Beautiful and Proud”**

Harry Johansen’s photographic practice is intimately linked to the political mobilization of the Sámi peoples. At the age of twenty-four, after two years of photography studies in Luleå, Sweden, Johansen moved back to Finnmark, the northernmost county in Norway, in 1982. This year was a significant time in Sámi history. The Alta Dam conflict had ended with the Áltá-Guovdageaidnu Action, the era was marked by the revitalization of Sámi culture, and the ethnopolitical movement had reached its peak. Working as a freelance photographer mainly for Sámi and Norwegian media, Johansen was centrally positioned in this exciting and challenging time.

Johansen’s website offers peeks into his career and photographic production (**Johansen n.d.**) I refer to the webpage in Refs. Among the photographs is the image of the famous hand of

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<sup>7</sup> Ivar Bjørklund, interview with author, March 25, 2019.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

the Sámi activist Niillas A. Somby, Johansen's cousin, lost during the Áltá-Guovdageaidnu Action (see the Introduction, this volume). The website also shows another of his iconic pictures, a photograph of a young woman triumphantly waving the Sámi flag during Norway's National Day celebration in Oslo, 1992. Even though the police tried to intervene, Johansen managed to capture the scene. Back then, the sight of the Sámi flag was unusual in such a context.

The production context of the portrait series commissioned by the museum was rather different. The curators wanted the photographic gallery to represent all Sámi people living in Norway. Furthermore, Johansen was instructed to take into consideration gender, age, occupation, residence, and birthplace when producing the portraits.<sup>9</sup> The aim was to challenge stereotypical images of Sámi people and Sámi culture, particularly the misconception that all Sámi are male reindeer herders (Eidheim, Bjørklund, and Brantenberg 2012, 99; Eidheim, Bjørklund, and Brantenberg 2002, 129–130). As Johansen phrased it: “The reindeer herding is such a small part of the Sámi culture, but it is so easy to get stuck on it. For *Sápmi – Becoming a Nation*, we wanted something else.”<sup>10</sup>

When commenting on his photographic method, Johansen stated: “I have always met the people I portray in everyday situations. My task has been to look for the people behind the symbolic meaning of the finished photograph.”<sup>11</sup> He made use of this everyday approach in the commissioned photographs. In spite of being one of their own, Johansen found it challenging to recruit sitters for the project. It was difficult to find people willing to expose their everyday lives in front of a camera, thus becoming part of a public museum display. After a few rounds of

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<sup>9</sup> Harry Johansen, interview with author, March 22, 2019.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

experimenting with formal portraits in classical style, he understood he had to let the subjects decide for themselves how they wanted to pose. This decision came from recognizing the importance of avoiding the oppressive photographic practices experienced by the Sámi people in the past. As he proclaimed: “In the end, all I wanted was for them to appear beautiful and proud.”<sup>12</sup>

### <1>**The Use of Photographs in Museum Exhibitions**

In *Uncertain Images: Museums and the Work of Images* (2014), Elizabeth Edwards and Sigrid Lien argue that photographs form a crucial museum ecosystem. Even if this ecosystem is defined as a “finely balanced yet vital set of interconnections, dependencies, benefits and threats, which sustain a particular environment expressed through practices, materialities, hierarchies and values,” Edwards and Lien (2014, 4) hold that it is difficult to bring awareness to the way photographs work in museums because they are intertwined with other museum practices. Photographs can serve as pictures in the background, establish the historical context for other objects, illustrate or stage arguments visually, or provide “a sense of authenticity, ambience, memory and affect rather than specific information” (Edwards and Lien 2014, 8). Historically, photographs are not often positioned as objects or statements in their own right. This is the case in *The Sámi Culture*, which is organized around several dioramas and display cases. In the display cases, both colour and black-and-white photographs of cultured landscapes are mounted (see Figure 11.5). They reflect the scenic *tableaux vivants* that were so popular in the 1960s and 1970s in ethnographic museums. Photographs were blown up to become a central part of the

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

museum narrative; “underlining the photographs’ role in creating the realistic effect, the mannequins were often modelled ... exactly on people depicted in the fieldwork photographs” (Nielsen 2014, 65). This realism in ethnographic displays can be linked to early nineteenth-century living exhibitions (Baglo 2017, 58), which were then brought into the museums through display formats such as dioramas, which also have a prominent place within conventional displays of Sámi culture in museums.

<Insert Figure 11.5>

**Figure 11.5** A display case, *The Sámi Culture*. Photo by Hanne Hammer Stien. Courtesy Arctic University Museum of Norway

However, parallelling the 1990s ethnographic turn in contemporary art and photography, museums developed an awareness of the complexity of photographic images and art, of the ways they blur the border between art and nonart (Stien 2017). Consequently, the design of exhibitions dealing with “cultural others,” diversity, or gender tend to be marked by presentation formats and aesthetics that involve narrative contextualization and multivocal exhibition modes in which photographs have a prominent place (Naguib 2004, 2012<Not in Refs Now in Refs>). These strategies are motivated by growing recognition that photographs and art appeal to the senses and have a broad interpretive and critical potential (Purkis 2013).

### <1>**Photographic Portraits as Dialogical Contact Zones**

The critique of *The Sámi Culture* by the curatorial team behind *Sápmi – Becoming a Nation* must be seen in the context of the crisis of representation in museums. Critical voices against conventional displays of Sámi culture emphasized that the exhibitions placed Sámi culture within

an unspecific, traditional past, focusing mainly on reindeer herding, handicrafts, nomadism, and religion (Mathisen 2014; Levy 2006<Not in refs Now in Refs>; Webb 2006<not in Refs Now in Refs>; Olsen 2000). The use of landscape photographs in *The Sámi Culture* contributed to creating a sense of timelessness. In contrast, the people presented in *Sápmi – Becoming a Nation* are named and, to some extent, also contextualized. By positioning the portrayed as subjects, not in a timeless past but within the “same” time frame and space as the audience, the distance between the portrayed and the audience is reduced.<sup>13</sup> Johansen’s subjects are not exclusively reindeer herders who dwell in the North but Sámi individuals who live all over Norway, many in urban settings; thus, they inhabit the same spaces as many of the people who visit the museum.

Silje Opdahl Mathisen (2017, 66–67) argues that a new preoccupation with the present is notable in newer exhibitions on Sámi culture. Representations of Sámi peoples as types and cultural others have been replaced by personalized and individual accounts to show “that ‘they’ are ‘just like us’ but with the added extra dimension of another ethnic identity.” Marzia Varutti (2011) makes a similar argument when discussing museums in Norway and the display of “others” in a broader sense. She has found that the latest generation of museum displays in Norway try to transcend a divide; they “striv[e] to open up an in-between space where cultural identities are neither past nor far, but rather multiple, fluid, ever-changing identities that are here and in the present” (Varutti 2011, 33). Like Mathisen, Varutti (2011, 17) points to the use of contemporary photographic portraiture as a means to communicate that “we are all ultimately similar,” her main example being a photographic portrait of a Sámi girl in the entrance to the

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<sup>13</sup> Taking into consideration that it has been almost twenty years since the photographs were shot, we have to except a stretched-out time frame for “contemporaneity.”

“new” gallery in the display of Sámi culture at the Norwegian Museum of Cultural History in Oslo. This is the first image that catches the eye of visitors, and it is a photograph of a girl standing against a wall covered with graffiti. Her gaze is open and directed towards the viewer. The display case where the photograph is presented also contains a skateboard. By including references to global subcultures, the portrait conveys an understanding of Sámi identity as simply one of many identities in the contemporary global world. Sáminess is always in a process of becoming through negotiations on the local and global level, transgressing boundaries on different scales (Greiner and Sakdapolrak 2013 <not in refs Now in Refs>).

Like the portrait displayed at the Norwegian Museum of Cultural History, the portrait gallery in *Sápmi – Becoming a Nation* emphasizes sameness by pointing to Sámi identity as composed, dynamic, and multifaceted – typical of identity formation in the era of globalization. However, the statement from the Sámi Cultural Program, cited in the introduction, and the Sámi flag positioned next to each of the portrayed names also highlight the distinctiveness of Sámi identity and culture.

The portrait of reindeer owner Karen Ellen Marie Utsi (see Figure 11.2), for example, seems to connect the “timeless” past – which Utsi is looking back at – with the always coming future, where she seems to be heading. Although the reindeer and sled are replaced by a snowmobile, it is impossible not to associate the image with the “Lappish equipage” (Mathisen 2017; 2014, 197–232). This is a motif that can be traced back to the living exhibitions of Sámi people (Baglo 2017, 269–282).

In museum displays, the Lappish equipage usually consists of a mannequin wearing a traditional Sámi costume placed together with a stuffed reindeer. The reindeer are often pulling a sled, and the whole scene might be surrounded by a painted or photographed landscape,

forming a diorama (Mathisen 2014, 196) (see Figure 11.6). Mathisen argues that the Lappish equipage over time has become an iconic and essentializing depiction of Sámi culture, cultivating an idea of the typical, timeless Sámi.

<Insert Figure 11.6>

**Figure 11.6** “The Lappish equipage,” one of the dioramas presented in *The Sámi Culture*.

Photo by Hanne Hammer Stien. Courtesy Arctic University Museum of Norway

As I see it, by adding individuality and the specificity of time and space to the conventional motif of the Lappish equipage, the photographic image creates space for dialogical movement between the presentational and representational levels; it advocates for a different understanding of time and historicity. Similarly, Sigrid Lien and Hilde Wallem Nielssen argue that the exhibition practices at RiddoDuottarMuseat-Sámiid Vuorká-Dávvirat (RDM-SVD) <img alt="A small yellow square icon with a black arrow pointing to the right." data-bbox="845 475 860 490"/>, in Kárášjohka, break with dominant ways of structuring the past through the aesthetic framing of its cultural history display (Lien and Nielssen 2012<not in refs Now in refs>).<sup>14</sup> The timelessness of the display signals another mode of historicity, one that is fragmented and dispersed, and points to “a Sámi conception of time and space – a Sámi understanding of reality” (2012, 613).

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<sup>14</sup> Lien and Nilssen’s analysis of the exhibition practices of RDM-SVD opposes that of Bjørnar Olsen (1999, 2000). Olsen argues that the exhibitions at the museum create an underlying idea of Sámi culture as static by placing Sámi culture within an unspecific, traditional past, confirming the master narratives of ethnography that belong to majority museums. Further, he argues that these narratives set up a distinction between the traditional and the modern, as if “real” Sámi culture existed only in the past (Olsen 1999, 2000).

The portrait gallery, however, also points to the future, not least by demanding viewers to meet the portrayed people's gazes and to recognize their bodily presence, as if stating "we are still here," like in the performance of musician Sofia Jannok, featuring artist Andres Sunna (Jannok 2016), which can be interpreted as a call for restitution for the Sámi people.

Following from this, I suggest that the photographic portraits in *Sápmi – Becoming a Nation* work as dialogical contact zones. As mentioned, according to Mary Louise Pratt, the contact zone is a social space where different cultures meet and where negotiations regarding cultures and identities take place within asymmetrical relations of power. Expanding the concept to the exhibition space, Harriet Purkis (2013) argues that an emphasis on people and individual experiences through the use of life stories, photographic portraits, and a display mode that resembles artistic installations makes "newer" museum exhibitions work as dialogical contact zones. She emphasizes the value of the nonverbal and sensorial experience of museum audiences and refers to this experience as a dialogical one. As I read Purkis's argument, she is trying to expand the original concept of the contact zone by focusing on how photographic portraits can explicitly make audiences recognize the subjects presented in museum exhibitions on a more fundamental and existential level.

The seemingly expressionless portrait, of, for example, the school girl Marja Kristiine Eriksen Partapuoli (see Figure 11.2), can, in this regard, be recognized as a dialogical contact zone. It comes across as an encounter – as a clash and as a dialogue. Traces of meetings that are by no means symmetrical are inscribed in the photograph. The traces inscribed might be ongoing and unknown encounters in which different beholders are initiated, creating either intra-action or interaction recognition or misrecognition. What could be described as a photographic in-between space also reflects the complexity of the (post)colonial situation, which is a field of discursive

positioning through the always-shifting matrixes of I-you and we-other relations (Clifford 1988, 44).

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As an artistic intervention, the series of photographic portraits by Harry Johansen presented in *Sápmi – Becoming a Nation* demonstrates how images can work best in museum exhibitions – creating spaces for representation as well as self-presentation. However, the portrait gallery does not necessarily undermine conventional displays of Sámi culture; it encompasses a more dynamic idea of Sámi culture and identity as well as ideas about audiences as active **<participants>** (Ragazzi and Nerici 2019, 139–40). By focusing attention towards the presence and presentation of the people portrayed, the photographs become dialogical contact zones in their own right. Within these contact zones, the beholder can negotiate different and shifting positions, identifying with themselves or the one being looked at. The limited contextualization of the subjects makes the role of the photographs in the exhibition less fixed, more shifting and open.

Considering the exhibition and the museum as a whole, we must, however, also take into account that the audience's meaning-making process depends on how they connect and reconnect the exhibition experience with their earlier experiences. Hilde Nielsen (2014, 71) points out that permanent exhibitions continue to be “haunted by conventions and thoughts of earlier times, in ways that create discrepancies between the anthropologist's own research and the exhibitions they produce.” Thus, seen in relation to the use of photographs and dioramas in *The Sámi Culture*, as well as in the history of museum exhibitions dealing with Sámi culture, there is always a threat that the subversive potential of the portrait gallery might be undermined.

## <1>Notes

<insert notes here>

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[Positions in Nordic Photography II by Preus museum - issuu](#). It is a crazy long title and it is both in

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