

FROM NATURE TO iNATURE. ARTICULATING A SAMI CHRISTIAN IDENTITY ONLINE

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We are moving with the reindeer herd behind Luossavaara, past the Kurra Road and behind Tuollavaara to cross E10. Drive carefully! #Kiruna Please RT ☺ (Tweet of January 22 2012)

In the tweet quoted above, a reindeer herder tells about the moving of the herd and asks drivers to be careful. Sami culture has indeed gone online – as have other parts of the global indigenous society. This article discusses how indigenous and Sami identity in general, and a Sami Christian identity in particular, is articulated through the use of the Internet.

The article has two goals. Firstly, it discusses the activities of indigenous people and religion online, and introduces the pair of concepts indigeneity-online/online-indigeneity as a means of analysing these activities. This serves as a way of contextualising the second goal of the article, namely to perform an analysis of the website www.osko.no, a site for the Christian education of Sami children and youth. I treat this as an expression of, or a medium for, the contemporary formation of Sami identity.

Data/method/theory/background

The two-sided goal of the article calls for a two-sided set of premises, one for the general discussion and one for the case study. The basis for the discussion about the concept of indigenous people online consists mainly of literature on the topic. I will call for new perspectives and suggest new concepts through the combination of the field of indigenous people online and the field of religion online. I will argue that these two can be a fruitful combination.

The main empirical basis for the case study is www.osko.no. This is the Church of Norway's official site for the religious education of Sami children and youth, and a result and expression of efforts made by the Church of Norway (CoN) to do something good for the Sami in church and society. This is an area of focus for the church, especially since 1997. In 1997, the CoN asked for forgiveness after having been a part of the official – and often brutal – Norwegianization policy towards the Sami. The last years have shown an increasing interest in and emphasis on Sami issues in the church. www.osko.no is one of the latest results of this new policy. Being a product of the CoN, a discussion has to be made on whether or not the website should be treated as an indigenous website or a Christian institutional website. I will argue that it is both.

On a more global level, the last 15 years have also shown a steady growth when it comes to the use of the Internet in general – not only in the number of websites, but also in the amount of research on web related issues. Alongside this comes the ever-growing reflection on methodological issues on Internet studies. Heidi Campbell provides a framework for research on Internet and religion, and shows how different

websites can be categorised in fruitful terms. Campbell also emphasises the importance of relating a religious group's use of the Internet to its general understanding of authority, community and media (2010; 2011). Laurel Dyson shows that there is a growing number of websites related to indigenous peoples, and points to many different uses of the Internet. This constitutes a challenge to scholars analysing online content (2011). Roland Niezen gives an example for the treatment of what he terms digital identity among indigenous peoples. He argues that the Internet "[...] is able to give shape and substance to political relationships that might otherwise be only fleeting", and that through the use of the Internet both local and global, as well as nostalgic and visionary, statements can be found and spread among indigenous peoples worldwide (Niezen 2009, 58).

Use of the Internet is a new practice and a new tradition among indigenous peoples. Put another way: The Internet is a new medium for the communication and expression of tradition. A theoretical perspective when discussing this is the language of *articulation*. To see tradition as articulated in particular contexts opens up for a dynamic approach to tradition. This connects to the debate on how to treat tradition and the use of tradition in an age of (post)modernity. Tradition is no longer taken for granted. On the contrary, what was once taken for granted is now to an increasing extent expressed as being "traditional". When indigenous people term and rationalise their actions and customs as traditional, it has raised the issue of authenticity. Some scholars have termed this kind of practice an invention. Eric Hobsbawm gives the already classic introduction to this perspective. He argues that when it comes to tradition, the often alleged continuity to the historic past tends to be factitious (Hobsbawm 1983, 2).

James Clifford is one of several scholars who criticize the invention perspective. Instead of using the term invention, Clifford suggests that scholars should use "the language of articulation [...] that gets at the practical deconstructive, and reconstructive, activities of indigenous traditionalisms better than the demystifying discourse of invention" (2004, 18). Russell T. McCutcheon sees the jargon of authenticity as a technique of dominance, and argues – with reference to Bruce Lincoln – that it is necessary to distinguish between "truths", "truth-claims" and "regimes of truth" (2003, 169). Greg Johnson discusses the concept of articulation in relation to his research on Hawaiian indigenous traditions. He argues that the language of articulation has its advantages also in its ability to reopen conversations with native scholars and audiences (Johnson 2008, 246). To talk of articulation instead of invention has the potential to transcend the division between outsider and insider perspectives. Theories of articulation try to see a plurality of voices – instead of one singular voice – and how these voices sometimes harmonize and sometimes argue (Johnson 2008, 247). Many traditions can be articulated at the same time. Johnson concludes from his research in Hawai'i that often "tradition is constituted in and through moments of struggle" (ibid.). When the people of Hawai'i struggle about the properness of their tradition, they in fact actively constitute their culture and tradition. At the same time, there is not a presumed lack of continuity at hand in the analysis.

Indigenous people online/online indigenous people

When studying indigenous people online – even though the picture is quite different when it comes to the Sami – it is important not to forget the striking fact that many do not have Internet access. In fact, a number of indigenous people do not even have computers – or electricity. The combination of poverty and being located in geographical peripheries makes Internet irrelevant for many indigenous groups. Still, an even greater number of indigenous peoples have found their way to the Internet since the mid-1990s. Today indigenous websites and uses of the Internet are diverse and numerous (Dyson 2011, 251). In Norway, statistics show that more than 90 % of the population has Internet access (<http://www.ssb.no/ikt/>). Nothing indicates that there are differences according to ethnical distinctions.

To categorize or define indigenous activity on the Internet is difficult. The same website can be articulated as indigenous and non-indigenous at the same time, dependent on the context. To provide a preliminary definition, I suggest that an indigenous website is (primarily) made and run by and indigenous people, and (primarily) about indigenous issues. Still websites on indigenous issues are run both by communities, organizations and individuals. They are educational, commercial and activist. They can be representative of and not representative of indigenous groups. Both for indigenous people themselves and for scholars on the topic, a challenge is the question of authenticity, even though the scholar should be careful not to claim the truth. There is a danger of misrepresentation of indigenous people that should lead to the questions of by and for whom the website is run (Dyson 2011, 253). Among some indigenous people concerns have been expressed about the Internet's possible potential to impact indigenous culture. This concern is based on the experience made and suffered by indigenous people in the past that no technology is neutral. Everything comes with a price (Dyson 2011, 258). Nonetheless, the indigenous presence on the Internet clearly shows that the concerns have not been sufficient to scare people away.

In fact, one can argue, as Ronald Niezen does, that the Internet has shown a positive potential to many indigenous people, especially those living in pressured situations. "The Internet creates public space for secret lives", he says (Niezen 2009, 48). Hence, it becomes possible to be an outspoken member of an indigenous society even though you do not live in the same neighbourhood, compound or village as the other and do not wear the "correct" clothes. Online identity formation clearly works on a number of different levels. The Internet can be a site for collective memory, where it is possible to express nostalgia for times never experienced and pride towards peoples among whom one has never belonged (Niezen 2009, 58). Niezen emphasizes this two-sidedness of indigenous activity on the Internet: It can articulate global abstractions at the same time as it works as a tool for the preservation of local cultural boundaries (ibid.). The development of indigenism is parallel to the development on the Internet. Indigenism is a global political movement was both strengthened by and strengthening the indigenous use of the Internet.

Dyson affirms the importance of the Internet related to the growth of indigenism, and points to a fruitful way of distinguishing different orientations of online indigenous identity. Those aimed at "inreach" are eager to build community and to create a virtual space for shared meanings within a certain indigenous group or

people. Those aimed at “outreach”, on the other hand, wish to connect with people from outside (Dyson 2011, 259).

Religion-online/online-religion

A website like www.osko.no is obviously not only an indigenous website. It is a religious website. The world of religion online has grown, as has the indigenous activity online. Religion online is varied and includes a number of different kinds of religious performance and practices. Campbell points to this variation, and argues that religion online consists both of established religious groups going online, and of more innovative examples as “godcasting” and Godtube.com (Campbell 2011, 232).¹

There are different ways of trying to categorize the religious activity on the Internet for scholarly purposes. Campbell identifies five narratives that help explain the common ways religious users employ the Internet as a part of their religious practice (2010, 25-26): The Internet may be seen as a spiritual medium and network that helps the users in their spiritual experiences. The Internet may, secondly, be seen as a sacramental space and a worship space. Thirdly, the Internet can be used as a missionary tool. Furthermore, the Internet has an individual dimension in the possibility to help building and maintaining a particular religious identity. Finally, the Internet can be viewed and used simply as a functional technology (Campbell 2010, 25-26).

Mediation is a relevant and often used term to describe how religious statements are communicated. The intersection between media and religion has been a topic of interest for scholars since the middle of the 20th century (Hoover, 2002, 1). With the dawn and growth of the digital age, the focus on mediation has increased even more. In recent works, mediation is integrated in the understanding or definition of religion as such, alongside processes such as consumption, political resistance, postcolonial nationalism and globalization. As a social formation, religion must be mediated and communicated (Morgan, 2008, 8). When it comes to self-representation, mediation is significant in the sense that a group will find use of different means of communication, hereby (re)constructing its own group identity (Stolow 2005; Andreassen 2011).

In another study of religion on the Internet, a useful distinction has been made by Christopher Helland (2000) between religion-online and online-religion. Whereas religion-online describes the import of traditional forms of religion and religious practices to the online world of the Internet “from the top down”, online-religion describes the creation of new forms of religion and religiosity of an interactive kind on the Internet, “from the bottom up” (Helland 2000 214-220). In a later work, Helland has made some adjustments to his model, in particular discussing the phenomenon of “doing” religion on the Internet. He underlines that the distinction between religion-online and online-religion is not to be seen as locked. Instead, it is preferable to view the distinction as a extremes on a scale where religious activity can float between the two and be located in both areas (Helland 2005, 2-3).

I will suggest that the theories and models for the study of religion on the Internet can be transferred to the study of indigenous people on the Internet. The distinction between religion-online and online-religion may point to a similar distinction

¹ The rich history of religion on the Internet is described by Heidi Campbell (2010, 23-25).

regarding indigenous people. As an adaptation I suggest the paraphrase indigeneity-online and online-indigeneity. The former would consist of existing forms of indigeneity or expressions of indigenous identity found on the Internet. The latter would hold the adaptations of existing indigenous identities into new forms placed and played out on the Internet. On the Internet, we most certainly find both. Indigenous groups and organisations have websites where they present their history, traditions and causes (see for instance <http://www.noereh.no/>). There are also a number of websites from the other category, where new forms of indigenous identity are found. These sites form an enormous variety where more or less serious presentations mix together with activist sites, political sites and sites inspired by New Age religion (see for instance <http://www.nativeplanet.org/>). Important in this new distinction is to avoid a sense of dichotomization. Instead, the distinction is to be seen as a spectrum or axis where many websites probably will fit in between the two endpoints in the continuum.

Campbell's five narratives may also be relevant to transfer to the study of indigenous people online. The Internet may be seen as a medium that helps the users in their indigenous experiences, it may be seen as a space for being indigenous both individually and collectively, it most certainly is a "missionary" tool for the spreading of knowledge and ideas, it has the power to help building and maintain indigenous identity, and it has shown to be a functional technology. These perspectives are in line with Niezen's reflections on digital identity. Not only does the Internet hold the ability to work with identity, knowledge and emotions, the Internet was one important medium through which the claims of indigenous peoples from Africa and Asia were given substance (Niezen 2009, 56).

Sami Christian identity online

From the more general discussion on indigenous people online, I move forward to the more specific case. The case at hand, www.osko.no, is an expression of Sami activity on the Internet. I will discuss how the website best can be categorized following the models and adaptations mentioned above.

Sami people online

As shown above, the Sami is a very active community when it comes to being online. Social media as Facebook and Twitter has become an integral part of day-to-day communication for many Sami. On Twitter, there are not only tweets on reindeer herding. On the contrary, the Sami tweets, if they can be categorized as such, cover a broad range of topics. They even cover the narratives mentioned above. The social media has most certainly proven to be a functioning tool in the building and maintaining of Sami and indigenous identity.² Earlier this year (2012), Noereh, the Sami youth organization, arranged a conference where the topic was Sami identity online, and how to treat bullying and racism online (<http://www.noereh.no/>).

² In this respect, there has been a certain development since the first major website especially for Sami people, Same.net. This was an online community for the Sami of Norway, Sweden, and Finland, and was quite popular. In 2011 it was closed due to technical development. Apparently new media platforms had taken over the functions of Same.net.

When it comes to Sami Christians, there has not been a website explicitly directed towards Christianity or spirituality before www.osko.no. This means that this particular website is some sort of a pioneer work. The following analysis is not a full-scale analysis of Sami Christian identity online. Nonetheless, some lines will be drawn from the case in question through Sami Christian identity, and to indigenous identity.

www.osko.no: Local artefact in a global medium

The website is the first attempt by the *Church of Norway* (CoN) to make a website entirely directed towards Sami children and youth. As such, it is part of a bigger project with efforts made towards improving the Christian education in the entire CoN. There are a number of websites and –pages related to www.kirken.no covering the education of different age groups in the church. These sites are, unlike www.osko.no, not directed towards a particular ethnic group. Hence, they are directed towards Norwegian children and youth. Reflecting upon the making of a digital Christian education from the point of view of the church, Birgit Hertzberg Kaare and Knut Lundby underlines the necessity of building bridges between the traditional text culture and the visual/digital culture that today’s youth are inhabitants of. Hence, the church must enter the digital world, in order to reach out to young people, and to avoid the “aesthetics of boredom” (Kaare og Lundby 2011, 94). The educators of the church clearly see themselves as performing an active and explicit mediation of the Christian faith through the websites. Even though www.osko.no is not referred to in the text on digital Christian education, it is safe to assume that it is part of the bigger picture.

www.osko.no is the result of a project that was started in 2009. The CoN wanted to strengthen the Christian education among the Sami. The website is made by a number of people, but it is run by the Sami Council of the CoN with its Secretary General Tore Johnsen as editor (<http://www.abc-company.no/osku/bm/omoss.html#>). The website was opened in 2010 after a few years of construction.

Is it mainly a Sami product or a product of the church? Who are the producers of the website? Who is talking through the website? These are relevant questions. Without doubt, the website is an official product of the church and is linked to it through www.kirken.no, the official website of the CoN. In this sense www.osko.no is an institutional and institutionally accepted website. At the same time, those in charge of the site are Sami, and are part of the Sami institutions within the CiN. Hence, the website can be seen and treated as both. It is a product of the CoN and it is made by and for Sami Christians.

On the different sites of www.osko.no a picture is painted of what Sami identity can be. This picture is not univocal. A starting point is the obvious: The site is found in three Sami languages and Norwegian. Hence, it is presented as relevant for and reaching out to all the Samis of Norway, no matter where they live and which language they speak. This can be explained as an ideological and political choice. No one is excluded. The opposite would be politically impossible. However, this might not say all that is to be said about the Saminess presented on the website. Going into the content of the site, there are different perspectives, motifs and narratives pulling

in several different directions. Nonetheless, I will argue that it is possible to find a dominant voice or direction.

From the first click it becomes obvious that there is a double set of intentions with the website: The readers are to learn both about Christian theology and about what is presented as Sami traditions, practices and identity. To get to the Christian teachings, they have to “walk” through a Sami landscape. The structure of the website is based on the compilation of nature and Christian teachings.

When you enter the website you can choose between four different languages, three Sami ones and Norwegian. And you can choose between 6-12 years and 12-15 years. The main page for children consists of a huge picture that shows what must be interpreted as a model or typical Sami landscape. This picture is strongly reminiscent of the Christian Sunday school flannel board with pictures attached to it. In front there is a lavvu, a fireplace and a tree. In the middle there is a lake with a boy fishing and a boat. And in the back there is a church with sun shining over it. All the mentioned motifs are also links to new pages. When you enter the different subpages, there are particular topics treated. The birch leads to a cluster of pages about the use of birch in Sami culture, about kinship and about the Christian cross. The lavvu gives knowledge of the lavvu in Sami culture, the Trinity, and different ritual aspects of the lavvu in history. The fireplace leads to pages on the use of fire, stones and the community around the fireplace. The lake and the boat lead to knowledge on birth and baptism. The church contains information about the church and the rituals and professions of the church. And the sun leads to pages that tell about the sun in nature, about the sun in Sami tradition, and about Jesus as the light of the world. The different links are not presented in a hierarchy. Hence, what is chosen first depends on what the user chooses. The main page for the older children has the same choices as a menu, but does not have the same landscape. The subpages are a combination of information, stories, pictures and some songs, videos and plays. The topics treated on www.osko.no are a mixture of the main aspects of Christian teachings and practices and what is presented as traditional Sami knowledge.

The educational principle of the website seems to be to lead the children to knowledge about Christianity through symbols and knowledge related to their or the hegemonic picture of Sami identity. This means that there is a certain element of identity building on the website.

Moving from the landscape to the particular topics, there are choices to be made. By dragging the pointer over the birch, the message “Learn how to make your own genealogical tree” appears. This means that the picture of the birch leads the user to a place of learning about kinship. After clicking the birch link, it soon appears that the lessons on kinship are on kinship in Sami traditions. The user gets the possibility to make a tree of kinship, and learn about the kinship structure and the meaning of kinship in Sami history and society.

The next pages on the birch-site are related to the use of birch in Sami history and society. The user learns how the wood is used to make tents, other equipment and handicraft, and as firewood. The birch is presented as having a central role in Sami culture. The text on the birch starts out by referring to the trees of the Bible, and to the way Jesus uses the metaphor of the vine about himself. Then it moves on to the Sami geographical context. (http://www.osko.no/index.php?kat_id=21).

As user of the website you are put in a community of Christians as well as in a community of the Sami people, across the limits of time. And it is the birch that locates you in these communities. The life as a Sami, as pointed out through the birch, is marked by handicraft and the importance of fire and shelter. Nature, and the Sami traditional use of nature, is emphasised. The birch becomes a symbol that points in several directions. Most importantly, it becomes a symbol for nature, the nature that you can or must pass through on your way to salvation.

When the topic is the Earth as a gift from God, the human responsibility for nature is described:

The Earth is a part of the creation. The Earth gives plants, food, water and everything we need. Humans have at all times survived on what nature gives. In Sami tradition, it is important to listen to the voice of nature. What does that mean? We will move with caution in nature and not harvest more than nature can take. We will bless what is alive. We will live with gratitude towards the Creator, for the gifts of the Earth (http://www.osko.no/index.php?kat_id=16).

Here, the website is at its most explicit regarding nature. Nature is a gift from God. A defining factor of the Sami is the ability to listen to nature and to be cautious when moving in and using nature. This double dimension ties together a set of different discourses. The location of the Sami Christians and their ability to listen to nature is part of a discourse on Sami identity and on what is presented as essentially Sami. www.osko.no can be said to present a Saminess that claims to be a dominant one. Sami Christian identity becomes ideally located in nature and with great knowledge and understanding of nature. Other parts of the website pull in the same direction. Christian teachings are explained through a contextualisation that locates Christianity in nature. What are left unsaid are the opposites. Not to be close to and cautious in relation to nature means that you are to some extent distant to a preferred kind of both Saminess and Christianity. Nature's dominant position in representations of Sami identity and culture is seen in other Sami narratives (e.g. Johnsen 2007). And scholars, such as Siv-Ellen Kraft, have argued that nature is a master myth of Sami discourse (Kraft 2009, 182; see also Gaski 2008 and Olsen 2012).

The point on cautious movement in and management of nature is a hint in the direction of a more global discourse on the preservation of Earth and nature. The same goes for the use of "Earth" as concept. Here, it can be seen as a way of referring to the international indigenous movement, in which Mother Earth is an often-mentioned concept or agent. Explicit references to indigeneity or indigenous people are not found on www.osko.no. I will come back to that later.

Going into the picture that is painted of the Sami community, there are some aspects that stand out more clearly than others. This goes both for what is mentioned and shown and for what is not mentioned and not shown on the website. The practices and ways of life of the Sami community point in a particular direction, towards the woods and mountain and the life in the woods and the mountains. The coast and the coastal ways of living are seldom mentioned. The most often mentioned dwelling unit is the lavvu. Neither the gamme (hut made of wood and

turf), nor the modern house, nor the city apartment are mentioned. Urban life is not mentioned at all. Technology does not get any major place. An exception is the picture and description of how the power-saw today is used by many Sami. The Internet and social media are neither mentioned on the website. As such, the young brothers sitting in their house in the city of Tromsø, with parents working on the university or a school, are presented an idealized Sami culture that differs from the culture they are living in.

Another side of the same argument is connected to the way the past is presented on the website. The past does not have a huge place. However, when the past is mentioned, it is almost always related to the old Sami religion. When talking about the lavvu, and how it is divided internally, a series of goddesses from the pre-Christian religion are referred to, and one can read that the division of the lavvu “[...] was because the gods were important in the everyday life of the Sami, you ate and slept in a sacred room” (http://www.osko.no/index.php?kat_id=147). Siv-Ellen Kraft argues that the pre-Christian religion³ of the Sami is an important link to the nature relation of the Sami, and that this is used actively in Sami nation-building (Kraft 2009, 187). When the past is the place of the pre-Christian religion, this is saying something about the religion of today. The practices of yesterday are still seen and used today, but given a new, Christian canopy. Hence, the continuity is pointed to between old and new, between previous and contemporary practices, and between “tradition” and Sami Christian identity. As it appears, the past can be included in the idealized Sami culture presented. Do the brothers sitting in front of their computer in Tromsø experience the rooms they are sleeping and eating in as sacred? The idealized Sami culture, with its Christian canopy, can clearly be perceived as a preferred way of being Sami. I will come back to this in the discussion.

Discussion

Whether www.osko.no is an indigenous website or not can be discussed. I will argue that it is, in spite of the complete lack of any mentioning of the concept of indigeneity. The Sami people are never mentioned as belonging to an international group of peoples. In fact, the international dimension is non-existing, at least on an explicit level. This is a bit surprising, given the central position of the international work with indigenous peoples in other parts of the work made by the Church of Norway on Sami issues (Olsen, 2012). Nonetheless, this must be interpreted as the result of a conscious choice. Still, the website can be regarded as an indigenous website. It follows many of the characteristics mentioned, and can be seen as an expression of a collective Sami self-identity in a Christian setting. The website is a part of the CoN’s work towards the Sami Christians, a work that is explicit in its inscribing into the international indigenism movement. Hence, the international indigenous dimension can be seen as an implicit part of any Sami expression of a certain format.

³ Which concept to use when talking about Sami religion, can be discussed. Most often, scholars will use “the pre-Christian Sami religion”, indicating a breach introduced by Christianity. Some prefer “Sami religion”, indicating that the real Sami religion is the one that was most common in the past. A few scholars also use the term “Sami shamanism”, thereby making the phenomenon a shamanistic one. I use the term “pre-Christian Sami religion”, but will not, as such, deny any kind of continuity to practices occurring after the coming of the Christian religion.

Nonetheless, the lack of references to indigeneity is noteworthy. An interpretation is that the makers of the website do not see the website as the right medium to treat the discourse on the Sami as an indigenous people. This leads to the question of who the imagined users of the website are. Is www.osko.no an example of inreach or outreach? Those who aim at inreach want to build community and create a space for shared meanings *within* a certain indigenous group or people. For those who aim at outreach, on the other hand, it is more important to connect with people from outside (Dyson, 2011, 259). What characterizes www.osko.no, is a primary direction towards inreach. The website is presented as giving knowledge about and insight into Christian and Sami practices and traditions. It creates or becomes a space where the users can share – or view what is presented as shared – meanings and stories belonging to a Sami Christian society. At the same time, there is a possible dimension of outreach on the website as well. The many languages together with the trendy format are a way and a means of reaching out to children and youth outside or in the border-zone of the Sami society. The website as a mediation of a Sami Christianity will create or be a part of an active, reciprocal process.

Accepted as an indigenous website, what then with the religious dimension? This is more obvious. www.osko.no might be said to be a typical example of religion-online. It is an official site for the CoN, and it is a part of the religious education policy of the church. At the same time, however, the website has an innovative dimension. The presentation and blending of Christian teachings and Sami self-identity as one, is new and perhaps most clearly expressed on this particular website. It is an adaptation of existing forms of religiosity and narratives of a religious and mythical kind into a new unity. As such, it has a dimension of online-religion.

The question remains or returns: Is www.osko.no primarily a Sami set of statements or a set of statements from the church? This has a certain impact on the analysis. Seen as primarily coming from the church, the website is an expression of *outreach* to the Sami. And the content must be analysed as a theological attempt to get the message out to the Sami through the use of concepts and languages known by the Sami. Nonetheless, those who made and run the website are Sami Christians. The editor, Tore Johnsen, is Secretary General of the Sami Church Council, and a well-reputed theologian with an outspoken Sami contextual theological agenda. As such, www.osko.no can be treated as an *inreach* to “our” children and youth, seen from a Sami perspective. And the content must be analysed as an attempt to make Christian theology and narratives on Sami identity, culture and history pull in the same direction.

The difficulties in deciding whether the website is an expression of outreach or inreach, or whether it bears a set of statements and knowledge from the Sami or from the church, makes it a challenge to try to apply so-called indigenous methodology in the analysis. In indigenous methodology, emphasis is made on looking from the perspective of the indigenous people, and on the integration of indigenous knowledge systems (Chilisa 2012, 40-41). It cannot be univocally decided whether www.osko.no is the voice of the indigenous people talking or not. At the same time, another important principle within indigenous methodology is to view knowledge as relational, made and communicated in particular context with some sort of continuity to a perceived or articulated tradition. The analysis of www.osko.no so far has shown

that there are various sets of knowledge, traditions and narratives that are related and intertwined throughout the pages of the website. Hence, even though the producer or narrator cannot be labelled easily, this is not the main point. The Church of Norway, as an institution with a strong history of colonization and Norwegianization, has developed into an institution that seeks to integrate, implement and strengthen the Sami voices and traditions to such extent that Sami Christians use it as platform for the communication of a Sami kind of Christianity. This might be seen as quite a harmonizing perspective. Focusing more on conflicts, one might try to explore and find other voices on Sami Christian identity that are not found within the church – a task for a later work.

The combination of being a religious and an indigenous website, calls for an application of Heidi Campbell's five narratives. Without any doubt, www.osko.no is a medium created to help the users in their experiences both as Christians and as Sami. The website gives a space for being Christian and Sami both as individuals and as part of a group. Hence, it constitutes and maintains the identity of the users. And it can be used as a missionary tool for the spreading for a manifold set of ideas, both religious and ethno-political.

Above I suggested the new concept of indigeneity-online/online-indigeneity. www.osko.no can be placed in both categories. Focusing on the site's wished for presentations of a Sami Christian identity that is already a defined entity; the website becomes an expression of what Sami Christian identity is in Norway at the moment. The Sami Christian identity of www.osko.no becomes the normative and preferred Sami Christian identity, an indigeneity-online. From a more critical or sceptical perspective, however, the website can be seen as expressing something new. At least the Sami Christian identity of www.osko.no can be described as an adaptation of different forms of identity, both religious, social and ethnic; an online-indigeneity. The melting together of different aspects of Sami Christian identity into a unified website is innovative.

I would argue that www.osko.no is an example of a certain articulation of Sami identity. The combination of Sami and Christian traditions and practices forms a unity that pulls Sami identity in a particular direction. Continuity is an important part in this regime of truth and presentation – as is unity. Contemporary Sami and Christian practices are presented as belonging together, as being in continuity with former practices and traditions, and as a whole package that can make both the world and each individual better. In this articulation of tradition, nature is given a central position. The logic that is articulated is as follows: Even though both modern society and parts of the Christian world seem to have forgotten about the preservation and correct use of nature, the traditions of the Sami are closely connected to nature. In an age of environmentalist movement and debate, www.osko.no articulates a Sami tradition that can teach the rest of the world something about the preservation of nature. Here, there is an echo of the discourse of the Sami as an indigenous people found in other media. And there is an implicit reference to what is termed eco-indigenism, the idea that indigenous people partly is defined by their closeness to and special care of nature (Sissons 2005, 13).

With this as setting and context, it is intriguing to explore the articulation of Sami tradition(s) on www.osko.no. The website becomes part of a greater movement where Sami and indigenous tradition and practice are constituted in a certain way, where certain “truths” are communicated. Being part of official church policy and made by the Sami Council of the church, the website unarguably carries a strong voice. Greg Johnson comments on the making of traditions through articulation, and states that to lift “one voice above the crowd – the true, normative voice of tradition – has a profound silencing effect” (Johnson 2008, 254). It remains to be seen if www.osko.no has a silencing effect in the struggle to constitute Sami Christian tradition.

Again referring to Johnson, it can be emphasized that struggles on tradition do not necessarily need to be viewed as problematic or dangerous. In his work on Hawaiian struggles on identity and tradition, he shows that many competing groups are claiming authentic Hawaiinness and the authority to speak as such. “The cultural “truth” of these demands is found in the struggles themselves, the commitments they demand, the learning and speaking they inspire, and the shared resources they contest and draw upon” (Johnson 2008, 255). In a Sami setting, the picture is not quite the same. There is no open struggle, at least of the same magnitude, to define Saminess. Nonetheless, there are a number of voices heard. www.osko.no is interesting in the sense that it is the first website claiming to articulate a unified presentation of Sami Christian traditions. In the articulation, a number of forces or voices blend together – Sami and Christian, local and international, indigenous and Western, traditional and modern. And the nature that the website invites you through and into is still an “iNature” - a nature viewed on a screen.

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Summary:

The article discusses the activities of both indigenous people and religion online, and introduces the pair of concepts indigeneity-online/online-indigeneity as a means of analysing this activity. This concept is new, and leans heavily on the pair of concepts religion-online/online-religion that is used in religious studies. The second part of the article consists of an analysis of the website www.osko.no, a site for the Christian education of Sami children and youth. I treat this as an expression of, or a medium for, the contemporary formation of Sami identity, and argue that it can be seen as an indigenous website. The Church of Norway, as an institution with a strong history of colonization and Norwegianization, has developed into an institution that seeks to integrate, implement and strengthen the Sami voices and traditions to such extent that

Sami Christians use it as platform for the communication of a Sami kind of Christianity. www.osko.no is an example of a certain articulation of Sami identity. What seems to be the preferred or idealized Saminess is related to nature and a particular past, and is distant to modernity, urban culture and Norwegian culture.

Keywords:

indigenous studies, Sami Christianity, indigeneity online, religion online.