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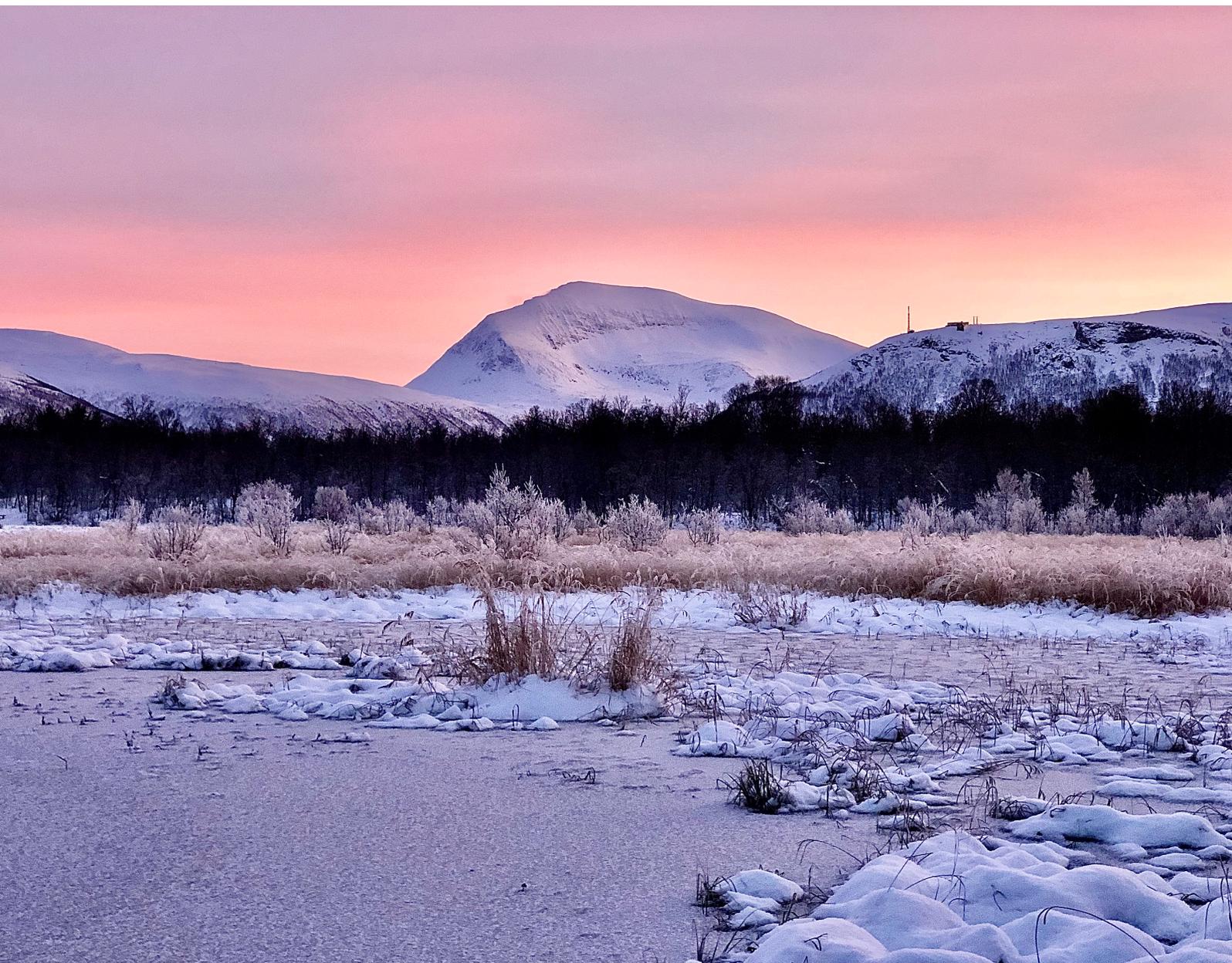
Faculty of Humanities, Social Sciences and Education, Centre for Sámi Studies

The Concept of Sacred in Sápmi

An Inquiry

Chloë Rain Cunningham

Thesis submitted for the degree of Master of Philosophy in Indigenous Studies May 2023



Cover photo of Sálašoaivi / Sálaščohkka (Northern Sami) or Tromsdalstinden (Norwegian),
sacred mountain in Tromsø, taken by me on November 24, 2020.

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Spring 2023

Supervised by

Bror Olsen

To Sálašoaivi

Acknowledgements

Any endeavor of this sort requires the support and assistance of more resources and people than I will remember to name here.

I offer my sincere appreciation to Bror Olsen for his support and insights and the many interesting conversations, without his encouragement I would have abandoned this inquiry altogether. Thank you to my indigenous teachers for everything you have shared with me, and also for the things you have not shared with me.

To the sacred land of Sápmi, thank you for bringing me here. Thank you to the Ancestors. Thank you to the water, the rivers and the sea, the mountains, the rocks, the fire, the snow, ice, and the ancient glaciers, the standing tall and the rooted ones, the winged ones, and the swimming ones, and to the reindeer. Thank you for all those who came before me, and all those who will come after me.

I am grateful for the times spent around the fires, amongst the mountains and by the sea. I am grateful for the warmth and generosity of the people I have met, and the friendships that have grown and taken up root in my heart. What I have received through the sharing of the stories of our lives, music, and song, and our many conversations over kitchen tables, around backyard fires, on mountain tops, and forest floors, is immeasurable in value. I am forever changed at depth.

Thank you to the friends who shared their fire making skills in the Arctic with me, and for those who joined me around the fires, while I learned.

Thank you for to the Center of Sámi Studies for giving me the opportunity to come to Norway to deepen my education of indigenous knowledge and indigenous rights. Thank you to all of those who allowed me the space to fumble along the way and to those who offered their sincere guidance and course corrections throughout my time at university.

I am grateful for indigenous scholars who have published courageous volumes of academic writings and used their voices to share hard earned perspectives to educate others, for which otherwise I would not have been exposed to.

Summary

This thesis explores the concept of sacred in Sápmi, tracing the trails of its existence through the historical past into more contemporary ideologies affecting recent events. This inquiry attempts to describe the essence of Sámi self-consciousness through their unique tradition of interconnectedness, by asking if the concept of sacred has value and place in the struggles of the Sámi of today, to preserve their cultural identity, as well as their ability to practice their beliefs and traditional livelihoods.

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Introduction

Sápmi, is the land of the Sámi, that stretches across the northern part of Scandinavia, Norway, Sweden, Finland, and Russia's Kola Peninsula. This thesis is organized into three parts that broadly ask the question “What can we learn about the concept of sacred landscape in Sápmi?”

Here my focus will be primarily on literature review, reflecting on common themes that I observed through my inquiry of the concept of sacred in Sápmi, the history and events leading to the contemporary identity of the Sámi people, and their relationship to the landscape and nature. I attempt to apply indigenous methodologies, bridged by personal experience, and informed by decolonial theory and anthropological science, to analyze the relationship between human and the natural environment, honoring the role of nature and the philosophies of sacred traditions of indigenous people. Using mostly modern literature with references to historical literature, I present stories that evidence the existence of “landscape as sacred” continues to remain ever present in Sápmi and amongst the consciousness of the Sámi indigenous people. I further reflect upon how we may benefit from adopting indigenous perspectives as well as deep ecological thinking when confronting environmental and climate change issues, resource, and land management concerns.

Ultimately, indigenous peoples' relationship to place is about more than simply caring for the environment. Across the planet, Indigenous communities, from the Sámi in the arctic, to the Powhatan on the Chesapeake Bay in the United States', to the Māori in New Zealand, have successfully stewarded the landscapes and the seas for thousands of years (Johnston, 2022). Traditional Sámi livelihoods were nomadic, and included reindeer herding, fishing, hunting, gathering, agriculture, as well as Sámi handicrafts, or Sámi *Duodji*. In the past, communities shared the fruits of their different labors, however, today the only viable traditional livelihood is reindeer herding. Hunting and fishing have become secondary livelihoods (Mallarach, 2012). A central and vital part of the Sámi culture is the knowledge embedded in their language of places, nature, flora and fauna, and community history.

The first section, introduces the Sámi and their loss of their indigenous knowledge, language, and traditions of “old religion”, highlighting historical instances of the concept of nature and the sacred. Part two explores modern examples of the sacred landscape, landscape as documentation of indigenous sovereignty and traditional practices, and a bit of insight into

Sámi-self-consciousness and what makes life worth living. The last part focuses on the sensitive issue of cultural zombification—bringing back of cultural practices of the past— and cultural appropriation—the adaptation and exploitation of indigenous practices without respect or support for the people who developed these practices and whose lands and resources are still being colonized—and questions the dominant paradigm around *shamanism* and reciprocal practices, as solely religious beliefs. This viewpoint remains a left-over remnant of colonial based epistemology still anchored in a thought process of separateness: an obdurate and society-inflicted split between intellect and belief, self and nature. As it turns out, the process of this thesis was about experiencing the sacredness of Sápmi, not about whether *the sacred* exists.

Methods and Theoretical Perspectives

Indigenous research methodologies arise from knowledge frameworks that are people and place specific, though the methods can be used across different contexts, one must modify the methods to suit the indigenous epistemologies of the research group or community. Though the Sámi are a people whose territory spans across four different countries, I will predominantly focus on the Sámi of Northern Norway. Tromsø was my physical residence during the course of this inquiry, and this exploration was my primary purpose in living there. Seeking shared conceptual ground (Tallbear, 2014) on which to stand on, the focus of my data gathering was on immersion into the landscape, learning the history of the Norwegian and Sámi people, and with some good fortune (or luck) I was present to some storytelling and sharing around fires, and witness to some traditional knowledge practices. It proved to be difficult to avoid falling into dominant narratives, such as “Sámi people don’t care about nature any more than Norwegians or anyone else,” or an outsiders’ concocted version of “the Sámi as indigenous protectors of the land”. The more time I spent in inquiry around my research topic, the more I became astutely aware of the pitfalls of insider/outsider perspectives. It would be easy to share idealistic views of the places I visited, the beauty and majesty of the north are almost inherent by any description. In writing down experiences and reflections, I understood that I was looking through my own lens, in attempt to grasp the essence of the local people of Northern Norway, the Sámi *and* non-Sámi, and their relationships to the landscape around them. These interpersonal dilemmas forced me to

consider the reasons behind my questions and lead me to abandon certain research topics or ask particular questions.

My primary focus was on more recent Sámi research, sprinkled with a few alternative data sources including walking the landscape¹ and experiences while being invited, as a friend, to kitchen table conversations, outdoor all-night fires, and Easter celebrations. I have chosen to use related literature from Native American academics in an integrated way throughout the thesis, because of my background, being from the United States, and because of my previous experiences in a wellness-based certification setting with a Native American instructor. Here I touch on a fundamental issue in the philosophy of Indigenous Studies: the problem of objectivity; how can one understand a subject without becoming intimately associated with that subject? In this case, I am referring to human beings, their inner motivations, and their conceptions of personal identity. In this case, I am speaking about indigenous people of a place, that I was unfamiliar with, as a non-indigenous person born on stolen land, i.e., the United States of America. How can one understand a people without attempting to engage in their perspective, world views, knowledge practices, and ways of being in the landscape? I could argue that to remain objective is to lack understanding of the subject at all.

The inquiry into the concept of sacred in Sápmi led me down many pathways, ultimately it furthered my education of indigenous methodologies, decolonization, indigenous rights, land management issues, and indigenous perspectives, spanning from the global level to the interpersonal level. Eventually after consuming a mass variety of writings, a collection of articles concerning a slightly different body of knowledge, the concept of Sámi-self-consciousness (Paine, 1987, Porsanger, 2012), began to form and a few themes and concepts began to stand out. I was left with a sense of responsibility to attempt to grasp something of the essence of Sáminess, even as they are an ever-evolving people characterized by diversity and multiplicity. In the book, *Research is Ceremony: Indigenous Research Methods*, Shawn Wilson (2008), presents the notion of research as an idea and practice reflective of cultural values and beliefs of the researcher. This viewpoint on research emphasizes relationships over knowledge, participant over authority, and holism over comparison and distinction, as a way

¹ Tilley, Christopher, 2022. "Walking the Past in the Present," in *Landscapes Beyond Land*. New York, Oxford: Berghahn Books, pp. 15–32.

for the researcher to honor the culture and people, participants, history, and subject matter of the research.

My approach to research included embodied immersion into the landscape. I journeyed to far places like Vardø to see the witch burning monument, and to Berlevåg to experience the northernmost community of Norway. I spent time in Kautokeino visiting a well-known *sieidi*, and a lesser-known spring. I traveled to and through Karasjok several times, camping on the riverbank of Karasjohka (Norwegian) or Kárášjohka (Northern Sámi). I visited the area of Tysfjord, a community which made national news in 2017 when a sexual assault and rape scandal was reported, of 151 alleged sexual assaults, dating as far back as 1953, almost 70 percent of the victims identified as Sámi.

I serendipitously made friends from Manndalen (Olmáivággi in Northern Sámi), while I was solo hiking and camping and exploring the area of Kåfjord. I accessed Reisa National Park through Birtavarre (Gáivuonbahta in Northern Sámi) and the Ráisdouttarháldi Protected Landscape Area during the autumn and stayed long enough to witness some reindeer husbandry activity in this area. I returned several times to hike Reisadalen, entering through Storslett, once spending several overnights in the free cabin located closest to the Sieimma rock paintings (dating back to 1800BC).



Picture 1 Sieimma Rock Painting, Reisa National Park, October 9, 2022

I engaged in the practice of walking the landscape, performing the landscape versus doing, and personal reflection to uncover narrative themes and relationships as they developed between me, the landscape, Sámi history, and the broader culture and society of Northern Norway. This approach was a result of a decision not to use interviews, due to the research fatigue of the Sámi people, and (after some time in living in Sápmi) the personal feeling that if aspects of contemporary Sámi experiences are to be shared with the outside world, perhaps Sámi people should do this. At the very least, someone more intertwined over a longer period of time with the Sámi community would be more appropriate.

Jürgen Kremer writes in his article '*Bearing obligations*' (2008, pg.147–152) that it is important for a western minded researcher to embody theories in her/his physical being. The awareness of the [researcher's] participation, however, increases a researcher's burden in terms of integrity, self-reflectiveness, ethical and other considerations of value. (Helenar-Revnall, 2010, pg. 46, Kremer, 2008, pg. 181) My investigative perspective, at times, dismissed the validity of categorization and hierarchy in empirical research methods. Instead, I chose a constructivist approach that conveys indigenous concepts of reality that are not sharply defined and are ever evolving across the borders of the nation states in which they reside and the communities and subset of communities of which they are comprised of and represent.

Methodological Limitations and Considerations: i.e., Personal Beliefs and Biases

I came to the north of Norway to learn about the Sámi indigenous people. This was a very purposeful decision, and one that I had considered for several years before arriving in Tromsø to embark on this thesis journey. I had been traveling back and forth from North America to South America for the seven years prior to arriving in Norway, spending time with two different indigenous peoples of Peru, the Q'ero and the Shipibo, learning about their knowledge of plants and animals and the traditional practices surrounding this knowledge.

My interest in coming to Sápmi was to experience the relationship to nature of the indigenous people of the North. Much of what I learned through experiences in an indigenous context in South America, was that the most important way of transmitting and understanding traditions, cultural practices, and their applications and meaning is through oral traditions of passing on knowledge while sitting on the ground in nature on the land of their ancestors.



Picture 2 Fire on Tromsø Island, March 20, 2021

My personal feelings, beliefs, motivations, and perceptions are inextricably interwoven into the analysis of the texts and influenced the context and process of which the gathering of information was conducted. I wished to glimpse, through examples of Sámi-consciousness, a valuation of landscape and nature different from the dominant Anglo-European epistemology which had historically showed limited interest in Sámi ontologies. Research agendas of the past had been linked to colonial economies. The lifestyles and knowledge of the nomadic and the “primitive” were seen as inferior to the value placed on state formation and functional analysis in anthropology.

After reading a number of contemporary books, poems, academic articles, and dissertations (including some research on Sámi experiences in the hospital system in Norway); and being exposed to Sámi activists in the community via social media and online blogs (West, 2020) what came to be clear is that the Sámi experience extreme research fatigue. Juha Pentikäinen, a scholar well versed in field work, concluded that the Sámi are the most researched indigenous people on the planet (Pentikäinen, 1998). Even a brief review and summary of the history of research on Sámi communities revealed deplorable acts of racism, demoralization of their humanness, desecration of the dead, and straightforward kidnapping of entire families and their reindeer for display.

A conversation with a Sámi friend and colleague asked me to consider my research from another angle and pointed me to Helga West's blog. West is a Doctoral Researcher in the Faculty of Theology at Helsinki University, she writes in three languages: Finnish, Northern Sámi, and English. She states "I choose the language based on my goal. When I want to make a statement for the Finnish audience, I write in Finnish. The most personal stories I share in my native language, Northern Saami. When I wish to join more global discussions on indigenous affairs, I write in English." (West, 2020) The article written in English titled "No, thank u, next – The Sámi are heavily burdened with Western science, so what?" begins with West sharing what it feels like to be approached by a stranger to be interviewed about her (Sámi) identity for research. For me it was clear, I could not compose one of those emails to *anyone*.

I was not interested in the stereotypical representations of old religion, for example the Sámi shaman with the drum or the mystical *Noaidi*, neither did I want to learn solely about landscapes through the reindeer herding population of Sámi. Rather I was interested in learning about the landscapes of the North through the ontologies (cosmovision) of the people living there. I was curious how including indigenous ontologies and epistemologies (ways of understanding that cosmovision) could help deepen my relationship to the landscape and personal experiences of nature while living in Sápmi.

The art of listening along the way (Pentikäinen, 1998), observation and walking the landscape as research, became my research strategies. Kim Tallbear prompts us to approach research creatively, and suggests research be not just data gathering, but relationship-building. She suggests research should be performed in less linear ways without knowable goals at the outset (Tallbear, 2014). If we must articulate specific goals, then these should be used as guideposts. "A researcher who is willing to learn how to "stand with" a community of subjects is willing to be altered." (Tallbear, 2014, pg. 2) I expanded data collection by reading Sámi-authored stories and books about aspects of Sámi culture and cosmology, existing volumes of Sámi history and culture (Lehtola, 2004, Solbakk, 1990, 2018), as well as a few key articles written in Norwegian that I translated using *Google translate*. My choice to not include typical traditional research methods such as personal interviews, group conversations, and general meetings with local persons in the community is due to what I learned about the position of many Sámi people who do not want to be treated as research and do not appreciate the constant grabbing of personal data. An undertone, that became louder over time was that

the burden of science on Sámi communities had become resentful, one Sámi author joked that every Sámi household includes an academic asking personal questions (West, 2020).

Ethics and Reflexivity

In my personal inquiry towards the concept of sacred in Sápmi, difficulties arose with several different faces, all pointing to an underlying question of who is qualified to discuss, document, or debate inherently Sámi ideas? As Robert Paine explicates in his article “Trails of Saami Self-Consciousness” 1987 there are several important groups of writings about Sámi information. One being Sámi authors, both academic and non-academic, another group are non-Sámi academics, and the third group of writers being non-Sámi or mixed Norwegian Sámi, who were raised in a Sámi environment. Which group has more authority to interpret and/or document Sámi world view, concepts, and perceptions of the Sámi? The Sámi themselves are characterized by multiplicity, a diverse group sharing some common characteristics, yet also encompassing a wide spectrum from oneness to individuality. Perhaps it is possible for an outsider looking in to see things more clearly, but this is still being observed by a person with their own biases and beliefs, making conclusions through their individual lens. Paine points out that the important difference is “when Saami people speak or write about Saami self-consciousness it is based on their own experience ... and when non-Saami academics do, it is based on others' experiences.” (Paine 1987, pg. 172)

Tallbear goes as far as to say, that indicating the purpose of your research as “giving back” is symptomatic of a disease of academic research, the disease being that of a myopic binary system —of researcher and the researched—the one who knows versus the one who is the resource for such knowledge production (2014). West states directly, that “if the need for research arises out of personal curiosity toward the Sámi people, the research may not benefit the community from which the material is collected.”

So, now what? The only conclusion I could come to was to self-educate to the point of becoming an ally to the people of which I hoped to gain a more expanded understanding of the world and nature from. Perhaps through my experience, I could then cause others, like myself, to look a little closer at ourselves, at the natural environment that surrounds us, and our beliefs of separation, race, culture, religion, and the *other*.

Context

Since the tradition of written documentation and history was established, it has been about outsiders telling stories of indigenous people, until more recent history, colonial attitudes toward indigenous ontologies and epistemologies went unchecked and unquestioned. Sámi points of view and descriptions of their own history, culture, and traditions were rarely if ever recorded in historical texts. Stories gathered about the Sámi did not effort to relay the Sámi perspective or point of view and were depicted as a culture diminished by time and soon to be out of existence. The majority of accounts depicted an antiquated culture that was on its way out, a people whose identity as a distinct nation only existed in the past. Today, such narratives of a lost culture have been invalidated, yet the wounds of a harsh and heavy handed 150-year assimilation effort are fresh.

Current figures of Sámi people range from 60-100K depending upon how the population is counted (Näkkäljärvi, 2012). They are the minority people living in four different countries an area distinctly called Sápmi. The largest population of Sámi, approx. 50,0000, live in Norway, half of these in the province of Finnmark. They are the only people recognized by the European Union as indigenous to the land where they currently reside. In Norway, a Sámi person is defined as anyone who identifies themselves as being Sámi and has Sámi origins or has either Sámi as their first language or a grandparent who had Sámi as their first language. What is emphasized in the consideration of Sámi identification is a relationship that indicates Sámi ancestry, and a direct connection to the Sámi language, and a feeling of being Sámi.

The Sámi language is complex and nuanced, and it has many words to describe many different features of the landscape and their relationship to nature. Locating sacred places in the landscape of Sápmi is challenging due to a few notable factors, such as the oppression of the “old Sámi religion” due to Christianization, under the guise of civilizing the primitive peoples and ridding them of their sinful and animistic ways. The policies and politics of Norwegianization, that assimilated or changed place names on maps to Norwegian, and the abolition of Sámi languages, due to nationalistic positions of the Norwegian state. An interesting factor that is something more enigmatic and difficult to recognize, i.e., *Sámi Silence*, is a practice of only sharing information, stories, and traditions within Sámi families or community members.

Of particular interest is the information that was lost during the ‘time of the drum’. The existence of the Sámi drum was all but annihilated from the landscape, people were arrested, imprisoned, murdered, and burned at the stake for their use of the drum (Ahlbäck 1991; Joy, 2016; Rydving, 1993). The legacy of the ferociousness directed towards burning all the Sámi drums and silencing the people and traditions using it, endures to this day. One of the only known Sámi drums in existence, that was confiscated in 1691, was just returned to Norway in March of 2022 after a near 40-year campaign, and a final request from the president of Norway to the Queen of Denmark, appealing to her conscience, to return the drum which had been “on loan”. The drum is not only an important symbol of the past and the atrocities committed against the Sámi people, but its repatriation has meaning beyond its physicality, because drums are not considered material objects, they are considered as persons and ancestors (Porsanger, 2012) This way of thinking is also reflected in similar fights by Native Americans for repatriation of their ceremonial bundles, “these ceremonial bundles, which are circulated as gifts in their native context, are robbed of their statuses as living beings or persons, when they are treated as symbolic objects or commodities by cultural outsiders.” (Lokensgard, 2010, pg. 33)

The drawings on the Sámi drum are known to reflect their former belief systems before Christianization, they tell the stories of their cosmological landscapes and shamanic phenomenon. There is a wealth of research on drum illustrations as a source of information on the Sámi (Ahlbäck, 1991; Joy 2016) but interpretation (understanding) of the stories that these ancestors hold remain something of a mystery. I will not be able to venture into this subject here.

Christianization & Norwegianization: Loss of Language & Culture

Christianization and Norwegianization changed the practices and traditions in the landscape, and in many places, silenced the stories of the sacred landscape altogether. Evidence of some sentiments remain, such as treating certain mountains with respect, but most of the designations of sacred mountains, as well as the original sacred name on maps are gone (Myrvoll, 2017). The beliefs encompassed within the Sámi “old-religion” and culture are difficult to trace due to the destructive and violent Christianization policies of the 1600s and 1700s.

A national policy of Norwegianization and assimilation of the Sámi and Kven people, *fornorsking*, stretched from about 1850 up to approximately 1980. The establishment of the *Finnfondet* [the Lapp fund] in 1851 marked the beginning of the policy, when money was set aside in the governmental budget for education and teaching of the Sámi and Kven with specific initiatives focused on eradicating the use of Sámi languages. In the second phase of Norwegianization (Minde, 2003) funds were increased toward stringent and strict assimilation measures toward the Sámi and Kven. The strengthening of the policy of Norwegianization was justified under the guise of strong nation state building, pointing to security concerns the newly established borders of Sweden and Russia. The policy was considered to be for the good of all.

In 1931 a secret body was created, *Finnmarksnemden* [the Finnmark Board], signifying the culmination of the Norwegian assimilation policy in post-war years where the funds and directives of the minority policies and security policies in Finnmark up to this point were merged. Perhaps fearing the organized opposition to the education policies and mobilization of the Sámi people, this new consolidated *Finnfondet* and *Finnmarksnemden*, was concealed and more the nefarious objectives for the harsh assimilation policy were not made public (Minde, 2003).

For a very long time, the Sámi people weren't allowed to speak their own language and were not allowed to express themselves in their cultural traditions. What is interesting, as Minde points out, is that the policy of Norwegianization was not different from other policies of emerging "strong nation states" in the 19th century, ie. *americanization*, *russification*, *germanification* for a few examples, but that it was the longstanding, determined, and continuous management of the policy that set it apart (Minde, 2003). "This is what makes the historical legacy of the Norwegianization policy morally problematic and politically sensitive, even to this day." (Minde, 2003, pg. 123) Driven initially by the church and local authorities, then through the schools and governmental bodies, the process of Norwegianization fostered widespread racism and discrimination. Influenced by the theories of social-Darwinism, the [Norwegianization] policy was a civilizing directive grounded in the notion that the Sámi were an inferior people, and that their way of life was primitive and useless. The ban on Sámi language in schools was particularly effective. Ultimately, the consequences of these policies had substantial damaging effects, many Sámi families and societies rejected their own Sámi identity and lost the use of their Sámi languages.

The end of the period of Norwegianization was marked by the *Alta Controversy* of 1979–1981, “which became a symbol of the Sámi fight against cultural discrimination and for collective respect for political autonomy and for material rights.” (Minde, 2003, pg. 123)

Before this time there had been no protests by the Sámi people, and the demonstrations that ensued over the course of the plans to build a dam in Alta fundamentally changed the consciousness of Norwegian society and the perceptions of the Sámi people. Forty years later, it remains one of the most powerful uprisings, an iconic clash synonymous with the fight for indigenous rights across the world. Some of the tactics that were used by demonstrators carried immense significance, namely, occupying the government buildings in Oslo, setting up a *lavvo* (a traditional and visually distinctive tent used by the Sámi) on the front lawn of the Norwegian parliament, and hunger striking, have become some of the most commanding actions of activists still used today. The Alta Controversy made the Sámi people known to the rest of the world.

In 1971 the Norwegian government set out creating plans for a 56km long artificial lake between Alta and Kautokeino, flooding the 400-person settlement of Masi, who were all Sámi speakers (Steven, 2016). What proceeded in the years following, 1979-1981, escalated into an event of historical proportions. The young Sámi activists who first pitched their *lavvo* in front of the Oslo parliament buildings and went on hunger strike caught the attention of international organizations, and for the first time Norwegians, were publicly confronted with the history of human rights violations in their country.

At the time of the beginning of the Alta dam debate the struggle of the Sámi people had barely been recognized, perhaps even amongst the Sámi themselves. There were no language rights, no support for reindeer herders, and the traditional of *joik* had been silenced even discriminated against within Sámi communities. In legal terms, the Sámi had no rights.

It was not until 1988 that a clause was included in the Norwegian Constitution, solidifying the rights of the Sámi people to develop their language, culture, and society. *The Sámi Act* included the establishment of the Sámi parliament and directly indicated that the state shall create conditions enabling the Sámi people in Norway to safeguard and develop their language, culture, and way of life.

Today, less than half of the Sámi people in Norway speak the 9 different Sámi languages, because of the Norwegianization assimilation policies (Mallarach, 2012). For this, the Sámi people got an official apology from the Norwegian government in 1997.

“The Norwegian state is founded upon the territories of two peoples – the Norwegians and the Sámi. Sámi history is closely interwoven with Norwegian history. Today, we must apologise for the injustice previously inflicted upon the Sámi people by the Norwegian authorities – through a hard assimilation policy.

The Norwegian State, therefore, has a particular responsibility for facilitating the Sámi people’s ability to build a strong and viable society. This is a historical right based on the Sámi’s presence in their cultural regions, which stretches far back in time.”

King Harald V of Norway, 1997²

The images from the Alta scene of Sámi people in the snow, wearing their colorful traditional clothing *gákti*, chained by their own will to machinery at the construction site evoke emotional responses, from shame to heroism. They continue to be used in social media commentary, fictional films, and documentaries to this day symbolizing more than just an indigenous uprising against the state but the beginning of an entirely new chapter in the history and identity of the Sámi people.

In the aftermath, of the Alta dam it appeared that Norway wanted to do things differently, however in more recent years it has been documented that if it behooves the state to open up tracks of land for wind energy or unearth the tundra for foreign mining companies these types of projects will be politically expedited without informed consent of the Sámi.³

In 2019 the Norwegian government granted Nussir, mining company, the final permits to begin construction at Repparfjord, permitting 2 million tons of toxic waste⁴ to be dumped annually into the fjord where protected Atlantic salmon spawn and traditional fishing rights of

² Mellgren, Doug, October 7, 1997 “Norway’s king apologizes for treatment of Sámi people” APNews <https://apnews.com/article/e98d6c4f07f9479c7c256c51c5c0699b> also <https://talknorway.no/Sámi-people-injustice-and-the-kings-apology/>

³ Two projects that were getting a lot of international attention (2021-23) are the Repparfjord copper mine and the Fosen wind farms. Information referenced here are from various associated news outlets, as well as my own facebook post, August 21, 2021 accessed at: <https://www.facebook.com/ChloeRain/posts/>;

⁴ Tsiouvalas, Apostolos (2020) *Don’t Wake the Rávga of Repparfjord: Sámi Storytelling to Discuss Nussir ASA’s Mining Waste Disposal*, Master’s Thesis, Faculty of Social Sciences, Humanities and Education, University of Tromsø.

the indigenous Sámi people are recognized as well as seriously disrupting and destroying the reindeer herding and calving areas in the district. The government forged ahead despite a slew of appeals by local fishermen, environmental groups, and Sámi people; not securing the free, prior and informed consent of the Sámi people. In response, thousands of activists throughout the country pledged the use of peaceful, direct action to block construction of the controversial mine and the dumping of toxic waste into Repparfjord. Activists (young people, environmentalists, Sámi people, local fisherman, and marine experts) set up camp outside Nussir's project preventing the start of construction on the land. In 2021 the German company withdrew their contract to buy the copper from the controversial mine indicating certain social aspects need to be given more consideration (Wehrmann, 2021).

It was also in 2021 that Norway's supreme court ruled that the wind turbines that had already been erected on two wind farms in Fosen in central Norway violated Sámi rights. But in 2023 these wind turbines remained in operation and the Norwegian government had made no movement to take down the 151 turbines, nor had indicated what was to be done about the roads that had been created through Sámi territories to facilitate the construction of these wind farms. In March of 2023, Sámi protestors once again took to occupying the parliament buildings in Oslo to demand the removal of the turbines, attracting international attention.

Again, the Norwegian government issued an apology for the violation of human rights that had occurred by issuing the permits to build the wind farms, and allowing the subsequent farms to be constructed through Sámi territories. Both the Repparfjord mining project and the Fosen wind turbine farm had been promoted as "green energy" projects. Many critics, Sámi and non-indigenous, accuse the state of "greenwashing" projects at the expense of indigenous rights. The mining company, boasting the proposal of the first carbon neutral coppermine, all the while dumping toxic waste into recognized Sámi traditional fishing areas, and the Fosen wind farms had been pushed through under the guise of "green energy" to supply electricity for 100,000 Norwegian homes.

The inquiry into the topic of the sacred landscape challenged me to develop greater awareness and accuracy of representation regarding Indigenous histories up to and including their present-day sovereignty. I hope to have demonstrated that the resulting knowledge of history can be used to better understand current events surrounding indigenous rights violations and climate change issues, as climate change is now regularly used as a reason to push through

and surpass indigenous rights claims against such projects. This new movement has been labeled “green colonialism” by indigenous leaders (Kraft et al, 2020).

The Myth of the Noaidi as Magician

The first time the written word *noaidi* (written ‘Noide’) appeared in a text about the Sámi was in the early 18th century written by a missionary Isaac Olsen (Kaikkonen, 2019, [Olsen 1751]). Since then, it has become synonymous with the old-religion Sámi specialist, one who worked with guardian-spirits both animal and ancestral and used induced trance states.

In Louise Bäckman’s article “*The Noajdie and his Ecstasy*” (1982) she methodically describes how the *noajdie* was represented as a frightening individual who “fueled the fear” of his powers to terrify people. “The view of the Saamis as *the wizards* (trollkarlar) has been dominant in the history of the Saamis from time immemorial right up to the present day, a history that has been written for example by the Scandinavians. From the Viking sagas, we know that a *noajdie* had an aura of sorcery, and that the “Finns”, meaning the Saamis were in general looked upon as skilled in the arts of magic. In the historical sources, as well as in the archives, there are also documents from the time of the colonization of the Saami area, in which amazement at, and dread of, Saami sorcery is profoundly expressed by the intruders.” (Bäckman, 1982, pg. 122) In another account, “the precise knowledge of nature that was used to control the weather and reindeer herds” was indication of how powerful the Sámi were, referring to the thousands of years of traditional knowledge using the signs of nature to master the elements. (Lehtola, 2004, pg. 29) It was said that some Europeans came to buy wind from the Sámi, one purchasing the wind for the “ridiculously low prices of ten crowns and a pound of tobacco.” (Lehtola, 2004, pg. 29)

Two things that began to stand out to me while reading past and present stories, articles, and books describing Sámi cultural traditions and what is called the “old religion” (referring to the times before Christianization) were: one; how much the Sámi *noaidi* or *noajdie* (the Sámi shaman) were feared for their supernatural and spiritual abilities, and two; the repeated statement that the “old religion” is dead. This struck me because I had never heard so many accounts using the word “fear” to describe cultural and shamanic traditions of a people, and after a while I wondered who *they* were trying to convince that the powers that were once prevalent and feared in Sápmi no longer existed. Veli-Pekka Lehtola writes “the great *noaidi*

appear to have disappeared by the 1800s. The ‘second rate quacks’ were the only remnants left. People posing as *noaidi* for tourists, and drinking alcohol, is more of a “reflection of the far-reaching advance of alcoholism rather than the shamanistic tradition.” (2004, pg. 29)

Bäckman, well known for her research on the topic of *noajdie* and things associated with this, also cites an informant that told her “the *noajdie* of former days... had "powers" that we know nothing of today, because they took their secrets with them.” (Bäckman, 1982, p. 125)

There is substantial published research indicating that today in Sámi communities, some people still view traditional healers as doctors, and both traditional doctors and *guvllárs* (Nergård, 2021) are accepted, and both may refer the other to their patients (Lee, 2009, Miller 2007, Nergård, 2021). Here the case studies suggest that some patients will not use the term *noaidi* to describe a traditional healer because this is a term that signifies pre-Christian origins, and many feel their healing powers come from God, the Sámi Christian religion Læstadism supports this understanding (Nergård 2021, Stewart 2009). “In recent decades, the old practice of the *noaide* has been partly replaced by the *guvllárs*. As the cultural context changed, so did this practice. With Christianity, this tradition invented a new area, but much of the contemporary Sámi and Læstadian healing practices are still grounded in the *noaide* tradition. Today, they also are influenced by ideas coming from other healing practices, but the tradition is still influenced by the *noaide* tradition and the narratives which persist in most communities.” (Nergård, 2021, pg. 67) It could be very interesting to talk about Læstadism and its development, impact, and integration of Sámi old religion, but I am not going to focus on this here.

Trance State & Shamanism

Most scholars on shamanism consider trance state or the state of ecstasy to be one of the most important features of shamanism, as well as shape shifting into animals (Hagen, 2014, Bäckman 1975, 1982, Eliade, 1964). Shamanism is common to indigenous cultures around the world and there are multiple differences in techniques and correlating beliefs cross-culturally, however, “ecstatic techniques” are common to all shamanic societies to induce altered states, and the ability for the shaman to leave his body and travel with his soul through time, to other places on the globe, or places in the underworld is considered central to the position of the shaman. As Hagen suggests in his article “*A critical perspective on Sámi*

shamanism in seventeenth-century Northern Norway”, perhaps the Sámi shaman’s ability as a “go-between of two worlds is more or less a fabrication of some eighteenth-century missionaries.” (Hagen, 2014, pg. 20)

Danish-Norwegian and Swedish sources from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries suggest the lines between the *noaidi* and the common individual were blurred (Hultkrantz, 1984). They mention the “guardian spirits of the Lapp,” and speak specifically to the protective spirits of the shaman but also make distinctions of such spirits that suggest all people have guardian spirits. A manuscript dated 1723 by Johan Randulf, *Naerø*, says the Sámi of the Trondheim area referred to spirits who lived in the sacred mountains that helped them with protection and also mundane activities (Hultkrantz, 1984). Åke Hultkrantz introduced the idea that having guardian spirits “was not necessarily limited to shamans” in Sámi belief systems (1984, pg. 1). Another source written by Thomas von Westen, a Norwegian missionary, who was working in the southern areas of the Norwegian Sámis in the early 18th century, talks about the *saivo* and that every Sámi had his particular *saivo* (Hultkrantz, 1984, Reuterskiöld, 1910, p. 2) “The word *saivo* denotes both sacred lakes and mountains and the supernatural beings (also *saivo olmai*, “saivo man”) living in them...the exact meaning differs in different Sámi regions.” (Hultkrantz, 1984, p. 115) Other Sámi guardian spirits could be a fish, a bird, a fox, a reindeer, or other animals. Von Westen’s field notes were lost, but the information he gathered was preserved in Hans Skanke’s *Epitomes* from the 1720’s. Skanke writes that *saivo* belonged to every person “as soon as he becomes a man”.

It is my assumption that both women and men had *saivo*, however at the time when these accounts were written (the early 1700s) the focus was only on the men because of the viewpoint of the times, where men would have been the only priests of a religion. It is not noted in these texts whether there were female *noijadi* at this time but several of the accounts including Skanke’s indicate that *saivo* were inherited from both the mother’s and the father’s lineages. “Each Sámi had three kinds of animals as helpers for his shamanic service, a bird, a fish or snake, and a reindeer bull. These were included under the designation *noides woeigni*, ‘magic spirits’” (Hultkrantz 1984, p. 115, Skanke 1945a: 191: 253)

“The Scandinavians believed that a man's *inner ego*, *his soul*, named *hugr*, could free itself from the human body, for instance in dreams, and be materialized in an animal. This transformation was called *hamnskifte* (change of shape) and this "soul-animal"

was named *fylgja*. Among Saami traditional beliefs we find the same thing: a man's soul freed itself from its human covering and manifested itself in an animal, a bird above all. These "soul-animals" functioned as an alter ego and a guardian spirit in both cases. The Scandinavians believed, however, that *fylgja* sometimes turned into a woman-shaped being, but, in my opinion, this idea was foreign to the Saamis. Furthermore, in his "soul-animal-shape" a person could do evil or good to another person, according to the Scandinavians, while a *noajdie* had to obtain help from the "other world", where his helping-spirits lived." (Bäckman, 1982, pg. 126)

In a more recent collection of Sámi narrative traditions by Jens-Ivar Nergård (2021) he indicates that "dreams, sings and visions have a meaning and the practices of interpreting them is the search for the messages they possibly bring." He goes on to give examples of stories from his informants that their "interpretation may be considered as an art that still belongs to the specialists" though maybe no longer going under the identity of *noaidi* they have adopted new terms for traditional healers and "they have a reputation as advanced interpreters. Most of them know the traditional cosmology well and their interpretations often have this reference." (Nergård, 2021, pg. 75)

Joik and the Sámi Narrative Tradition

Story telling practices among the Sámi reflect that the relationship between life and the landscape are inseparable and intimate. "The capacity the narratives have to bring messages and to communicate them between persons can also be observed in the *joik* tradition. The joik is probably the most recognized Sámi cultural expression to the outside world." (Nergård, 2021, pg. 76) Joik (or *luohhti* in Sámi) is the traditional music tradition with its characteristic sound, form, and style. A joik can be personal, usually composed given to each family member when they are young children. The joiks are divided into classes such as personal joiks, the joik of animals, joiks for certain aspects of nature and so on. Most often, they reflect the qualities of its owner or subject but not through explicitly singing about characteristics, rather "the act of joiking establishes a relation between the person joiking and the person joiked." (Nergård, 2021, pg. 76) Through joiking something there forms a reciprocal relationship between the performer and receiver in a joik. The goal of the joik is to create an intimate relationship, either through memories or by a character sketch that takes hold of and describes what is distinctive about the person, place, or thing being joiked. "To be able to do

this one has to be in a position to understand the nature of the person concerned.” (Nergård 2021, pg. 76) The person joiking does not perform the joik or louhetti belonging to someone. They joik the person.

Under the Christianization regime in the northern points of Norway joiking was condemned as sinful and forbidden. Outlawing spiritual practices, burning the drums, forbidding and making *joik* sacrilegious, as well as condemning the *noaidi* were ways to obliterate and assimilate the cultural and spiritual traditions of the Sámi people. Most of the traditions around “old” beliefs were silenced, outlawed, destroyed, or went underground.

Sámi Silence

The Culture of Silence has to do with respect for nature and is also an expression of respect and humility. “The Sámi Silence” may refer to both a loss of knowledge or imposed secrecy around such knowledge. The Sámi Silence indicates both strategic secrecy of sacred places in order to protect them from being destroyed and also an inability to speak about traditions because the knowledge or reason behind the practices has been lost.

The silence in Sápmi may also refer to matters that are not talked about, or in private contexts only. It refers to collective, rather than individual matters, and to inherited wounds from the past, as a result of discrimination and the prejudices manifested by assimilation attitudes (Kraft et al, 2020, pg. 5). The stigmatizing and even demonizing of Sámi traditions by the church has also been internalized by some of the Christian Sámi community members themselves. For many people, the effect of the assimilation policies of the past are traumatic to talk about, the relations between the majority and the minority are shrouded with caution and judgements, going both ways. Discussions about old traditions with outsiders tends to end up with the conclusion that the old ways of the Sámi are dead, and when speaking about reclaimed connections to the former “old religion” questions of authenticity tend to rise, and for many these kinds of connections are too risky or hazardous to declare.

Sacred places have rarely been talked about publicly, due partly to what is commonly referred to as a Sámi culture of silence (concerning matters positioned outside of Lutheran orthodoxy) and a loss of knowledge about sacred landscapes in the past. Second, shamans and politicians have rarely gathered for discussions of any sort, and

third, “the sacred” has so far been kept out of land-claims and legal contexts.
(Kraft et al. 2020 pg. 3)

Another aspect of Sámi Silence is, as Jens- Ivar Nergård depicts in his article “The Sacred Landscape”, when you ask a reindeer herder about crossing terrain with the herd, he may tell you about possible risks due to weather and caution you about rockslides due to the movement of the herd, but “he will certainly not tell you all the tales he knows about the spiritual protection at this place” (2004, pg. 88). A reindeer herder has learned many protocols for caring for his reindeers and appropriate migration practices as a young person, including practices of offerings, or giving gratitude to the guardians of the different landscapes for safe passage. He will only share and pass on this knowledge to his own son or daughter, as it was passed down to him.

Well-articulated descriptions of Sámi silence protocols, like the one stated below, show up in research but then knowing this, how might one proceed? Reading between the lines and wondering what is not being explicitly shared, the only answer I came up with was, one does not proceed, *unless invited*, and even then, with respect and perhaps a vow of silence.

There are also *sieidies* that are well-known for the members of Jávrrėsduottar community but not known in public. These *sieidies* are located far from villages. I have also learned the location of these *sieidies* that are not known in literature and I, like other members of the Jávrrėsduottar community, will reveal the location of these *sieidies* only to my family. It is a common code of conduct and common practice also among other Sámi communities. The members of the community don’t want to reveal the *sieidies* to public. We also know that some of the offerings can be found easily from the *sieidies*, but members of the community want the offerings to remain where they are. The members of the community want to respect the privacy and world view of previous generations. (Näkkäljärvi and Kauppala, 2017, pg. 124)



Picture 3 Ráisdouttarháldi Protected Landscape Area, September 8, 2020

Once while sitting in the Anthropology faculty kitchen having coffee, a professor visiting from Kautokeino looked at me as said, “you’re wearing Norwegian labeled rain boots, Swedish hiking pants, a hand knitted sweater of Northern design, and you are American – so what are you doing here?” I dreaded inquiries like these because of the insecurities around my answer being that I came here to learn about the Sámi people. I knew that could turn people off to me immediately, or initiate conversations that made me uncomfortable and questioning my own motives for being in Northern Norway. I had, however, also committed myself

internally to being as present as possible to the uncomfortable feelings, having read that as a non-indigenous person, if you were not uncomfortable in the process of decolonizing yourself; and deconstructing your own privilege, then you were not doing the work properly. This particular conversation turned out to be rich with insights, and I felt humbled that this person spent time sharing their personal experiences and thoughts about being Sámi with me. This conversation also solidified in me, that information, and more importantly emotional sharing, of people who opened themselves to me was not content to be included in “my research”. Participant observation, in this context, felt more like abusing emotional trust than anything else. I understood that to ask this person to go on record with the things we spoke about would, in the very least, put the person on the other side of the table on edge, bring up intergenerational wounds of being treated as research, and last but not least, be disrespectful of the newly acquainted friendship.

Another time, while sitting at a different friend’s kitchen table, I noticed that the table and four chairs surrounding it were shorter in height than the previous week before. I marveled at what had happened. My friend exclaimed that in her (Sámi) house, Sámi people should feel comfortable sitting at the kitchen table. She had taken to sawing off the legs of the table and the four chairs, equally and ever so accurately, to accommodate the (Sámi) people who walked through her front door and sat down at that table. She asked me if I thought she was crazy? That thought had truly not occurred to me, rather, I was impressed by the precision of her execution in the garage with a hand saw. What I felt I understood from this experience is that, in a society entirely designed for the people of the majority, in this case Norwegians, a person may take whatever means necessary to establish a sense of autonomy and belonging, if even, only within the walls of their own home.

In Robert Paine’s article that explores Sámi-Self Consciousness, he concludes that there is not one way to get at the question of Sámi- consciousness, but that there are “many trails” to help us understand the facets of identify and trace the influences of these inner landscapes in the outer landscapes (1987). During the course of my time spent in Sápmi, I could not help but be moved by the quiet request of Sámi Silence to not go to places and into spaces where I was not invited, and to not ask about things that will not/ and shall not be shared with me.

It is crucial that Sámi points of view are shared by Sámi people. What they choose to share with others is up to them.

The Concept of the Sacred in Sápmi

In many indigenous traditions the direction of the North is the place and space where the spirit of the water resides, and a place of wisdom and healing.⁵ Emotional experiences can be induced by the extreme geography and climate in the North. The mountains that are covered in snow nearly all year round, the long period of darkness of the polar night that is lit by the aurora borealis, that is in stark contrast to the time of year when the sun never set and there is twenty-four hours of daylight; all this adds to the majesty and implied power of the North. This project seeks a better understanding of the concept of sacred, not by defining it directly, but by examining different effects of the way in which ‘sacredness’ affects the usage and protection of the landscape as well as the perceptions of Sámi-consciousness revealed within them. That we must define and conceptualize “the sacred”, that we have to prove its existence through systematic data processes and demonstrate its validity, I believe is at the heart of the conflict between academic approaches and indigenous approaches.

As Indigenous people, we are taught to live our lives in a balanced rhythm with the harmonic frequencies that surround us. This is why our teachings rise out of an oral tradition. Our history has been passed orally, not because we lacked the ability to translate our words into written form, but because we have always realized that our words have an alchemy that is capable of creating form. Our language is the vibrational expression that gives form to the animate universe. Every vocal expression that is released creates its own unique resonance. As we speak, we are weaving layers of sound that merge into harmony with the entire creation. (Mitchell, 2018, pg. 25)

The entire natural environment, weather and landscape, of Sápmi is inextricably intertwined in the integral identity and language of the people. The Sámi demonstrate an in-depth understanding and precise descriptors of natural phenomena, such as weather conditions and landscape characteristics. Things may be seen in a different way through the Sámi language and in knowing the language a different way of thinking may also be revealed. In inquiring

⁵ Davydov, Alexander N. 2012. “Synergies between spiritual and natural heritage for habitat conservation in the Barents Euro-Arctic Region” *The Diversity of Sacred Lands in Europe: Proceedings of the Third Workshop of the Delos Initiative – Inari/Aanaar 2010*. Gland, Switzerland: IUCN and Vantaa, Finland: Metsähallitus Natural Heritage Services

about Sámi place names, I came to understand that the Sámi language itself is a map of the landscape, the words, not just the stories passed on through generations, preserve a way of being, and give guidance for adapting to the environment and a way of relating to the world around you, unique to the land of Sápmi.

There is no one single Sámi word, which is equivalent to the Western concept of nature. Instead, there is a variety of terms for what the Sámi considered as nature. Leif Rantala counted words describing landscape. “There were 109 words depicting shapes of mountains and hills, 40 for bogs and marshes, and 60 for valleys, ravines, and hollows.” For example, *vággi* is a “shortish, deepish valley”; *gorsa* is a “smallish, deep ravine”; *gurra* is a “ravine, gorge, narrow valley”; *lákku* a “flat highland valley”; and *leakši* is an “ordinary marshy, widish valley on a treeless mountain”. (Lehtola, 2004, pg. 14) To translate a single Sámi word that explains multiple characteristics of a landscape one must use many words in another language or even complete sentences to describe what one single expression can convey in Sámi.

Vocabulary describing kinds of snow and ice are so exact that they are being studied to develop international scientific classifications. Human behaviors are also distinctly described in Sámi language, as well as well as over 500 expressions relating to reindeer (Itkonen, 1948). As the Sámi language creates a map of the landscape, the Sámi language can create a map of the Sámi consciousness or way of seeing the world. In order to talk about indigenous viewpoints, we must have indigenous wisdom, and that cannot be researched. If we don't have this understanding, then we can only use our words and concepts to describe something more superficial or categorical.

Indigenous communities traditionally place a high value on social relationships and relationship with the landscape and the natural world. The indigenous paradigm constructs a perceptual and tangible relationship between the living Earth and its human constituents. According to many indigenous philosophies, humans were not the only members of the community. The animals and plants were treated not as resources to be exploited, but as members of a greater whole to be cared for. This relationship to nature is expressed in many cultural practices to recognize the importance of the environment, but also reinforce the distinct identity of the group, which is necessary for the group to thrive.

By focusing on reciprocity and the common good—both for the community and the environment—the needs of community are met through the efforts of all, and all are expected to contribute. Many people working together could accomplish much more than individuals, and their cultures reflect this understanding, and because everyone, everything, every animal or plant or tree is considered a relative, everyone is responsible for everyone else and the landscape in which they live. The skills needed to be part of the communal effort to maintain the balance of the natural world around them are passed down from generation to generation through example, storytelling, ceremony, and song.

“The Sámi concept of nature implies relationships, reciprocity, and a notion of power, both for humans and for the whole surrounding world.” (Porsanger, 2012, pg. 38) The actions of living in reciprocal relationship with the landscape include processes of connecting to the environment that create meaning and cultivate relationship through traditions of ‘performing on the landscape versus doing to the landscape’⁶ by which to maintain the natural balance of the world. “Ethnographic studies have shown that a strong emphasis on the sacred as an aspect of landscape is justified, except perhaps in western/ urban / industrial societies.” (Mulk, Bayliss-Smith, 2007, p. 97) Lyla June Johnston (2022) concluded in her dissertation that many Indigenous groups developed “refined sciences” of land management and sophisticated food systems working with the natural environment. She further proposed that their capability in creating sustainable methods and techniques had to do with their value systems. These indigenous “values are nearly universally rooted in: kinship with creation, reverence for the Sacred, reciprocity, restraint, responsibility to homeland, and respect for non-human beings.” (Johnston, 2022, p. 19)

It appears that in Sápmi the case for protecting “sacred landscapes” is a valid one (see the case of Tromsdalstiden/ Sálašoaivi below), versus some examples in North America where ‘sacredness’ does not equate a valid claim, but relational accountability proves to be a more effective route (Reo, 2019; Tallbear, 2014; Wilson, 2005). Relational accountability arose as an Indigenous counternarrative to extractive modes of research, based on ‘kincentric’ models where everyone and everything is related and dependent upon the other, including rocks,

⁶ Olwig, K.R. (2019) “Performing on the landscape versus doing landscape,” in *The Meanings of Landscape*. 1st edn. United Kingdom: Routledge, pp. 129–139.

plants, rivers (water in general), mountains, ancestors— living or dead, and guardian spirits (Reo, 2019, Johnston, 2022).

Guardian spirits or helping spirits may live in sacred mountains, or they may be represented by an animal, such as a fish, a reindeer, or a bird. Helping spirits may also take the form of an ancestor, not necessarily of direct relation to the person related to the helping spirit, such as the stories about the appearance of *visitors* in the homes of informants, making noise and even helping themselves to coffee in the kitchen, in the stories collected and by shared Jens-Ivar Nergård in *The Sámi Narrative Tradition* (2021).

The Sámi term *saivo* can be used in referring specifically to the spirits living in the sacred mountains, however the word can have other meanings such as referring to spirits of nature. The Sámi see their relationship to the world around them as interrelated and therefore have a strong reciprocal relationship to nature and the land. This is documented in their traditions of offerings, sacrificial sites, and behavioral protocols around sacred mountains, rivers, and lakes, as well as passed on in narrative traditions and musical traditions such as *joik* (Myrvoll 2017, Näkkäljärvi 2017, Nergård 2004, Porsanger 2007, 2012). The use of guardian spirits for help, as documented by Bäckman, and further explicated upon by Hultkrantz, shows up in narratives (Nergård, 2022) suggests it is likely that the sacredness of the mountains and waters persists to this day (more on that later). Initial text analysis traced reverence for nature only back to the old religion sacred places in Sámi culture refer to old Sámi world view, shamanism (Näkkäljärvi, 2017, p. 118).

Indigenous peoples assert that they have a radically different viewpoint and way of understanding the world than the colonial or Western/ European mindset (Turner, 2006). Many who identify as indigenous strongly reject European terms, created by Europeans, to discuss or describe anything related to indigeneity, not wanting to categorize themselves using the same terms of the people who subjugated, enslaved, oppressed, and many cases forced genocide on their people. “The concept of *birgejupmi*, ‘maintenance of life’, describes a holistic Sámi understanding of well-being and survival and interdependence of everything in the world.” (Porsanger 2012, pg. 43) Within this holistic view of the world there are certain experts within the community that help to keep the balance and understand the forces of nature in such a way that they are able to wield certain forces to influence or aid in the wellness of the community. The Sámi term of “noaidvuolta” was introduced in the 1990s to

the study of indigenous Sámi religion by Professor Håkan Rydving (1993).⁷ *Noaidevuohta* ('shamanism') is not considered a form of religion or a practical aspect of a special naturalistic religion today; it is thought to be linked with the way of life and culture of a people. The Sámi *noaidevuohta* is based on the worldview of a people who are interdependent upon nature, and it is in harmony with the environment, and the economic and social structures (Porsanger, 2012).

Reciprocity was also a feature of the relations between people and the divine powers. To understand the social and ideological meaning of sacred sites, it is important to consider sacrificial offerings as a form of gift. It may be significant that the Sámi word for 'sacrifice' and 'gift to the gods' is *vaerro*, a word that also means 'tax' (Fellman 1906, Solem 1933: 246f., Mebius 1968).
(Mulk & Bayliss-Smith, 2007, p. 102)

Today there is still a strong relationship with nature in the Sámi cultural context, however, the beliefs around their relationship to nature have changed due to imposed Christian ideologies. Any instance of tradition indicating continuity with pre-Christian beliefs and practices has gone underground, or would not likely be shared with an outsider, no matter how good the intentions of their inquiry.

The Sámi Cultural Heritage Act of 1978 was established to protect archeological sites and cultural environments in 'all their variety and detail', both as part of the cultural heritage and identity and as an element in the overall environment and resource management (Norwegian Government, 1978) The practices and perceptions around Sámi sacred mountains have their origin in the indigenous Sámi traditions (old religion), and so sacred mountains are considered a part of protected Sámi cultural heritage. The unofficial translation of the definition of archeological and historical monuments and sites and cultural environments is as follows:

The term "archeological and historical monuments and sites" is defined here as all traces of human activity in our physical environment, including places associated with historical events, beliefs, and traditions.

⁷ Rydving, Håkan, (1993), *The End of Drum-Time: Religions Change among the Lule Saami, 1670s – 1740s* (Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis. Historia Religionum 12). Uppsala: Uppsala universitet.

The term “cultural environment” is defined here as any area where a monument or site forms part of a larger entity or context.
(Cultural Heritage Act, 1978)

Documenting Sacredness

Sacred mountains are found in all areas of the Sámi settlement areas, though their names differ as do the Sámi languages in the different locals. Their common features have to do with the practices and beliefs associated with the sites and surrounding areas. Mountains are not the only sacred sites in the traditional Sámi areas, other sacred bodies could be lakes, rivers, glaciers, and special rocks or *sieidis*.

...It seems reasonable to assume that some sacred sites were better known than the others. Rydving has differentiated among three types of sacred sites depending on the users: the first group includes sites that have been used by whole Sámi community; the second one is comprised of common and shared sacrificing places of multiple households; and the third category contains personal sites that belonged to the families and individual (Rydving, 1993, pg. 97–98).

Each family and household had traditionally their own sacred sites; those *sieidis* were considered to a certain extent personal *sieidis*. The personal *sieidis* were kept in secret, and for that reason we cannot know for sure whether they are still in use. The *sieidis* widely known and shared by several households or families (Itkonen, 1948, pg. 312) were used collectively and can be viewed as a form of collective property of the Sámi living in a certain geographical region.

(Heinämäk & Herrmann, 2017)

Sacredness implies certain rules of human behavior, according to the beliefs, those who mistreating or misusing *sieidis* or failing to adhere to the customs around them would result in misfortune, or even death (Heinämäk & Herrmann, 2017, Nergård, 2021). Mountains spirits were so powerful as to be dangerous to normal people. An one of the forgotten protocols was that you were not to hike the sacred mountains, rather greet them, and make an offering to the spirit of that mountain. The traditions also required you to ask permission from the guardian of the place in order to stay or pass through the area in safety.

If you happen to be in the mountains under extreme weather conditions, say trapped in a heavy snowstorm, run out of food, tiredness and so forth, it is acceptable to seek shelter in a cottage or a goahte (turf hut) if you find one. On such occasions, the visitor is supposed to stick to the custom and ask for permission to enter and stay. The visitor then must talk to the guard of the goahte and tell who is visiting and why. This acting according to the tradition give the permission to stay. On less dramatic occasions the asking on a spot gives the right to rest, pick berry or fish. In the asking on a site there is also included a thanks to nature for the gifts on the spot. A visitor to a cottage or site should present him- or herself for the guard by telling why what is asked for is needed. On such occasions, the guard is addressed but also the nature that in the last instance is owning the hut and the fish or the cloudberry on the spot.

To most people the guard exists just in the narratives, telling what may happen if forget the custom to ask. This is the very foundation of the acknowledgement of a place or a person. It is important in a way of living where people must share resources and need to pay respect for each other. This tradition was not spoken loudly about since most outsiders saw it as pure superstition. The tradition has never been fully understood or respected outside the Sámi community. That gives the feeling of shame on behalf of the tradition. This narrative tradition about ownership and sharing has in recent indigenous research been named as ‘land acknowledgement’.

(Nergård, 2021, pg 58).

In Sápmi — there is no such thing as an empty landscape— the words you may choose to describe the wilderness would indicate how much information you perceive about the processes you observe at work in the landscape. Knowledge about a site is based on the experience of being there. Because Sámi is a language where the verb has a more prominent position than the noun the expression of this is that there are many words for processes that describe interactions rather than objects or properties (Grenersern, 2016). This way of thinking and the use of the verb-driven language has been used to ‘document’ traditional use and has been accepted as evidence in high courts in Norway and Canada (Grenersen, 2016). In countries like Norway, Canada, USA, Australia, Greenland (Denmark) and New Zealand there has been a growing awareness among researchers, politicians, and lawyers of the importance of indigenous forms and traditions of documentation.

“Within Native American oral traditions, different means of validation and verification are utilized. For example, collective memories are often engaged to ensure the accuracy of any given account, and those who are known to have been trained well are respected and sought out within the community for their knowledge, skill, and expertise. In terms of establishing credibility or validation, in many native communities, the words and the honor of the elders are sufficient.”
(Wilson, 2000, [online]).

The Case of Sálašoaivi

In her article “Where have all the Sacred Mountains Gone” Marit Myrvoll asks the question as to whether beliefs and practices about sacred mountains survived the assimilation policy of the Norwegian state and Christianization (Myrvoll, 2017). Myrvoll concludes that invisible landscapes have disappeared and so have the human behavioral protocols that used to surround them. She says that sacred mountains could be considered “part of an endangered cultural heritage” (2017, pg. 114). Taking a hike up a sacred mountain could be commonplace in today’s society, when before people were warned to stay off the mountain lest be stuck there until death (mostly women were warned to stay away.) Sacred mountains were once greeted by waving or tipping one’s hat (as per Ola Omma’s interview, Kristiansen, 2007).

Myrvoll interestingly states that the relationship between the visible reality, the actual mountain, and the invisible reality, that of the mountain spirits and the narratives associated with their powers and names has become dysfunctional because no one remembers their stories and tells them anymore and their names have been forgotten. Perhaps I would have agreed, except that upon arriving in Tromsø it felt obvious to me that Tromsdalstiden or Sálašoaivi (Northern Sámi) is a sacred mountain. Only after some time was I told that it is an *actual* recognized sacred mountain by the Sámi parliament.



Picture 4 Pictures of Sálašoaivi taken on Prestvannet during different seasons.

The question of the sacredness of Sálašoaivi became a public debate in 2003 when the application for winter Olympics 2014 in Tromsø proposed a ski resort with trails be built on the face of this mountain. “The Sámi Parliament was contacted to investigate the question of whether the Olympic plans could conflict with the protection of Sámi cultural monuments in the area.” (Kristiansen, 2007, pg. 43)

The problem was in the lack of written documentation that Sálašoaivi was a sacred mountain, and it was debated as to whether it could be considered an active sacred mountain today. When the question of whether or not it is still an active sacred mountain or not was posed, Roald Kristiansen set out to see if he could find evidence of active offerings around the site of Sálašoaivi. The main informant Ola Omma (born 1923) grew up in a reindeer herding family, he shared his memories of how the mountain should be greeted by waving as well as demonstrating other protocols of respect for the sacredness of the mountain and its surrounding areas. His testimony ultimately proved to be enough evidence in the public debate to refuse the proposed construction of a ski slope and later a tunnel through Sálašoaivi. The mountain that had to many only been known as Tromsdalstiden was then declared a sacred mountain by Sámi Parliament.

“Academic religious research has traditionally focused on issues that were quite distant from those that indigenous peoples themselves considered as indigenous religion.” (Porsanger, 2012, pg. 38) Angela Cavender Wilson (*Wahpetunwan Dakota*) writes extensively about indigenizing the academy and decolonizing the recovery of indigenous knowledge in her

dissertation and subsequent published works as a professor of American Indian History. Wilson argues that indigenous scholars are exposed to “intellectual imperialism” and academic gatekeeping and are required to defend themselves (Wilson, 2004).

The fundamental difference between academic Native American history and Native American history from the native perspective is the medium through which the history is interpreted. For the vast majority of native cultures, the primary means of transmitting and understanding history has been through the oral tradition; for academic historians, the primary way of transmitting and understanding history is through the written narrative. For many Native American people, whose voices and perspectives are rarely included in written histories, those histories are considered just another form of oppression and continued colonization. (Wilson, 2000, [online])

There are respectful practices to engage in when passing through, visiting, or setting up camp on the landscape. One should ask permission to pass through or to be there if even you are just staying a few nights. In the North and South American traditions that I participated in you would always make an offering of appreciation before, during, or when leaving a visiting a place. The offering maybe for what you have received while there, safety, water, or even a good night’s sleep. More so one would understand that by making an offering to the land and sharing a prayer for the mountains, water, nature, and ancestors of that land you might receive more than just a safe passage. In this way one may ask to receive teachings or insights in the way of dreams or messages. In Sápmi there is considerable material evidence and research about the existence of sacrificial offerings as a thing of the past. I was never taught the practice of sacrificing anything as an offering, though I was taught that upon finding a feather (and taking it home with me) or harvesting a plant from the land, to pull out a few of my own hairs from my head, is an acceptable offering. In this way you are honoring that which is given to you and also where the nutrients, strength, and energy to grow those hairs on your head comes from— the earth.

In the north, joiking the mountain or the river might also be a good way to commune with the land. For in joiking a thing, you do not sing about it, or even sing to it, through the vibrations made through your own voice you attempt to commune and union with the person, place, or thing that you are joiking and become the essence of it through your offering of song.

Even without documented historical reference to sacred sites in Sápmi, to think that the question of protection of these sites is only historical is to miss the point. Many non-Sámi local people find these places important, and the emotional feelings connected to these sites remain strong. There is evidence that Sámi people, as well as tourists or other visitors, make offerings at these sites.

Landscapes as Documents: Sámi Understanding of Document and Documentation

As Jens-Ivar Nergård says articulately in “The Sacred landscape”: “What is perhaps most amazing about early and mid-20th century anthropology is the idea that the people living close to nature and making a living from it in non-western societies did not fully understand it.” (2004, pg. 85) Awareness and knowledge of nature was perceived as magic.

When translating Sámi concepts into English, one must attempt to retain the Sámi criteria that defines the concept and makes it true or valid. The Anglo-European definition of documentation insists that it be a written object proving “transactions agreements and decisions made by citizens” (Lund, 2010, pg. 741). Its authenticity indicates its legality and the document as such can serve as evidence of information. In the Sámi epistemology, documentation is made when you have a strong sense, perception, and understanding of things with such depth that you are able to explain them later. (Turi, 2012) A person’s depth of knowledge and their personal relationship and proximity to the information would indicate the truth or authenticity of the documentation. If one were to remove an object from its original setting to make a document of it, this would be considered an untenable source of information. (Greneresen, 2016, pg. 1182). Another of the important premises of Sámi documentation is that “objective facts can change over time” due to the nature of the movement within the landscapes. Weather patterns and behavior of animals within the landscape are considered core sources of information. “The landscape itself can be seen as documenting traditional use and has been accepted as evidence in Norway and Canada.” (Greneresen, 2016, pg. 1181)

Events and details conveyed through oral histories are not necessarily the same as those written in historical texts, nor do those historical texts include circumstances and details of which indigenous peoples may find important in the sharing of knowledge systems. This represents a difference in value sets of information, what is of value in indigenous cultures

may not make it into written records, and what does make it into the written record may be deemed unimportant by indigenous people or lacking important details about some things, or completely missing vital information altogether. “Oral accounts, legends, traditional songs and traces in the landscape are seen as documents and documentation in Sámi and other indigenous cultures.” (Greneresen, 2016)

For example, indigenous knowledge may include interactions with non-human helpers, or spiritual beings, and for most scholars this would veer into the lane of religious practices versus being a legitimate part of understanding historical context and knowledge systems. Indigenous peoples question the ability of historians to accurately interpret indigenous philosophies, and scholars mistrust the accuracy and legitimacy of oral histories and traditions based on what academia deems as religious belief versus knowledge. At the core of this mistrust is a basic argument about who has the authority to interpret what is knowledge and on what sources that interpretation should be based.

Indigenous peoples have their own philosophies, which they apply when articulating their understandings of the world. Indigenous philosophies are rooted in oral traditions, which generate explanations of the world expressed in indigenous normative languages. But the legal and political discourses of the state do not use indigenous philosophies to justify their legitimacy. The asymmetry arises because indigenous peoples must use the normative language of the dominant culture to ultimately defend world views that are embedded in completely different normative frameworks. The dominant culture does not face this hurdle. (Turner, 2006, pg. 81-82) The academy mistrusts the ability of indigenous peoples to retain accurate amounts of their historical past and knowledge systems. For many indigenous peoples written histories are considered just another form of continued colonization. Others could argue that the ability to write fluently in the language of the colonizer would indicate or put in question the indigeneity of the writer in the first place.

What is established at this current moment in time, through everything from court cases to United Nations level law is that written documentation is needed to even begin an argument against the current protocol. Rarely are the voices and perspectives of the indigenous people included in the historical texts, yet these are what we base our understanding and historical knowledge of indigenous people on.

The historians or discoverers of the Sámi were working within the same paradigm as what created the “primitive native” and concepts of “primitive animism”. Jens-Ivar Nergård (2004) makes an argument that this mind set blinded the observations of the earliest documenters of the Sámi old ways of knowing, making little attempt to understand the people they were documenting through the lens of their own knowledge. The practices of the Sámi, where spiritual and practical information is interwoven into the fabric of the culture, did not fit into the European concept of knowledge. “Human life leaves different landscapes with different conceptual footprints. These footprints are the traces of human life and work carried out in the different landscapes.” (Nergård, 2004, pg. 87)

The fundamental difference between academic or “trusted” knowledge sources of the western paradigm is the medium through which history is interpreted. “The discrepancy between the way native people and academic historians think about indigenous peoples’ history has to do with perceptions of what constitutes important information.” (Wilson, 2005, pg. 24)

Events and details deemed relevant and important enough to transmit within the oral tradition are not necessarily the same as those academic historians feel compelled to write about, nor do they necessarily include those events and circumstances about which non-Native Americans chose to leave records. One of the results of this difference in values means that what is of value in native culture may not make it into the written record, and what does make it into the written record may be seen from the Native American perspective as dry, full of unimportant details about some things, and completely missing the important aspects of others. (Wilson 2000, [online])

On Reindeer Luck

Reindeer and fish are a way of life for the Sámi people, as are the landscapes and its resources integral to the common identity of the Sámi people. Sámi have a special relationship to the reindeer, they are not merely a means to an end, instead they are central to living a worthy life (Oskal, 1999). Reindeer and your relationship to the reindeer, i.e., your reindeer luck can indicate whether you are living a good life and if you understand (and live by) the moral ideals essential to Sámi way of being. Reindeer are a source of spiritual strength, conviction of your “Sáminess”, representative of your personal identity as well as physical nourishment.

In the very beginning of Nils Oskal's essay "On nature and reindeer luck" he starts to paint a picture for the reader "reindeer luck does not in itself mean a good life but is an ingredient of a good life. It can change along the way, but you can spoil it through actions, behavior, words and thoughts." (Oskal, 1999, pg. 175) Reindeer luck can be seen as a metaphor for living a good life.

"There is a difference between reindeer luck and plain luck. Reindeer survival can be ascribed to either, or more correctly, plain luck can come from reindeer luck. Reindeer luck is not co-incident. You are lucky if the summer grazing land is good or if no avalanche takes any of your reindeer in winter. This could be plain luck or reindeer luck depending on whether it was an accident or not. For example, your reindeer luck can even improve if the summer grazing land is bad or the avalanche is just taking its due. If such is the case, being lucky or unlucky is not an issue. It is easier to describe plain luck than reindeer luck. You have reindeer luck if your reindeer survive and the herd prospers. The cows calve. The herd is healthy, well provided for and beautiful." (Oskal, 1999, pg. 176)

Oskal speaks of diversity and beauty central to good reindeer luck, with good reindeer luck you may have a large herd composed of many ages, shapes, and colors of reindeer. But a large herd does not necessarily infer good reindeer luck. To be rich in reindeer is not a goal in itself but it is a value. But it is preferable to have a small and beautiful herd rather than just a large herd.

Oskal examines a variety of little-known qualities on reindeer luck and showcases his considerable understanding of what it is and what it is not, but still does not define it explicitly. Paine does a good job of explaining the problematic stance of the Sámi writer who is committed to the purity of his Sámi expressions, yet "elevates their own experiences (and interpretations thereof) as though they are shared by all Saami; but the painful truth, at the moment, is that among themselves Saami claim different experiences, or where one might suppose that experiences are similar, there are very likely to be markedly different interpretations. This is particularly troubling when working for a consensual political Saami front." (1987, pg. 181)

Mapping a Different Paradigm

In nearly every indigenous culture learning to understand the relationship to the landscape is a central part of every child's education. This education provides vital information for how to survive, offering information and instructions around behaviors in one's daily activities, work, family, and community relations. Understanding these messages allows one to become part of the community and society in their own individual way.

The purpose of any sustainable society is to protect and nurture the most important resources for future generations. That is one of the main roles of kinship relations and cultural traditions. Within kincentric value systems there are structures which create checks and balances to ensure equality and prevent abuse of nature, landscape, and natural resources because everyone is related to everything and therefore responsible to the whole of nature.

In seeking Sámi voices on the concept of sacred in Sápmi, I still found myself fighting against the dominant paradigm; knowledge and belief pinned at opposite ends of the spectrum from each other. Do the Sámi themselves, have spaces devoid of oppression, hierarchy, and categorization? There are scholars who cite examples of community dysfunction amongst the Sámi as proof that continuity in Sámi (reindeer herding) traditions no longer exist, and therefore protection of wilderness, reindeer herding pasture, and land resources under the cultural heritage protection laws would not apply. It seems to me, in reading such an argument in that context, that there is a desire to diminish (through leaps of logic) a culture that is inconvenient to the agendas of development and resource extraction. The historical violence of the majority civilization is ignored, while the indigenous peoples' response to its excesses are dismissed and condemned.

"After working with and with reindeer farmers for many years, I've come to realize that thinking of reindeer farming solely for meat production is like thinking of family life as merely raising children." A family means belonging, connection and interaction. Similarly, the relationship between people and landscape is characterized by strong belonging and interaction. You belong to a family; you don't own it. In the same way, the people, the animals and the land belong to each other. Like every family has a relative, the reindeer are woven together with the past by ancestors and forefathers still present in the landscape, interacting with those alive today. You communicate directly with them, you communicate with the animals, and also with the

mountains, rivers, lakes and forest. Destroying the landscape, therefore, leads to despair and grief that is much, much deeper than mere loss of good pasture or the beauty of beautiful nature" (Gerhardsen, 2023)

We can't free ourselves from the historical contexts that created our current experiences, but to continue to use the same logic that created the issues to attempt solve the issues seems irrational.

Lyla Johnston's commentary after being awarded her diploma for her dissertation sums it up as "Only in Western society can you get a PhD and still not know how to grow lots of corn properly or process a sheep or deer properly. We exist in a system that grossly over-rewards Eurocentric knowledge based on individuality, extractivism, profit maximization and English-speaking worldview."⁸

Indigenous Peoples as Protectors of the Natural World

It's rare to hear good news about our changing climate and environmental quality. Stories of Indigenous stewardship make me feel genuinely hopeful. This feeling has grown after learning that indigenous peoples shelter 80 percent of remaining biodiversity in the world.⁹ Many seem to agree that indigenous perspectives and indigenous knowledge systems are a resource for resolving issues of sustainability and resource management. Science frameworks do not always acknowledge Indigenous ways of describing how floral and fauna interrelate in the natural environment. Relationships are defined by indigenous conceptions of connectedness to the earth, this shapes and forms their communities, view of the world, and the many relationships that overlap and occur within these contexts, this is what we would term as Indigenous ways of knowing. Indigenous ways of knowing recognize the importance of culture and context in understanding what occurs in human interactions when constructing

⁸ Lyla June Johnston's commentary after receiving her diploma and being awarded her PhD from University of Alaska Fairbanks. "No one can ever again say we were "primitive" or "prone to collapse". And if they do, just point to this dissertation containing HUNDREDS of citations about native food systems that lasted for thousands and thousands of years! The main finding of the study: these systems are ultimately steered by the essential VALUES of reverence, reciprocity, respect, restraint, relationality, and responsibility to homeland. I've come to believe that without these values underlying and undergirding our design and thinking, sustainability, sanity, and true civilized behavior will continue to elude us as a species. And now, with the wizard ritual complete, the real learning begins" Accessed May 7, 2023, at: <https://www.instagram.com/p/Cr64uBzLM9m/?hl=en>

⁹ World Bank 2003, 2008

knowledge based on this understanding (Stewart, 2009). “We rarely see global sustainability issues addressed using Indigenous perspectives and thought processes. We don’t see economic models being designed using Indigenous pattern-thinking. Instead, we are shown a dot painting and implored to make sure we include Indigenous employment in our plans to double a city’s population ‘sustainably’ within a couple of decades. Any discussion of Indigenous Knowledge systems is always a polite acknowledgment of connection to the land rather than true engagement. It is always about the what, and never about the how.”

(Yunkaporta, 2020, pg. 19) Electric lines, resource mining, wind turbines combined created such huge habitat loss in Finnmark, a new problem for the Sámi in those areas is to come up with new feeding techniques for reindeer now that reindeer lands can’t support natural grazing.

Reconciliation is now tied to indigenous led climate change initiatives. The Canadian government states they “support Traditional Knowledge and Indigenous science in nature conservation to help ensure land, water, and ice are protected and can thrive into the future. This includes initiatives that support Indigenous-led climate change monitoring and greenhouse gas reduction, species-at-risk conservation measures, and on-the-ground conservation through Indigenous Guardians initiatives.” (Government of Canada, 2022)¹⁰ That connection has been maintained through generations of observation, in which people developed environmental knowledge and philosophies. People took actions to ensure the long-term sustainability of their communities and the environment, with which they shared a reciprocal relationship.

Australia’s report on the State of the Environment 2021 (published July 19, 2022)¹¹ indicates that indigenous peoples make up 5% of the global population, represent 15% of the world’s extreme poor, and their lands make up 20% of the earth’s territory, most interesting however, is that they protect 80% of the world’s biodiversity.¹²

¹⁰ <https://www.canada.ca/en/environment-climate-change/news/2022/12/partnership-with-indigenous-peoples-provincial-and-territorial-governments-is-the-key-to-progress-and-protection-of-nature.html>

¹¹ <https://soe.dceew.gov.au/climate/>

¹² <https://soe.dceew.gov.au/climate/management/national-and-international-frameworks#-cli-21-figure-21-indigenous-peoples-and-the-environment>

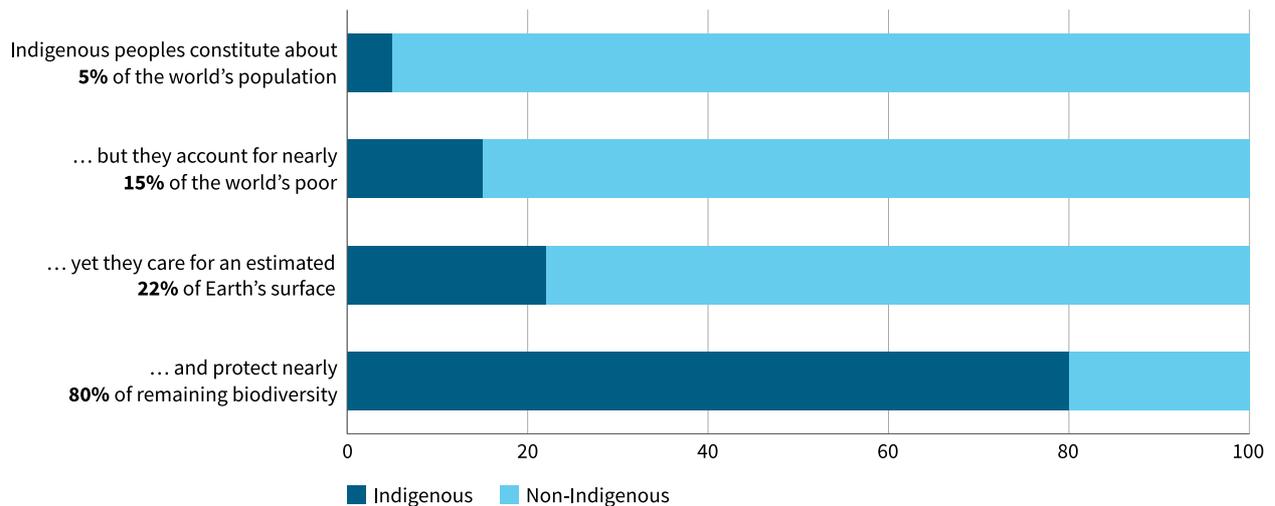


Figure 1 Indigenous Peoples and the Environment, Sources World Bank (2003), World Bank (2008) ¹³

In a world where these statistics are known and accepted and ‘sustainability’ and climate change initiatives are prolific across the board, one could argue that there are sufficient natural resources to support the current human population and the remainder of the flora/fauna. The issues we face at hand are not about the availability of resources, the problems lay in the way we extract and distribute the resources, i.e., farm, fish, mine, etc.

Being perceived as living in a state of nature relegates one’s existence to being an inseparable part of nature and therefore incapable of possessing it.” Instead, we Indigenous people *are possessed* like the land. Of course, we recognize our intimate relations in what others call “nature.” What we reject is the possessiveness associated with the hierarchy of human and nonhuman. (Tallbear, 2019, pg. 36)

The distinction between us and them – the primitive and the civilized – still appears to be the dominant paradigm, when relating indigenous knowledge to sustainable resource management and extraction.

Indigenous people should not have to keep adapting to the mechanistic value systems of the majority culture, a recent theory of Indigenous Regenerative Ecosystem Design (IRED)

¹³ Trewin B, Morgan-Bulled D, Cooper S (2021). Climate: National and international frameworks. In: *Australia State of the environment 2021*, Australian Government Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment, Canberra, <https://soe.dcceew.gov.au/climate/management/national-and-international-frameworks>, DOI: 10.26194/rdze-5d59

attempts to propose a system that melds the intention of both western science and indigenous knowledge paradigms.

Indigenous Regenerative Ecosystem Design (IRED) is proposed as a term and theory to (a) unify the discussion around regional scale Indigenous land management systems, (b) define this phenomenon from both Euro-centric and Indigenous lenses, (c) provide an in-depth and comprehensive definition that reflects the essential aspects of these reciprocal stewardship technique, and (d) create a strong, Indigenous-defined foundation upon which further research can be conducted.

(Johnston, 2022, pg. 286)

Deep Ecology & Sámi Worldview

Indigenous people are not the only people concerned with protecting nature— it was a Norwegian philosopher, Arne Naess, who coined the phrase “deep ecology” in the early 1970s. Deep ecology comes from the idea that today’s environmental issues are symptomatic of deeper problems in our society, and that this belief requires an effort to solve these fundamental problems, not just reforming our current practices to be in line with indigenous rights and environmentally “sustainable” resource extraction, but to question whether we need to be so dependent on current energy resources at all. It implies not only developing methods of sustainable fishing, and land management, but recognizing that some lands might be preserved for their own sake, giving nature value in itself, independent of human need deep ecology involves real interrogation of the current way we use the Earth (Reed, Rothenberg, 1992). The praxis of the philosophy of deep ecology is to suspend any separation of the human from the environment, rejecting a purely relational model and instead stimulating a “total-field model” where all organisms are interrelated to each other intrinsically.

The Deep Ecology movement:

a. Rejection of the man-in-environment image in favour of *the relational, total-field image*. Organisms as knots in the field of intrinsic relations. An intrinsic relation between two things A and B is such that the relation belongs to the definitions or basic constitutions of A and B, so that without the relation, A and B are no longer the same things. The total field model dissolves not only the man-in-environment concept, but

every compact thing-in- milieu concept—except when talking at a superficial or preliminary level of communication. (Reed, Rothenberg, 1992, pg. 69.)

In Naess' largest philosophical work, "*Interpretation and Preciseness*" (1953), he explains what happens with two people communicate; "they do not use a shared language, but interpret what the other says, according to their particular understanding of the meanings of each other's words and syntax. So, the question of what the other person *means* can only be addressed by using our own system and style of interpretation." (Reed, 1992, pg. 66)

Much of the founding ethnography about the beliefs of the Sámi people is focused on the old religion. Ethnographic accounts have been criticized by indigenous communities as being detached from their realities indicating that the data that is collected through observations and interviews, that then used to draw conclusions about how indigenous paradigms function do not focus on things that the people themselves would deem important. Despite the interest in the Sámi and their beliefs, the philosophy of this research does not differ much from accounts, that were solely concentrated on kinship and social organization, hierarchy, power relationships, religion and its rituals.

IRED systems, due to their underlying values and principles often work to achieve the following goals: cooperate with (and be in service to) surrounding life systems, support, feed, and care for all life, support, feed, and care for all humans, and help other lifeforms also fulfill their role within creation. They often employ the following strategies to achieve these goals: expand and maintain preexisting habitat, align and work with larger forces of nature, curb and modify ecosystem succession in a regenerative manner, design for perpetuity, design for biodiversity, design for efficiency, and give thanks to and spiritually support life through formal ceremonies and offerings.

(Johnston, 2022, pg. 287)

Humans have developed stories to answer the questions surrounding the beginning of our existence since time immemorial, this is a reflection of our deep instinctual search for meaning between the connection and relationship to the world around us. We require meaning for our psychological well-being, all "people feel a kind of longing for a belonging to the natural world," says the Native author and scientist Robin Wall Kimmerer. Adopting and

implementing the values of the IRED systems could be the way to implement the changes needed in facing the current global climate change crisis.

The most important insights/ experiences of my time spent in inquiry around Sámi-self-consciousness and the concept of sacred in Sápmi, were when people opened up and shared stories of things that they experienced in special places around the north. Many times, these stories included references to grandparents who had abilities to sense, feel, see, dream, or communicate with [the spirits] of Nature. If it wasn't for these experiences of personal sharing, most often somewhere out in nature, I might have missed the experience of understanding and seeing how deeply connected the sense of ourselves is to the natural world around us.

The Zombification of Cultural Heritage

Colonialism has not only displaced Sámi communities, but also their traditional knowledges. The re-articulation of those knowledges is often questioned as to the authenticity of the traditional knowledge, or referred to as non-Christian, the indication being that Sámi people are Christian people and so anything related to the traditions of the past do not have a place in Christian communities. Even the word 'traditional' emphasizes a cultural continuity, yet it refers to the past, ignoring the adaptation of indigenous societies to the world around them as well as the overtones of the majority society placed upon them.

Traditions survived by being transmitted from generation to generation through experiences in the household, perhaps in secret, and in the greater community, also seen or unseen. That's true of joik, a custom that could have been exterminated through the long period of Christianization, and then shunned under the intolerant and prejudices of Norwegianization. Instead, joik has been used as a form of activism and resistance against assimilation by using coded messages which only the Sámi themselves understood.

When indigenous people try to reclaim their culture, traditions, and connections to their ancestors by re-enacting or learning from other cultures—for example, how to play the drum—they are shamed for cultural appropriation. It may be historically accurate that drum linages no longer exist in Sápmi but beginning to reuse them is not cultural appropriation, instead re-emergence of something that once was.

To some scholars this kind of reclamation of traditions that once existed but fail to retain continuity is called the zombification of cultural heritage, a resurrection of something that was dead and is now animated in the present but with no real connection to the historical traditions. A broken lineage then does not have the same legitimacy, energy or power, it becomes a question of integrity of the contemporary tradition. This imposed ‘authenticity’ requirement of proving an uninterrupted cultural tradition back to time immemorial creates a kind of cultural dysphoria. There are social expectations of an individual's cultural performance of their indigenous identity, yet there can be confusion to the extent of their desired embodiment of that culture, and where they fit into existing cultural categories. “Preoccupied with notions of authenticity and the persons’ standing as a member of a cultural minority” one has lost the right to define itself” (Yunkaporta, 2020, pg. 4)



Picture 5 Muvravárri Bealljážat Sieidi Kautokeino, October 1, 2020

Efforts to protect or preserve no longer used or defiled sacred sites may also be perceived as a ‘zombification’ of cultural heritage, that is, “a futile attempt to bestow a semblance of life to something long dead and deprived of mystical power.” (Santos-Granero, 2019)

The Sámi are by no means all reindeer herders, it is true that the most recognized image of the Sámi is of the Arctic reindeer herder in their *gákti* but what about those who feel every bit a Sámi but were not born to a reindeer herding family? It is sufficient to feel Sámi, but it becomes more difficult to demonstrate one's *authentic* identity if language or occupation or the way you look is part of the social expectation of an individual's cultural performance or indigenous identity.

The Sámi aren't one thing, they are many. Reclaiming joik and sharing the remaining oral traditions in their indigenous language may be a difficult process of reconciliation but necessary for cultural renewal. The critics of reclamation have in a way, internalized the assimilation, denying the importance of, or putting down cultural ideologies is then a form of oppression—a way of white-washing the current cultural landscape making the indigenous people disappear or create a picture of them that makes them appear to be a thing of the past (Tallbear, 2004).

Attempting to understand one indigenous paradigm relating to tradition is difficult (perhaps more so to the western mind than the indigenous mind). An amazing, thing that could be relevant to indigenous ways of knowing, that has been discovered in neurobiology fields is that humans never actually lose memories—we may lose access to them, but they still somehow guide our actions (Yunkaporta, 2020). It has also been theorized that narrative material, songs, music, and ceremony (performing on the landscape) can wake up repressed and dormant memories.

In the current era of debates on resource management, green energy, and sustainability, universities and academics should provide models for the practice of decolonization and intellectual humility rather than continue the status quo, devaluing indigenous/ traditional practices down to “belief systems” relegated to animism. An embedded logic that enforces dismissive behavior disguised in academic or scientific language espousing progress beyond studying the “primitive” and “animistic” views of indigenous people yet keeps power imbalances and the colonial legacy intact.

Lyla Johnston makes a well-founded argument that “Native People were not scattered nomads hoping to find a berry to eat or a deer to hunt. Rather, (with some exceptions) Indigenous civilizations were living in highly manicured biomes, designed through extensive and sophisticated land management techniques to support complex and biodiverse life systems”

(2022, pg. 2). In this way, she suggests, the conceptual vocabularies of the academy can be replaced and re-signified with meanings that emerge from other ways of living.

Conclusions

Indigenous people protect their sacred rites with secrecy. Sacred places, spaces, and objects are robbed of their statuses as living beings, when they are treated as symbolic items or commodities by cultural outsiders. Perhaps not knowing any better one might assume that indeed the old traditions of the sacred in Sápmi are dead, however, it appears to be important to consider that these types of experiences are not shared with outsiders because of the history of assimilation, oppression, violence, disrespect, and disregard for cultural sites.

The proclivity of academic research to label things as “beliefs” and furthermore “religious or spiritual” diminishes or perhaps even blocks and prevents us from gleaning important information about the knowledge embedded in the traditions surrounding nature, landscape, and relationship to everything. I would like to mention that, historically, certain themes of writing in academic research on Sámi worldview, has negatively impacted inquiries into present day relationships to nature, practices, and traditional knowledge. The emphasis in academic publications on Sámi old religion as synonymous with sorcery and magic, the *noaidi* as the sole proprietor of shamanic information, and furthermore the repeated assertions that the old worldview is dead has served to marginalize and eroticize the Sámi indigenous relationship to the “sacred landscape” and any traditional practices accentuating such relationship.

The focus on shamanism as sorcery, with an added emphasis on trance states or states of ‘ecstasy’, have created a void where topics on their indigenous perspectives of the value of nature, irrespective of religious contexts, are lacking. Inquiry into the subject of the concept of sacred in Sápmi and traditional knowledge practices surrounding ‘sacredness’ sometimes lead to heated discussions on Christianization, Norwegianization, and the zombification of culture relating to “new” reclamation movements and “new-age” spiritual practices.

The current world education systems teach us analysis, comparison, technical writing, history, science, but we learn very little about how to connect to the world around us, the visible and

invisible, or how to interact with the spirit world. This urge to classify and to draw lines and create borders, is something that the western mind does, not the indigenous mind.

Sápmi is not simply an area of land in the imaginations of the Sámi people, but a landscape that encompasses four different nation states and their subsequent histories, formation, and current laws. Whether we can see it clearly on a map, the land of Sápmi is defined by a common history, usage, and attitudes that demonstrate the inherent value in the landscape, just as it is. But to be able to put your finger on one thing, to define the sacred, to espouse its meaning, and then to delineate the consequences of this definition, is to attempt to describe an enigma. A better scholar than I might be able to put it into more convincing terms.

The existence of sacred remains in the heart of Sápmi, though what that means is controversial—does it or does it not have continuity from the old times, is it authentic, or Sámi, or is it appropriated? Overemphasis on old religion, shamanism, and certain techniques such as trance/ecstasy states neglects the many aspects of indigenous peoples' philosophies and their relationship to the landscape. The copious use of the word “ecstasy” to describe techniques of ‘old religion’, (herein specifically the Sámi), in academic texts eroticizes indigenous peoples' cultural practices almost to demoralize their relationship to nature. At the very least it exotifies it to such an extent that no government or corporate actor could understand the viewpoint of nature as being sacred and therefore worthy of protection as legitimate information to consider seriously.

Cultural practices of indigenous people are perceived as religious or spiritual by the western paradigm, but indigenous people would not necessarily describe them as such themselves.

The friendships I made in Manndalen were ultimately my greatest source for reflection and debate. The warmth and inclusion I experienced there, I would like to think, had to do with my openness to listen and to learn and because of my appreciation and respect for Nature. It was also due to these friendships that I backed off of my research quest, almost altogether. Once sitting across that (same) kitchen table with my friend, she began crying when speaking about reindeer. She then laughed and suggested that I go and camp under the electric lines and see how easily I could make a baby there, inferring to what to her was obvious, electricity lines and the subsequent noise and interference they put off is a deterrent for any creature to consummate and give birth.

My question around the sacred in Sápmi led me into the quandary of the geopolitics of knowledge, as the expansion of western capitalism also transferred with it the expansion of western epistemology and all its ramifications. The Arctic is a crucial area for bridging western science and indigenous knowledge systems. Future research that conforms to indigenous ways, including indigenous ontologies (cosmovision) and epistemologies (ways of understanding that cosmovision) is essential. We must go further than mere respect for alternative ontologies and attempt to glean the knowledge through the epistemology of the indigenous peoples. What can the Sámi concepts of the maintenance of life and the interdependence of humans and nature teach us about how to reconnect with our own environment and the world around us? Perhaps, there is a need to rethink approaches to post-modern studies in Sámi-consciousness, perception, and awareness of the natural environment in the context of Sápmi and to more deeply upend the coloniality of academic research that focuses solely on the indigenous' perspective of nature as sacred as purely religious.

Sámi concepts of the sacred are not singular, unilateral, nor one-dimensional. An individual may be able to depict one facet of Sáminess, but not able to expand that to the level of consensus of the whole. Perceptions are dynamic and fluid, continuously drawing from, and shaping and reshaping, the social and natural environments around them.

One must draw some conclusions, but as history has shown us, researchers can draw false conclusions based on their own ideas, beliefs, and prejudices. Even after a few years spent living in Northern Norway contemplating these issues, I cannot pretend to present complete competence of Sámi ideology and world view, nor claim to impart a total comprehensive report on the entirety of landscape and sacred in Sápmi. Furthermore, I tend toward agreement that "Saami writers are likely to regard academics as disqualified when it comes to talking or writing about Saami self-consciousness." (Paine, 1987, p.172)

In pure academic research, knowledge acquisition should arise through deliberate methodological strategy, distancing oneself as much as possible to ensure the objectivity of one's thinking. My experience was that to spend time researching the history of the Sámi people, while listening to the experiences and stories of others, and participating through immersion in the landscape of northern Norway, to remain objective became a meaningless goal, that I eventually decided to abandon.

This writing is a work of soul searching more than anything else, my own baby step toward decolonization (of myself). Though I ended up with more open-ended questions and predicaments than answers and resolutions. At times, I wished I was a wiser, more intellectually articulate person, capable of making the kinds of water-tight arguments (and backing them with volumes of theory) necessary for these types of endeavors. I feel the topic of inquiry, the landscape itself, and certainly, the Sámi people deserve such an advocate, but I fear I may have fallen short.

I originally undertook this thesis in order to ask the question whether the concept of sacredness exists in Sapmi. Ultimately the question of *existence* ended up becoming an insignificant question, though it proved to be an immeasurable ledge from which to leap off of. Interest in the Sámi and their unique history and traditions of interconnectedness led me to consider a whole set of quandaries that I didn't see coming. The dilemmas I faced are not new to me, they *should* plague any non-indigenous researcher if that person is asking themselves the right questions. Perhaps these types of problems may be more simply resolved by eliminating *altogether* the position of learning *about* indigenous people, rather than start with what can we learn *from* them.

Linking indigenous academic research with the present problems in the world using the philosophy of deep ecology and the context of indigenous peoples as the protectors of natural resources may be the key. We don't dismantle colonial epistemologies by "learning about other cultures" we must attempt to deconstruct the system that centers around these paradigms while subjecting every other perspective to its demands of validity.

If the question of protecting wilderness spaces, nature, and resources innate to the landscape remains directly tied to protecting cultural identity, then the world needs many more advocates for indigenous peoples and their rights. I impart that it's also essential that the world needs many more advocates of deep ecological thinking irrespective of indigenous rights. After all, scholarship has little relevance if it is not grounded in the "real world", and at this moment in human history we face environmental problems that have never been imagined before. The terms 'sustainability', 'green energy', and 'carbon neutral' have become a hollow buzzwords synonymous with green-washing extractive industries and equal to "green-colonialism" in the eyes of indigenous leaders and environmentally concerned activists.

Indigenous knowledge, indigenous people, are always adapting, always creating, and always moving forward with the current stream of life. Indigenous people are people who have struggled to preserve their cultural identity against all odds , they embody different ways of seeing and thinking about the world. They are contemporary, yet aware of their past and our future(s), that are inextricably intertwined with the health, care, and protection of the natural landscape. Peering into the forest, the mountains, and the sea, one may catch a glimpse into the origin of the way the Sámi see the world, but then I hope, that the reader will experience for themselves the importance of the sacred and how it applies to all of us and all of our relations.



Picture 6 Tysfjord area, formerly the municipality of Ballengen, September 13, 2020

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