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# Indigenous methodologies and philosophies in academia

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## Lectio Praecursoria

Presented on the 15th of May, 2019 for a doctoral degree in Humanities and Social Sciences at UiT, The Arctic University of Norway. The title of the doctoral dissertation is: *Diasporic Indigeneity and Storytelling Across Media: A Case Study of Narratives of Early Twentieth Century Sámi Immigrant Women*.


## Introduction

As is customary in Indigenous Studies, I invoke my ancestors and acknowledge the local communities on the land and affirm my accountabilities. I present this lecture in Romsa, a place in Sápmi, the Sámi people's home. My own Sámi connections come from my father's side, from Ákšovuonta [Øksfjord] and Lákkovuotna [Langfjord] in West Finnmark. I am *also* American on my mother's side, of mostly English in descent with distant ancestry from Yorkshire and Somerset Counties.

The Ph.D. committee assigned to me the topic *Indigenous Methodologies and Philosophies in Academia* along with the following questions which I will address in this presentation:

*Why* should the practices of Indigenous methodologies as shaped by Indigenous epistemological and ontological perspectives be introduced into academia more fully? And tied to that: *How* does increased knowledge and understanding of Indigenous resistances over time fit with growing movements to engage in “truth and reconciliation” efforts in the ongoing treatment of Indigenous peoples?

When I received this trial lecture topic from the faculty, which can be fairly characterized as complex with several moving parts, some of my own questions immediately came to mind: Do they expect me to get a job after this, especially if I were to speak to these issues directly? What are the costs of *not* addressing these issues directly, aside from the very real pragmatics of economic survival? Why does the topic of Indigenous methodologies remain so pressing in institutions of higher education and research in the Nordic context? How can I do justice to the magnitude of the *why* and the *how* of these questions in a mere forty-five minutes?



The short answer to the last question is that *I cannot do them justice*. These questions arise from a more extensive project than forty-five minutes, one Ph.D. dissertation, and one Sámi/American researcher, writer and teacher can do justice. But I can do my part to contribute to the ongoing conversation, a conversation that has been going on in this institution and other Nordic institutions for many years. Also, while the Sámi are diverse and live in the contemporary countries of Norway, Sweden, Finland, and Kola Russia, I am, after all, addressing you from within a Norwegian institution of research and higher education; further, UiT, The Arctic University of Norway, has been assigned the national responsibility for research on Sámi and Indigenous issues. Thus, I will focus most of my attention on the Sámi in Norway and the colonial policy of Norwegianization and its historical and contemporary effects.

There is a *why* and a *how* in these questions, which opens for a pedagogical approach. My entrance into this ongoing conversation on Indigenous methodologies in academia and truth and reconciliation will be both framed within and arise from the following: a coastal Sámi yoik text from Várjjat/Varanger; a semi-fictional narrative from an article on the *náhppi* [milk bowl] by the Sámi philosopher Nils Oskal; and a story from my own family oral tradition. The yoik, semi-fictional narrative, and family story manifest the “worlds” of three Sámi women: Kárin-ákko who is rowing to fetch some flour; Risten, a talented reindeer-milker; and Bire-máttaráhkku, my great-grandmother Berit Jonsdatter, who people used to say “just knew things.” The fruitfulness of this approach will hopefully come through in the presentation.

### **Kárin-ákko**

A Sámi friend of mine with familial ties to several local communities in East Finnmark used the metaphor of rowing a boat to shore in rough waters when one is facing a challenging process. The metaphor of rowing a boat to shore called to mind a coastal Sámi yoik—the yoik belonging to Kárin-ákko. Ákko [written in the coastal Sámi dialect form, ákko=áhkku] can be used for grandmother or elder woman. I learned the yoik melody and text when I was part of Sámi Jienat [Sámi Voices], an international choir where Kárin-ákko was performed more like “yoik-song” than traditional yoik. The following yoik text is presented in the coastal Sámi dialect from Várjjat/Varanger:

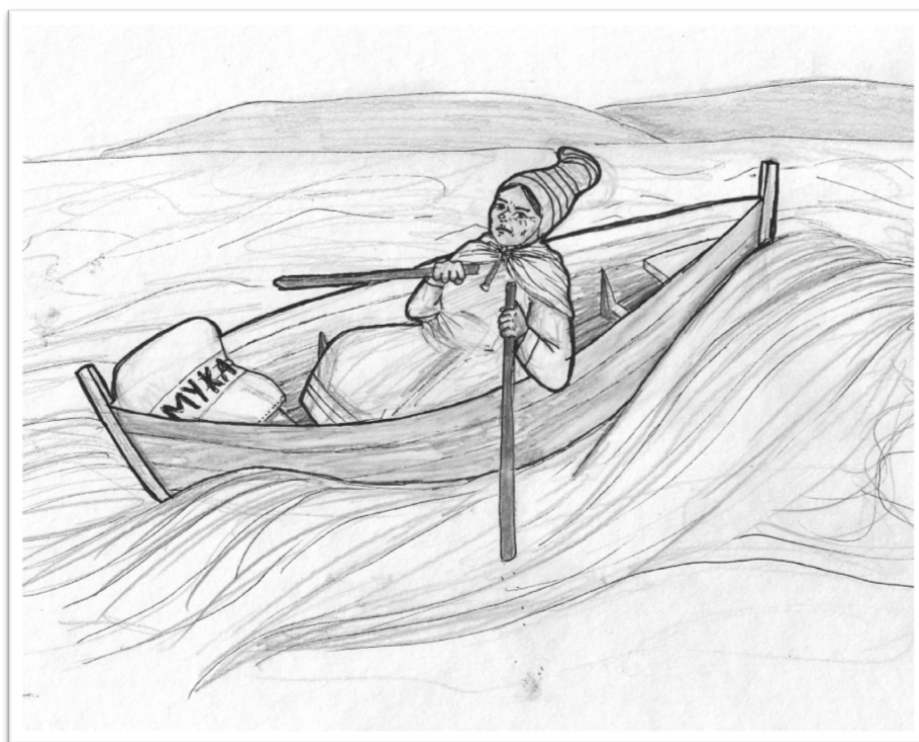
Kárin-ákko sukalii viežžak  
Diimmáš jáfuid sukkalii viežžak  
Njárggageaččai sukkalii viežžak  
Gornigállái sukkalii viežžak  
Kárin-ákko borjjastii viežžak  
Bárkuborjasiin borjjastii viežžak  
njárggageaččai borjjastii viežžak  
Diimmáš jáfuid sukkalii viežžak

[Kárin-ákko rowed to fetch last year's flour she rowed to fetch  
To the end of the peninsula she rode to fetch  
to the end of the peninsula, rode to fetch  
To Gornegállá rode to fetch  
Kárin-ákko sailed to fetch, with the bark-treated sail she sailed to fetch  
to the end of the peninsula, sailed to fetch, last year's flour]

The yoik melody invokes the movement of rowing with the long oars of a coastal Sámi-style boat. My interpretation or feeling of the melody is that Kárin-ákko is rowing with a sense of purpose. The place name, Gornegállá, and the task at hand, tells us something about the geographic location and historical time. Kárin-ákko's yoik was likely composed and given to her during the period of the Pomor Trade when the Sámi and others living in Finnmark would get flour from Russian traders. The flour would come in 120-kilo sacks, and Kárin-ákko was rowing to the place where the flour was delivered. While the text seems relatively straightforward, it tells us about history, belonging, and purpose. In other words, the text alongside the powerful remembrance invoked by the melody brings us into a represented world *beyond* the text and melody.

Now, I am not an expert on yoik. Multiple Sámi scholars and yoik artists who have grown up within the tradition have described the nature of yoik and the yoik's social function, and they have interpreted yoik texts from the standpoint of art, aesthetics, and theory. Some of them include, but are not limited to Ánde Somby (1995, 67), Lill-Tove Frediksen (2015, 287-294), Harald Gaski (2000, 191-214), Krister Stoor (2007), and Vuokko Hirvonen 2008, 128-136). But even with my limited engagement with yoik and yoiking, and from having learned Kárin-

ákko's yoik in the choir, I get this "yoik bug" in my ear as I tell you this story. I feel the urge to bring Kárin-ákko into presence, that is to *yoik her into presence*. Many people already know the foundational ontological feature of the yoik tradition, but it bears repeating for a broader audience: when one yoiks someone, something, some place, some feeling, some animal, or some event, one does not yoik *about* the yoiked subject, they simply *yoik* the subject. The owner of the yoik is the yoik's subject, not the composer of the yoik. The art and social practice of yoik extends beyond the limits of the self, and through a deep and profound remembrance, the melody and text bring us into contact with the subject. In this way, we may know people who have gone before us. In other words, through Kárin-ákko's yoik, we [the contemporary audience] can know her and her place and belonging.



**Figure 1.** "Kárin-ákko" pencil drawing by Diane [Nini] Jensen-Connel, May 2019.

My daughter drew the image you see with the aid of photographs and knowledge that people from the regional area shared with us. The subject is wearing a Sámi garment, the *gákti* from Várjjat/Varanger, and she is rowing a traditional coastal Sámi boat while transporting a portion of last year's flour from the 120-kilo sack from the Russian traders. But, importantly, this image is not Kárin-ákko in the same sense that the yoik is Kárin-ákko; rather, the image is reminiscent of Kárin-ákko, her world, and the world of her contemporaries.


## Risten

One of my favorite recent essays by a Sámi scholar is titled “The Character of the Milk Bowl as a Separate World, and the World as a Multitudinous Totality of References” by Nils Oskal (Oskal 2014, 78-89). In the essay, Oskal reflects on the changing contexts and uses of the *náhppi* or milk bowl in Sámi culture. The *náhppi* went from being an important utensil in reindeer dairy production to an object primarily of aesthetic value with autonomous and institutionalized norms for assessment. The essay opens in a Heideggerian frame, but Oskal’s own theorizing seems to arise from within narrative. The narrative he shares is loosely based on his own childhood memories of reindeer milk production in West Finnmark. The main characters of the story are a constellation of Sámi women reindeer-milkers: Sárá, Máret, Risten, and Ánne. The powerful protagonist is Risten who emerges as the milker with the highest status in the constellation owing to her familial position, disposition, and talents. Oskal describes the place in the story, the “reindeer resting site,” and illustrates the interconnectedness of the milking women in rich detail. The *náhppi*, as a material cultural object, has great practical significance at the reindeer resting site, as well as being symbolic of a relational world between humans, animals, and the land or place.

Oskal also outlines the decline in dairy production within reindeer herding and husbandry and the transition to reindeer husbandry becoming exclusively for meat production. Parallel to the decline in reindeer dairy production was the institutionalization of *duodji* [Sámi traditional handicraft] as an autonomous field, thus, the context of the *náhppi* and its distinct meaning or meanings also changed. He then describes the first juried *duodji* competition where a *náhppi* was up for review. In the following extended passage, Oskal compares the evaluation of the *náhppi* from the perspective of the institution as represented by the jury foreman and from the perspectives of the reindeer milking women, especially from the position of the powerful protagonist Risten:

//...The jury awarded first prize to a *náhppi* made by Lars Pirak, the justification, according to Guttorm, being that his *náhppi* represents ‘a new and freer form.’ This is a new way of describing and evaluating *náhppi* when compared to how I let Sárá, Máret, Risten and Ánne evaluate them in my example. Their evaluations of aesthetic form are merged with ethical and practical assessments and are based on





their life experiences, including their experiences at the resting site. This also highlights another conflict between the autonomy of the *náhppi* and the risk that the *náhppi* will become isolated from society and lose its ability to be significant. I assume that if Pirak's *náhppi* could speak to Sára, Máret, Risten, and Ánne, it would do so through relating to their life experiences. The 'new and freer form' of the *náhppi* emerges as something between Risten and Máret's *náhppi* and maybe leads to Ánne discovering new sides of herself that are reminiscent of sides Máret and Risten could have. Risten also notices the deterioration that the *náhppi* represents and is annoyed that important and well-established distinctions may be undermined. The point is that in order to prevent Pirak's *náhppi* from losing its relevance, it must be capable of causing annoyance, of offering hope, consolation and comfort, and of reconciling old, settled, but not forgotten, disagreements. The 'freer and new form' should be seen in light of past interactions with each other and use of *náhppi*.

The children of these women, who are now grown up, will perhaps be amused to recognize the youthful frivolity of Pirak's *náhppi*, while the women's grandchildren will have different life experiences from their parents and grandparents to base their interpretation of these new *náhppi*. The expert jury may have a different and autonomous basis on which to interpret the *náhppi* objectively. I, however, have difficulty identifying what this basis is, apart from hearing the form described as being 'new and freer.' A description of an imagined meeting between Risten and the chairman of the jury may be of help.

[ Imagine a long pause, and then Oskal continues with... ]

Again, I have been toying with the story and tried to depict a meeting between Risten and the jury chairman, but I have been unable to come up with a credible conversation. (Oskal 2014, 88)

What is Nils Oskal doing here? This is a productive and provocative narrative technique. We are invited to *consider* the consciousness of the powerful protagonist he describes as the "the great reindeer milker Risten." He is leaving it up to us, the audience, to imagine this conversation. We are empowered to either consider this credible conversation between the

protagonist Risten, or not to consider it, that is, we have the choice to disengage. Engaging imaginatively with this hypothetical conversation, however, requires empathy, or at the very least, the suspension of apathy. Oskal represents the world of Sámi women through a relational framework which illustrates that theory, story, and history are in constant interaction with each other, or as Lee Maracle writes “in every line of theory, there is a story” (Maracle 1994, 7).

### **Bire-máttaráhkku/Berit Jonsdatter**

This is my great-grandmother Berit Jonsdatter, or Bire-máttaráhkku and my great-grandfather Ole Jensen, or Ovlla-Máttaráddjá. She is the subject of many stories in our family oral tradition. Born in Lákkovuotna [Langfjord/Finnmark], she lived in Ákšavuotna [Øksfjord/Finnmark] at Mariteng after she married Ole Jensen, [Ovlla-máttaráddjá]. In the 1900 census, the Sámi place name for Mariteng was Dálvesagje, which means “Winter Place,” and it was written in the coastal Sámi form [sagje=sadji].<sup>1</sup>




**Figure 2.** Bire-máttaráhkku [Berit Jonsdatter] and Ovlla-máttaráddjá [Ole Jensen]. Circa 1940, Lákkovuotna/Langfjord. Source: Ellen Marie Jensen

On occasions when I have visited relatives from Finnmark, people have had this photograph hanging on their walls and it often prompted family stories about Bire-máttaráhkku and Ovlla-

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.digitalarkivet.no/census/person/pf01037575000892>





máttáráddjá. I am told that this photograph was taken around the time of their golden anniversary, around the year 1950, while they were visiting relatives in Lákkovuotna. One story that I heard several times reflected Bire-máttaráhkku's knowledge, a kind of knowledge that people referred to vaguely as "just knowing things." There was never a sense that one had to define, justify, or even try to understand how it was that Bire-máttaráhkku "just knew things." One simply respected that that was the way it was back then. The following is a composite of various versions of the family oral story that I have heard told by several relatives over many years:

She just knew things. She would know in advance that people in need were coming to visit her. She just knew they were coming. Some of the people coming might have been having trouble feeding their families or had a need for food. And since she knew they were coming, she would make a package of food for them and tie it up in a cloth with yarn. When the guests arrived, the coffee would be cooked and waiting, and they would have a good visit at the kitchen table by the window overlooking the fjord. They would share stories while watching and commenting on the various activities on the fjord: who or what was rowing or swimming by, where the birds were gathered, the placement of the sun in the summer sky. Undoubtedly, the language of many of these kitchen table coffee visits was Sámi, because Sámi was the language women spoke when visiting over coffee in the kitchen. And when the guests got up to leave, she simply pushed the package of food toward the guests with no fanfare or words. She did not want them to feel ashamed. And as they walked down to the boat landing, she told them to greet the others who were on their way. She just knew things.

This kind of knowledge, knowing that people were coming, knowing what they needed in advance of their arrival is what Margaret Kovach refers to as "inward knowledge" (Kovach 2009, 68). In an Indigenous epistemological perspective, this type of "inward knowledge" is on par with written knowledge or "book knowledge". Inward knowing forms part of the knowledge of community, rather than a community with "superstitions" or "strange beliefs." Kovach's concept of "inward knowledge" opens up for more careful listening and looking and an alternative to a dichotomous split between knowledge and belief.


Thus far, I have presented the yoik text of Kárin-ákko that illustrates an Indigenous ontology coming through in the yoik tradition; I have presented Nils Oskal's story of "the great reindeer milker Risten" that illustrates theory arising from story, and story arising from theory, and I have shared a family story that illustrates local epistemology as manifested in Bire-máttaráhkku's inward knowledge and expression of relationality and community.

Now I would like to tell you a bit more about my process. In the rumination phase of developing this lecture, I consulted friends, family, and people in local communities who have knowledge and insight. I also consulted scholarly texts in the world of abstract ideas. But seeking knowledge from within community is an everyday and seamless part of my process and it concerns the nature of knowledge itself. It concerns Indigenous epistemologies, ontologies, and philosophies that manifest within communities. Knowledge that lives within a community or family, does not announce its presence or importance in the way that abstract knowledge in written texts announces its importance. In short, this was my methodology and it could fairly be characterized as an Indigenous methodological approach, or simply, one approach to Indigenous methodology. This approach was not split off from other aspects of life in community with others.

Jelena Porsanger and Gunvor Guttorm wrote this concise and straightforward conceptualization of Indigenous methodologies:

The basic concept of Indigenous methodologies is the use of indigenous concepts, indigenous knowledge and experiences in knowledge-building, theorizing and argumentation. This also entails giving credit to indigenous peoples for their knowledge, respecting the knowledge belonging to a particular local community, and making Sami internal cultural diversity visible. (Porsanger & Guttorm 2011, 17)

Now, this is one of many conceptualizations of Indigenous methodologies. It is important to take note that the main subject of this passage —*methodologies*—is in the plural form. In other words, there is a multitude of Indigenous methodological approaches to research. However, all Indigenous methodologies are foundationally shaped within some Indigenous people's epistemologies, ontologies and philosophies and the driving questions concern the benefits of research to local communities. What seems to be one of the most quoted lines from Linda



Tuhiwai Smith's groundbreaking text on Indigenous methodologies is that one of the most important aims of Indigenous research paradigms is to “give back” to communities (Smith 1999). Importantly, “giving back” should not be understood as acts of charity or ways of dealing with colonial guilt, but rather, to acknowledge local people as equals and acknowledge that their stories and local practices are legitimate sources of knowledge. The intention of “giving back” is to contribute to the life and vitality of a community, which stands in stark contrast to strictly positivist paradigms where knowledge has historically been extracted from “the field” and used solely in the interest of “science” and the “academy.”

After coming upon Porsanger and Guttorm's concept of Indigenous methodologies, I realized that the approach they outline is basically my own process, both in this lecture and in my approach to research more generally. I conduct research in my own way because no two researchers are alike and no two research projects or lectures, for that matter, are alike. I do not mean to imply an individualistic approach nor cultural relativism. Rather, it is to emphasize that my approach or methodology is but *one* of thousands of Indigenous methodological approaches to research. My intention here is not to define or sanctify the content of Indigenous methodologies for all time; however, I do believe I can say with a fair amount of certainty what Indigenous methodologies *are not*:

- ◆ *Indigenous methodologies are not* discreet discourses than only a select few researchers are entitled to use or even talk about;
- ◆ *Indigenous methodologies are not* a set of principles that one should weaponize against an adversary;
- ◆ *Indigenous methodologies are not* reified things that some entities, departments, institutions, or powerful individuals get to claim exclusive ownership over.

Research methodologies are not uniform. And when it comes to Indigenous methodologies, we must remember that they are not distinct or separate from other aspects of teaching, writing, knowledge production, and everyday life. At best, they form part of a praxis that extends beyond institutions and beyond ourselves.


I have been living in Romsa/Tromsø for over fifteen years and I have occupied many institutional roles: student, teacher, researcher, and colleague. Over the years, I have witnessed

a myriad of responses to Indigenous methodologies from other people in various roles and from various institutional and cultural locations, including some of the following responses: *resistance* toward Indigenous methodologies from non-Indigenous scholars [accompanied with rolling eyes]; *resistance* or indifference toward Indigenous methodologies from Sámi scholars or administrators in positions of power [accompanied with rolling eyes]; *fear* on the part of allied non-Indigenous scholars and students who seek to use Indigenous methodological approaches, but they don't know if they "are allowed" to because they are not Indigenous.

But there are two issues that are of greatest concern here, or even of grave concern: the first concerns Indigenous and allied researchers seeking to use Indigenous methodologies while living and working in the shadow of hundreds of years of research conducted in the service of colonialism. I have seen the *anguish* that students and scholars experience when *their efforts are thwarted* by fear and resistance to Indigenous-centered approaches to research and education. They are anguished because they want to do right by their people, their communities, and by the standards of their own moral convictions. The other issue, and the most troubling issue for me, is the marked anxiety on the part of Indigenous students and scholars who yearn to use Indigenous methodologies, but they question their *own right* to use such approaches in their research, writing, and teaching. This anxiety I understand implicitly, and at times, even viscerally.

Herein lies *the* questions that have troubled me for many years. These questions might prick some Nordic-based scholars or readers, and surprise our friends from around the world: *Why is there so much anxiety about Indigenous methodologies? Why are so many students and scholars so afraid?* Are a yoik text, the story of a great reindeer milker, and a story about a grandmother from family oral tradition *things we should fear in academia?* Is theorizing from within Indigenous cultural frames threatening? Does this fear arise from experiences where our stories having been historically ridiculed or dismissed? Is making visible the everyday lives of Indigenous women and the diversity within Indigenous societies problematic? If so, why?

Margaret Kovach offers a way to understand this anxiety in an extended passage from the introduction to her text *Indigenous Methodologies; Characteristics, Conversations, and Contexts*. In this poignant passage or narrative, she describes an interaction she had after giving a presentation on Indigenous methodologies:



/.../ A young Indigenous student cautiously came up to me. She said that she enjoyed the presentation, but that she was wondering about something. She said that she was of Indigenous ancestry but had grown up in the city and did not have any connections with community. She said that she was drawn to using an Indigenous methodology but did not think that she could go this route because she did not have the necessary cultural connections. We talked about her aspirations and hesitations, and as she was speaking my stomach was churning, for she was not seeking guidance on a relatively straightforward question about Indigenous methodologies. Rather, her query was more complex. It got to the heart of why Indigenous approaches mattered in the first place. I had to choose my words carefully, for standing before me was the future. This young Indigenous student was questioning whether she could embrace her Aboriginal culture. It did not seem that her reasons were stemming from a lack of desire, but more about belonging. I did not ask for specific reasons, but I suspected that some of them were ours collectively born of a colonial history *that shadows our being* [my emphasis]/.../. (Kovach 2009, 10)

I was struck by the phrase *born of a colonial history that shadows our being*. In the Norwegian Sámi context, the contemporary colonial history that unquestionably *shadows our being* is the Norwegianization policy, that is, the colonial history in the Kingdom and nation-state of Norway, one of the four states that exercise sovereignty over the traditional areas of the Sámi people.

Norwegianization officially went into effect around 1850, but it had several antecedents. There was the violent suppression of the Sámi pre-Christian way of life in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, and the enforcement of Christianity through various abusive measures into the 19<sup>th</sup> century. There were oppressive tax regimes coupled with arbitrary borders on Sámi territories and the exploitation of Sámi local economies by merchants and traders. The Norwegianization policy was, as Knut Einar Eriksen and Einar Niemi illustrated, the culmination of geo-political conflicts and fear of the East (Eriksen & Niemi 1995, 4-56). Norwegianization also found justification in “nation-state science” which Greggor Mattson describes as “the scientific work of ethno-racial classification that made possible the ideal of the homogenous nation-state” (Mattson 2014, 320-350). Further, Bjørg Evjen demonstrated how Norwegianization was

justified through the social Darwinist pseudo-science of early 20<sup>th</sup> century race biologists in their attempt to classify the Sámi as a dying race (Evjen 1997, 3-30). Henry Minde revealed the social, linguistic, and cultural consequences of the Norwegianization policy (Minde 2003, 121-146), and Steiner Pedersen theorized how the concept of *terra nullius* was applied when the Norwegian Crown annexed Finnmark in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century (Pedersen 2010, 167-182).

The Norwegianization policy was enacted by parliament, sanctioned by research institutions and the Church, and implemented most fervently in the schools. Norwegianization was weaponized against the most defenseless Sámi of them all, it was weaponized against our child-grandparents and our child-parents in the most formative years of their lives. The legacy of Norwegianization has affected us right down to the clothes we wear and the languages we speak. Norwegianization, as a policy of social engineering, was instrumental in inciting or amplifying divisions between communities, within communities, and even within families. Policies designed to assimilate Sámi people or divide us into overly simplified and stereotypical categories has led to what I will call “identities of gradation” with one end of the spectrum being “ČSV” or “radical separatists” and the other end of the spectrum being assimilated or “Norwegianized self-haters.” As postcolonial scholars have theorized and Indigenous peoples the world over know all too well, once divisions are set into motion in a population, the population will be easier to dominate. Divide and conquer is the oldest trick in the book.

Undoubtedly, Norwegianization had gendered effects as well, which might go far to explain horizontal violence against women, children, and Queer people in Sámi society. And many people, including me, have pondered the deafening silence among Sámi people when it comes to taboo topics—this so-called, “Sámi silence.” Maybe this silence is ontological, because to speak of painful things, makes them more real. So indeed, Norwegianization *shadows our being* and it does so in the most intimate details of our everyday lives.

*But*, victimization does not define us. While Norwegianization suppressed language, dress culture and other visible or tangible manifestations of culture that many of us are in the process of reclaiming, we must always emphasize that the Sámi are *more* than the narrative of colonialism. Norwegianization does not define us for all time. We are not eternal victims in need of saving. And like our Indigenous siblings all over the world, we too, have a deep well of cultural resources at our disposal to persevere and move-on.



I am by no means an expert on Sámi language, but I am aware that there is an abundance of words in North Sámi that are derivatives of the word *birget* which means “to get by” or “to manage.” I asked the Sámi language digital community on Facebook to post words with *birget* as a derivative, and I added some from an online dictionary as well as asked a Sámi-speaking friend for guidance. One could understand this word art image as a window into Sámi ontologies of resilience and perseverance. Many Sámi scholars and students have made use of such terms in their theorizing and scholarship.



**Figure 3.** Word Art by Facebook friends and Jostein Henriksen. “Sámi ontologies of resilience and perseverance.” May, 2019.

### **Indigenous Research Paradigms and Truth and Reconciliation Processes**

This brings me to the final section of my contribution to the ongoing conversation on Indigenous methodologies, and further, to truth and reconciliation processes. At this stage, my contributions to the critical conversation regarding Truth and Reconciliation in Norway are preliminary or even tentative; the work of the commission has only recently begun. My approach to this historical moment of Truth and Reconciliation in Norwegian Sápmi comes from within an interdisciplinary Indigenous and Feminist studies framework, and from textual interpretation within the humanities; and it is from within these frameworks that I will outline

and reflect on the Norwegian National Parliament's Report 408S on the Truth and Reconciliation commission.<sup>2</sup>


Inspired by Truth and Reconciliation processes in other parts of the world, including South Africa, Greenland, Canada, and Australia, the Norwegian National Parliament has set in motion a Truth and Reconciliation process in Norway. In consultation with the Norwegian Sámi Parliament and organizations that represent the Kven and Norwegian Finns, the cabinet has constituted a commission, with the following broad overall aims: 1) to investigate the Norwegianization policy and injustices committed against the Sámi, Kven and Norwegian Finns, at local, regional and national levels; 2) to document or chart the history of Norwegianization at the local, regional, and national levels; 3) to investigate the ongoing consequences of the Norwegianization policy; 4) to make recommendations for further reconciliation policies.

My questions here come from within the fields of my scholarship and teaching, which significantly concern life narrative, oral history, storytelling ethics, and Indigenous and feminist methodologies. When I read the official document from the National Parliament that outlines the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's framework and mandate, the section on "methods" raised some critical questions for me from the perspective of Indigenous, Feminist, and Critical methodologies.

The following questions or considerations contribute to ongoing conversations on the history of research and the Sámi people, the ethics of storytelling, and the archiving of knowledge that comes from within local communities: 1) The commission proposes that the point of departure for their research process ought to come from within previous and existing research. Given that the history of earlier [pre-World War II] research *on the Sámi* was conducted in the interests of colonial aspirations, how can such earlier research be used in the interest of the Sámi people? 2) With that in mind, what existing research will be sanctioned in the research process? It was not until recently that the Sámi people themselves were even included as agents in knowledge production. Will Sámi researchers themselves be engaged in the commission's research process? 3) What are the foundations of "truth"? Whose truth? Who gets to define truth? 4) How does one tell the story of silence? Because silence also reveals history. For example,

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<sup>2</sup> See: <https://www.stortinget.no/globalassets/pdf/innstillinger/stortinget/2017-2018/inns-201718-408s.pdf>



Sápmi recently embraced Agnete Lorås, a coastal Sámi woman from west Finnmark who hid her Sámi background for seventy years because of the pain and humiliation of childhood trauma related to the Norwegianization policy.<sup>3</sup> Her seventy years of silence had its own meaning and content. There are many more people like Agnete in Northern Norway. 5) Will there be a special set of trauma-informed ethics when survivors of assimilationist school abuses and other colonial abuses make themselves vulnerable in the interest of knowledge production? Will there be attention to community-based ethics that extend beyond consent forms and checklists?

My own work concerns gender and the gendered effects of colonial processes and the ways in which agency, perseverance, and resilience are manifested in oral tradition and life narratives. The Sámi parliament has been instrumental in seeking to ensure that the gendered effects of Norwegianization will be addressed in Truth and Reconciliation. Hopefully, the approaches the commission takes may, at the very least, begin the processes of reconciliation within Sámi society, so that the whole effort does not end up only being of benefit to Norwegian society.

But I am left wondering the following: When systems of research and education were largely responsible for Indigenous erasure through forced assimilation, then shouldn't reconciliation also manifest explicitly in institutions of research and higher education? Shouldn't the Truth and Reconciliation process also look to the research efforts of Indigenous scholars and their allies who have broadly addressed similar issues from within Indigenous-centered frameworks? While many Nordic institutions and research communities have made strides toward interrogating nationalist research frameworks and colonial research paradigms, they seem to have fallen short of real transformation, as evidenced by the fear and anxiety that so many of us still experience in Nordic institutions.

If there is to be societal transformation and a viable reconciliation process, it seems to me that the very institutions responsible to train the teachers, produce new knowledge, and steer the direction of policy must be partners in the reconciliation effort and do so on Indigenous peoples' own terms, or at the very least, as equal partners. The full and explicit acceptance of Indigenous methodologies are only a small part of the effort toward reconciling. To be clear, we need Truth and Reconciliation processes, they are worth our every effort, but my sense is

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<sup>3</sup> See: <https://www.nrk.no/sapmi/xl/det-var-ulovlig-a-vaere-agnete-1.14181910>

that they reconcile the past, but fall short of bringing us into the future. Greater inclusion of Indigenous methodologies and Indigenous research paradigms more broadly, has the potential to address *both* the hurt and harm of past colonial policy and initiate a process of restoration and hope for the future.

## **Epilogue to a Trial Lecture**

This public trial lecture text reflects the culmination of a research journey that took me into the worlds and stories of early twentieth century Sámi migrant women and their descendants. Along the way, I was also confronted with the painful legacy of colonialism in my own life, and in the lives of my ancestors. My Ph.D. study *Diasporic Indigeneity and Storytelling Across Media: A Case Study of Narratives of Early Twentieth Century Sámi Immigrant Women* could be fairly characterized as an interdisciplinary Indigenous studies project significantly shaped within an Indigenous research paradigm. I also developed a Sámi-centered methodology in the execution of the research and writing. Thus, the topic of “Indigenous methodologies and philosophies in academia” for a trial lecture was perfectly fitting given the nature of my work.

Ever since the year 2000, when I received Linda Tuhiwai Smith’s groundbreaking work *Indigenous Methodologies: Research and Indigenous People’s* as a gift, I have been striving for greater inclusion of Indigenous knowledges and philosophies in academia (Smith 1999). I have also worked toward Indigenous-centered and feminist praxis in my own research, writing, teaching, and everyday life. As a bachelor’s student in Women’s Studies at the University of Minnesota, decolonizing and feminist approaches in research and writing were not only taught, but were actively promoted. Most, if not all, critical scholarship works in the interest of societal transformation; in transformative and decolonizing Indigenous studies scholarship, centering Indigenous voices, paradigms, philosophies, and narratives are paramount to knowledge production. Therefore, I was taken aback—to say the least—when I entered a degree program in a Nordic context where a handful of powerful scholars—both non-Sámi and Sámi—not only disregarded, but were openly hostile toward Indigenous methodologies and philosophies in Indigenous Studies. Notably, earlier detractors were especially critical of Linda Tuhiwai Smith’s timely intervention.



Like many Ph.D. candidates, when I received the trial lecture question from an “all-Indigenous” committee that included both Sámi and Native American scholars, I had a mild panic. But as the weeks leading up to the day of the public defense unfolded, critical and community-based praxis materialized. I was reminded of the very reason I continue to work within, and strive for greater inclusion of, Indigenous-centered frameworks in academia, especially in the Nordic context: community. Crafting the following trial lecture text was by no means an individual project. I consulted multiple people—relatives, friends and colleagues—about themes and ideas in this text. All of my helpers were sitting in the audience, providing moral support as I gave this lecture on 15 May 2019, at UiT, The Arctic University of Norway. I dedicate this publication to all of them.

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