



UiT The Arctic University of Norway

Faculty of Humanities, Social Sciences and Education - Center for Sámi Studies

Tracing Virtual Sápmi

Communicating Sámi Narratives in the Age of the Meme

Faith Lahey-McCoy

Thesis submitted for the Degree of Master of Philosophy in Indigenous Studies

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Supervised by Torjer Olsen

Academic Director of the Centre for Sámi Studies, UiT

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Abstract

Online social realities now more integrated into the daily lives of global human populations than has ever been witnessed before leads us to question how this shift might be impacting existing local realities. One phenomenon which characterizes today's online interactions is the creation and sharing of internet memes, or images from pop culture often layered with text to convey ideas and perspectives through the vehicle of humour. In this thesis I explore Sámi memes and Sámi memeing culture on Instagram, a popular social media site, to better understand how the online Sámi community is using this medium to communicate Sámi narratives. While similarly, I attempt to demonstrate how these narratives becoming magnified in virtual spaces and how this might apply to the theory of a cultural interface. In doing so, I also aim to uncover the multifaceted nature of Sámi memes and how they contribute to discourses of decolonization, intersectionality, and indigenization. In centring their own knowledges to communicate community needs and expectations, using mainly empirical data grounded in an Indigenous online research methodology, it is through the lenses of three Sámi online meme creators that I contextualize the nature of contemporary Sámi realities. Furthermore, in exploring themes of Sámi language reclamation and revitalization, humour, and Indigenous cyberactivism through a Sámi memeing culture, I present the notion of citizenship as it might apply to the concept of a 'Virtual Sápmi'.

Keywords: Virtual Sápmi, Sámi Memes, Sámi Humour, Indigenous Cyberactivism, Language Revitalization, Social Media, Indigenous Citizenship, Indigenous Studies

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Introduction

The cover photo below from *Čájjet Sámi Vuoijŋa*'s Instagram account is the perfect initiation into Sámi online memes and the relating thesis topic. In Lule Sámi, *Čájjet Sámi Vuoijŋa* means 'to show Sámi spirit' as translated by the account creator and research participant. In this particular meme we see pictured a South Sámi woman named Inga Åren from Frostviken, Jämtland in Saepmie (Sweden). The photo was originally taken by the photographer, Héléne Edlund ca. 1870-1898 and is part of a collection which can be found at the Nordiska Museet (Museum) in Stockholm.



Figure 1 Inge Åren – South Sámi Woman, by Héléne Edlund (1879-1898)



Figure 2 Uncaptioned, *Čájjet Sámi Vuoijŋa* (2019)

Transformed into a meme however, the image combined with words conveys a different meaning. Where the original photo shows the image of a young Sámi woman captured by a Swedish artist, we cannot fully understand the intention of the photo. However, as academic discourse and popular Indigenous opinion would suggest, often times Indigenous peoples were and continue to be objectified and exoticized through the lens of a non-Indigenous gaze. Where “often misconstrued by outsiders, the stories told of our communities are frequently expressed through an oppressive colonial lens” (Williams, 2019). The image itself then becomes a source of Sámi empowerment as it is reappropriated and reimaged by a Sámi meme artist. The image is juxtaposed with the text ‘I YEET COLONIZERS FOR BREAKFAST’, positioning itself in decolonial discourse. The original caption comes from the common English phrase ‘I eat people like you for breakfast’ which in its various derivatives expresses at the very least an assertion of resistance against a perceived threat. While the word ‘eat’ is replaced instead with the cyber verb *yeet*, a common term in cyberslang often pasted into memes. As a nonsensical word, one of its definitions expresses throwing something away forcefully with confidence or authority¹. In this context, the caption becomes subversive in a cheeky sense by suggesting that the Sámi woman is asserting her power against colonial forces. The meme contextualized, then becomes two-fold in that it subverts the non-Indigenous gaze while at the same time asserting Sámi resistance and self-determination.

¹ For more in depth reading on the term ‘yeet’ please refer to <https://www.howtogeek.com/436783/what-does-yeet-mean-and-how-do-you-use-it/>

1.1 Topic and Research Aims

My specific research tasks aim to explore the role of Sámi memes in fostering Sámi language reclamation and revitalization efforts. While I also inquire as to how the implementation of humour in a Sámi memeing context impacts the way in which the information is being constructed and communicated. Lastly, I aim to theorize upon how Sámi memeing culture is contributing to an Indigenous cyberactivism movement, and the resulting *indigenization* of social online spaces. In such, I direct my curiosities towards the notion of a ‘Virtual Sápmi’ and the reimagining of Sápmi territorial borders by interrogating the concept of citizenship.

For the majority of social media users, internet memes characterize online realities, whether shared by a friend, colleague, or observed amidst scrolling through their various user ‘feeds’². Sharing online memes, i.e., a humorous visual representation of an image layered with text, movement, or sound, has become a part of everyday online interactions. Most significantly however is the degree to which memes are characterizing and defining online culture. Living in the ‘age of the meme’ refers then to the rapid quantity with which memes are being produced and shared between online users. Also significant is the meme’s inherent power to shape and communicate culture, norms, concepts, and ideas (Shifman, 2013).

In response to heightened technological developments of the late 20th and early 21st centuries, online social realities have become a highly integrated aspect of people’s lives. The development of the internet in the 1960s by technologists for the purposes of military and scientific communications quickly saw its potential as a tool for the layperson (Gharbawi, 2005). The internet’s attractiveness rooted in the sharing of ideas and information at rapid speed across borders. While in our most recent technological history, a phenomenon known as social media has emerged, providing digital platforms for private users and groups to connect with each other

² A feed, or ‘newsfeed’ in social media refers to a syndication where online data and content is updated and distributed through a content channel available to internet user subscriptions. For example, Instagram provides updated content to their users personal accounts based on their subscriptions to the accounts they follow.

over distance for the purposes of sharing everything from ideas and information to photos of our morning coffee. These virtual spaces offer an ever developing mode of social interaction which allows for the individual user to create and share their realities, something unprecedented to that which society has ever witnessed before in technological and social history.

With the emergence of the individual user, similar to offline realities, there are observable shifts taking place along social lines. These movements include, though are not limited to, representations of culture, identity, political affiliation, special interest groups and sub-cultures. Social lineages, i.e., familial, subcultural, are being fused in multiplicity from micro social levels to larger macro levels. For example, the queer Sámi movement although beginning locally has expanded rapidly with the introduction of online technology. The project, *Queering Sápmi* is a reflection of this movement, where “without social media it would have been impossible” (Bergman & Lindquist, 2014, p. 16). As a collection of queer Sámi stories and personal accounts, the project itself has culminated into a movement, both on and offline. While Sámi queer individuals might have identified their sexuality to close friends and family, or within their communities, it has gained momentum through the use of online knowledge sharing and connectivity, resulting in the expansion of these localized movements. Networking with other groups like Garmeres³, Sáminuorra⁴, Noereh⁵, and Skeiv Ungdom⁶ across both Indigenous and non-Indigenous fronts, the Sámi queer community has accelerated their movement for recognition and inclusivity through online channels (2020b). In doing so, they have also positioned themselves visibly within both local and virtual social spaces.

³ As stipulated by their facebook page, Garmeres is an “organization by and for queer Sámi across the borders. Garmeres works for queer Sami rights, opportunities and visibility in all of Sápmi” (2022).

⁴ Sáminuorra is a Sámi national youth organization in Sápmi (Sweden) which promotes the interests and rights of Sámi youth.

⁵ Noereh is a Sami youth organization in Sápmi (Norway), representing the interests of Sámi youth.

⁶ Skeiv Ungdom is a Norwegian organization representing queer youth and their allies.

Rather than viewing online realities as separate from local physical realities, I suggest that online space exists as an extension of peoples lived realities (Miller et al., 2016). The technology itself then acts as a tool, yet the way in which users utilize, integrate, adapt, and normalize its usage in an everyday context leads to a further narrowing of the differentiation between social space and the here and there binary (Miller et al., 2016).

While many Indigenous groups have benefitted from the development of telecommunications technology, I specifically explore Sámi online memeing culture. The aim of which is to account for how Sámi people across the Norwegian, Swedish, and Finnish parts of Sápmi are using memes on the popular social media site, Instagram. I inquire into how Sámi online memes are communicating humor, culture, identity, and intersecting narratives within the Sámi community, as well as how their positioning relates to other Indigenous and non-Indigenous online users.

1.2 Theoretical & Conceptual Frameworks for a ‘Virtual Sápmi’



Figure 3 #sámmemes, Čájjet Sámi Vuoiŋŋa (2019)

In this section I present the concept of ‘Virtual Sápmi’ as a theoretical perspective in which the decolonization and indigenization of online spaces is occurring. As Sámi narratives become magnified through a Sámi memeing culture, what also becomes apparent is how Sámi self-determination persists in these virtual spaces.

Although I have yet to come across the term *Virtual Sápmi* in my background research findings, that is not to say that it does not already exist as a concept. Regardless of its existence or not, it is not the intention of this researcher to appropriate or label a potentially Sámi space. However, as an imaginative space, Virtual Sápmi is inclusive of all Sámi, and in traversing the physical boundaries of Sápmi, presents itself as a culturally relevant online locale. The concept of which, has also garnered favour amongst the research participants (2020abc). In such, I have decided to implement Virtual Sápmi as a term used in this research project to connote an inclusive online Sámi space regardless of physical location or state affiliation. Virtual Sápmi then, as an online locale, fosters inclusivity of all Sámi, whether along lines of social identity or by way of community and cultural affiliation, i.e., reindeer Sámi, Sea Sámi, urban, queer, or any such combination which could exist within the Sámi imagination. Echoed by Jeffrey Sissons, he suggests that while Indigenous identities have simultaneously countered uniformity through imaginative futurisms, they have also simultaneously led to ‘defending and increasing political and cultural diversity’ (Sissons, 2005, p. 14). Although Sissons refers to political and cultural diversity, this sentiment rings true for identity diversity as well, which has been made abundantly clear through digital representations of Sámi identities through memeing, as I will come to demonstrate more fully in subsequent pages. The concept of Virtual Sápmi is used then to reference those online spaces created and ‘inhabited’ by all Sámi peoples. In this way, I centre Virtual Sápmi as a means to express another social dimension of Sápmi, from local physical and geographical borders to the more conceptual yet very real social online spaces where Sámi identities are being visibly represented, shared, expressed, and reinforced.

In contextualizing the research, I defer mainly to a decolonial approach, applying the notion of a ‘cultural interface’ as it relates to a Sámi memeing culture within the homogenous and hegemonic systems of Cyberspace. Since Sámi memeing initiatives are taking place in a ‘post’-

colonial setting where identities, culture, histories, and social practices are made complex through competing intersectionalities, it is not enough to apply a decolonial lens but rather one that acknowledges and antagonizes binary oversimplification (Nakata et al., 2012).

Similarly, through the acknowledgment of a 'cultural interface', I also apply an indigenization theory to the research findings as a method for understanding how Sámi memes and Sámi memeing culture are integrating Sámi knowledges and culturally relevant content in their own agency, and in such are contributing to the indigenization of social online spaces.

Similarly, I reflect upon the concept of Virtual Sápmi in relation to Angela Hinzo's notion of digital survivance and rhetorical sovereignty. Where sovereignty relates to the concept of the nation-state, with its pronounced physical and geographical boundaries, and governing power over its citizens; Rhetorical sovereignty then refers to those online spaces which implore Indigenous autonomy through the decolonial approach of self-determination (Hinzo, 2019). Indigenous peoples then, "rather than being written into digital spaces" by majority bodies, in their own agency, are now in the position to virtually create and define their own borders and narratives online (Hinzo, 2019, p. 792); Essentially, those who previously and currently hold sovereign power in constructing outsider perceptions of Indigenous peoples, becomes redundant in Indigenous virtual spaces.

I would also argue that as a physical locale, geographical Sápmi often fails to include the rhetorical Sápmi, where we find a number of Sámi people displaced in urban centres and other parts of the world. This sentiment is echoed by Kajsa Kemi Gjerpe in her analysis of the 'textbook Sámi'. Gjerpe demonstrates how Sámi people, as a diverse group, are being limited in their portrayal by standardized teaching aids (Gjerpe, 2021). In such, Sámi people are being represented through an all too acute cultural lens reflective of only one particular area of Sápmi (Gjerpe, 2021). In applying Hinzo's perspectives on a rhetorical sovereignty then, what becomes magnified in these online landscapes are imagined Sámi cultural borders, where autonomy and self-determination can be more readily manifested. Essentially, Virtual Sápmi necessarily

demonstrates the ambiguity of being both unlimited in the virtual sense while at the same time strictly limited in terms of Sápmi membership.

This leads me to my final line of theoretical inquiry as it relates to Virtual Sápmi. Where Sámi memeing culture assists in tracing and defining the parameters of online Sápmi, it then serves the research to discuss the notion of ‘citizenship’. Here I would argue that a Sámi memeing culture meets all of the credentials for granting citizenship to those ‘residing’ in Virtual Sápmi, a theory which will be expanded upon in chapter 4.

1.3 Methods

As a primary source, I use mainly online empirical data in the form of social media research and Indigenous research methodologies. Collecting qualitative data in the form of online interviews, conducted through the Zoom⁷ conferencing application, I met with three Sámi meme account administrators located on Instagram. Engaging in one-to-one interviews, which lasted approximately between 1 and 1.5 hours each, an interview guide⁸ and consent form⁹ were presented prior to interviews. While the interviews themselves remained mainly open-ended, allowing for flexibility within the discursive space.

Although a meme analysis was not part of my methodology, the memes themselves account for my secondary source of data. Mainly, I investigate the meme creation process and subsequent impact of the memes as a method for informing my research findings.

⁷Zoom is a global cyber telecommunications application service providing free basic access to its software for the purposes of one-to-one or group meetings

⁸See Appendix I.

⁹See Appendix II.

As tertiary data, an anonymous online survey was conducted and distributed through various channels, such as Sami Studeantasearvi Davvi-Norggas (SSDN), Garmeres, and a few select private connections, i.e., friends who identify as Sámi. However, due to the relatively small sample selection, the data gleaned from the surveys is mainly inadmissible.

Given that Indigenous studies as a field relies heavily on centring Indigenous perspectives and epistemologies as a foundation to research, I have decided to incorporate an Indigenous research methodology. As it applies to both the research process and the dissemination of information, I anchor the research in what Bagele Chilisa promotes as the 4 R's of Indigenous research. Where, 'accountable responsibility, respect, reciprocity and the rights and regulations of the researched' are centred (Chilisa, 2012, p. 25). I aim to ground the research process in a relational and semi, co-theoretical framework which centres the voices and perspectives of the participants (Smith, 2008). In doing so, I attempt to build a 'story' of the research, moving away from typically western modes of dissemination which have traditionally centred the researcher and 'othered' the researched (Smith, 2008). In such, I have included the participants in the final process to the extent that they have had the opportunity to read through their interview components with the addendum to request changes. As an outcome, I aim to provide a respectful account of the research which upholds participant rights and promotes an ethical approach to the methodology.

As it applies to language translation and comprehension, since my focus is mainly on the qualitative interview data, with respect to *Sámeme* I decided as a researcher that I would not ask for translations of the meme content. Rather, I position myself as a language outsider so that the meaning embedded in the meme content would purposefully remain obscured. This decision was made for several reasons in consideration of the Indigenous research methodology. Firstly, I did not want to impose on the research participant with the expectation of providing translations. Although she was generous to offer translations if needed, it was a personal decision to allow the interview to speak for itself rather than crave unnecessary time and energy from her. While another curiosity for allowing the memes to remain inaccessible to me as a researcher was in my own interest to observe and demonstrate the interplay between insider and outsider culture as it

relates to the Sámi memeing space. Furthermore, with the other two accounts presenting memes predominantly in English I still had access to investigating Sámi meme content if significant to the research directly.

It can be noted however, that although I do not carry assumptions of the meme content definitively into the research, and cannot access the Sámi language content directly, the images incorporated into the memes does potentially provide some insights into their intention. Below I demonstrate in a narrow exploration of 3 memes, taking 1 meme from each account, as to how it might be possible for an outsider to potentially glean at least a partial understanding of the content based solely on the juxtaposition of images.



Figure 4 #bohccobiergu #Sápmi #hersko, Sámeme (2019)

Here we see an image taken from Sámeme posted February 14, 2019, with a total of 209 likes as of March 26, 2022.

When not connected through friends, family or special interest accounts, Instagram users generally come into contact with other accounts based on algorithms determined by the platform administrative system itself. With this in mind, we can assume that someone connected to the Sámememe account does not do so randomly, though this is technically possible, but rather through some form of commonality. Essentially, if not referred to the account by a peer or someone known to the user, the user for instance could have stumbled upon the account through Instagram suggestions, mutual followers, content interest, or background data stored and analyzed through likes, sharing, and online connections; The technological parameters of which go beyond the scope of this thesis, however for the purpose of this example we can assume that the meme viewer has some sort of knowledge of the meme content.

In the case of our meme example then, we see one image of a plate of food juxtaposed with another image of a plate of food below. Since this is a Sámi meme, one might deduce that commentary is being made through the comparison of two different plates of food, one perhaps being a plate of culturally relevant food. If one has some background knowledge of food culture and memeing as humour then one might assume that the image above shows food served at a restaurant or a typical homestyle table, perhaps Scandinavian or European depending on the location of the viewer. While the food in the image below would perhaps characterize food served at a traditional Sámi table. The humour then for the insider culture might relate to a solidarity or understanding around the insider food culture. While when set in comparison to the other plate of food, one might assume it to be characteristic of an outsider table, or at the very least a non-traditional Sámi table. The image above is presented in what would perhaps be an aesthetical norm for non-Sámi or non-traditional Sámi. Perhaps there is even a comment being made regarding the food content on the plates, wherein one plate exhibits a higher vegetable to meat ratio, the other image shows its inverse. The aesthetic detail or at least an aesthetic value unknown to someone without insider knowledge of Sámi food culture could also be a consideration. In the absence of language knowledge, or shared humour and cultural understanding, based solely on the juxtaposition of images one might assume there to be insider humour relating to Sámi food culture in contrast to non-Sámi food culture.

In showing this methodological process my intention is not to claim any definitive knowledge of the meme content but to demonstrate that there remains a possibility to extract meaning with or without full access to the language. However, in terms of research and data collection, as an outsider researcher without knowledge of the language it becomes problematic to offer any conclusions based on the meme content.

"NoN-blNArY iS tHe NeW nOt LiKe OtHeR GiRLs"



Figure 5 #indigenoustranspride #queersami #queersámi #sámimemes #samimemes #indigenoustmemes #čsv, Čájet Sámi Vuoiŋŋa (2020)

This particular image shared May 14, 2020, on Čájet Sámi Vuoiŋŋa's Instagram account received 344 likes. When examining this meme, one might assume the meme creator is relieving frustration and communicating their perspective with a commentary on Sámi insider and/or outsider issues regarding inclusivity, gender expression, and Sámi intersectionality. The reasoning for these possible indicators when contextualizing the meme content points to the popular culture image taken from a Star Wars¹⁰ still, or screenshot from the film, which refers to

¹⁰ Star Wars: The Phantom Menace (1999), starring Liam Neeson as Qui-Gon Jinn, a Jedi Master who fought for peace and understanding. While the creature beside him, Jar Jar Binks a childlike character characterized as annoying and insensitive.

the wisdom of the man in the image in contrast to the less intelligent or more foolhardy creature beside him. If one is familiar with the film reference, then they know that this meme template is often used to poke fun at another's intelligence whether it be a group or public figure. In the case of this meme, the quoted text above the image is portrayed as an 'unintelligent comment' while the juxtaposed response from the 'wise man' is displayed as text within the image. As it relates to gender politics specifically, the quoted text itself is positioned as an ignorant comment, where a gender politick outsider might consider the 'non-binary' gender label as a fad or associate it with being merely a 'cool or alternative' identity choice as opposed to an actual gender distinction within evolving gender discourses. This meme then, suggests a lack of intelligence, or more aptly understanding, of those who resist updated notions of gender. While in a subversive manner, the meme insinuates that those not in alignment with a more progressive gender politick should perhaps move towards educating themselves on the issues so as to embrace the shift towards a more inclusive gender rhetoric. Additionally, by importing traditional Sámi regalia into the image, the meme creator essentially *indigenizes* the meme; In doing so the meme creator might also be suggesting that the issue of gender exclusion is not only a general issue but also one that might be divisive amongst the larger Sámi community as well. The creator could be commenting on their desire for gender inclusivity within Sámi community. The image further brings to light the issue of being a minority within a minority. Though this remains but an example for possible meme analysis, in doing so I am merely attempting to demonstrate how content meaning and intention might be communicated between Sámi content creators and insider and outsider communities. Subsequently, the added function of captioning within Instagram's interface allows for the meme creator to contextualize the meme themselves, when wanting to especially underscore the meme's intention. While the caption on Instagram located under the meme itself, leaves no misunderstanding of the meme creators' perspective and community page expectations:

“No but for real, non-binaries and two spirited people are ancient parts of indigenous and non-white cultures, such as India for example. Third genders have always existed. Transphobia will not be tolerated on this page. Unfortunately, one of Sweden’s ‘top elite feminists’ have come out as not standing behind or supporting trans people, making a mockery of both them and the whole lgbtq+ community by using that term for revealing such ignorant views and proceeding to write extremely harmful things. You are not a ‘free thinker’ for criticizing trans identities, u r an ignorant, conservative asshole, and we are not ‘not thinking for ourselves’ for supporting them, we are forward-thinking and accepting. For all queers, u have a place in our indigenous feminist movement 💜” (Čájjet Sámi Vuoiŋŋa, 2020)



Figure 6 #ellossápmi#wearestillhere #saamiresiliencememes, Sámi Resilience Memes (2019)

While the final meme in this sequence from Sámi Resilience Memes is dated August 22, 2019, and accumulated 299 likes by Instagram users, reflect possible values which could include

themes of decolonization, Sámi language reclamation and revitalization, Sámi diversity, and inclusiveness. This particular meme template is notorious online for its image of a man showing interest in another woman. While he remains oblivious to the other woman holding his hand, looking at him with disdain for his ogling of the other woman. In applying the text however, the meme becomes even further contextualized. In this instance the man with the wandering eye represents ‘settler culture’, while the attractive woman walking by is given the value of ‘Lapland’, a term used by settler culture to identify the area traditionally known as Sápmi. The meme is given an added layer of meaning through the creator’s decision to include the various spellings of Sápmi in 6 Sámi languages. Here the meme creator might be making the point that Sámi people not only reject the colonial use of the term ‘Lapland’ to describe traditional Sámi territory, but even further that there is also linguistic and cultural diversity within the larger Sámi community as well. In this way the meme creator is possibly conveying her frustration with the colonial and derogatory labelling of Sápmi as ‘Lapland’. The meme also becomes subversive in its emphasis on the collective desire for recognition of traditional Sámi lands in their respective languages.

While these 3 memes provide examples for how Sámi memes are constructed and could possibly be interpreted, in a research context a Sámi meme analysis remains problematic as a primary source of data when done so by a non-Indigenous researcher. This leads nicely into the next section on ethics and positionality.

1.4 Positionality of the Researcher and Ethical Considerations

"Could you share your personal trauma so that I, a non-indigenous person, can benefit from it academically?"



Figure 7 Research season is upon us. Sámi Resilience Memes (2021)

“Please ignore your emails, don’t answer your phone, and remember, that you don’t need to participate in anything you don’t feel comfortable with. When participating in a study, know your rights-you are allowed to quit at any time.”

(Sámi Resilience Memes, 2021)

It became apparent that when attempting to categorize the Sámi memes as an outsider researcher, there exists an extensive gap in knowledge between my interpretation and the intention set by the meme creator. From a research perspective I would not be able to fairly draw any conclusions without having full access to the knowledge set by each meme creator. Despite my own personal

knowledge of Sámi politics and culture, as well as my cultural access to popular culture references and humour, as a researcher it would have been unethical for me to contextualize the memes through my own lenses and present them as categorically definitive. Although the perspective of the content creator in relation to the interpretation of the viewer becomes an exchange, it remains limited to the extent of the viewers own personal understandings and knowledge base. Therefore, as a presentation of data through an Indigenous research methodology, it was more attractive to rather point out these discrepancies and allow the interviews and participants themselves to primarily inform the research. Essentially, allowing the data to emerge through their own knowledge, experiences, and perspectives.

As for my position as a non-Indigenous researcher, there comes with it its own host of responsibilities and ethical considerations as expressed in the meme above. The quote under the image is the caption which accompanies the meme on Sámi Resilience Meme's Instagram account. Through years of education both at the bachelor and master's levels in Indigenous studies, this is a sentiment that I as a non-Indigenous researcher have been encouraged to antagonize from all angles before conducting any research within Indigenous communities. Given the historical ramifications of research in Indigenous communities, often done so for the benefit of the institution, and from the perspectives and interpretations of the researcher this has often times resulted in a negative impact for Indigenous communities (Chilisa, 2012). As an 'outsider' to the Sámi community with which I am conducting research, it is imperative that I implement good research practices to ensure a positive research experience for those the research is attempting to ethically serve, mainly the academic institution and larger Sámi community.

Originally from Canada as an expat living in Sápmi (Northern Norway), and as a Canadian-Norwegian citizen, I also hold a vested interest in contributing innovative and relevant research to the institution, while at the same time building good relations with both the academic and Sámi communities. It is difficult to know if every decision I make as a non-Indigenous researcher is sound, but through careful consideration, reflection, and communication, I attempt to contribute positively to the field of Indigenous research, while learning from any errors which might inevitably occur along the way.

Although I was intimidated by the prospect of asking the account creators to participate in this project, it was discussed with my supervisor that in acknowledging this personal discomfort, I might be more thoughtful in my research decisions during the process. Together with the participants, we discussed the role of the researcher and acknowledged the fact that the interview was conducted by myself, a non-Indigenous person. Additionally, we discussed the aims of the project to encompass a decolonizing framework to the degree that it would attempt to foster the 4 R's, based on relevance, respect, responsibility and reciprocity. While the interview language was conducted in English and addressed with the participants, this discrepancy was especially acknowledged and discussed with the second participant. We talked about how the interview was presented in English as opposed to Swedish, where in she was candid about the level of vulnerability there was in opening up about some of the more difficult topics, especially in a second language; Whereby upon our meeting she felt comfortable enough and even encouraged to proceed (2020b). I am very grateful for the openness and willingness of the participants to share their knowledge and to work with me in unearthing the material for this thesis.

However, the most difficult ethical choice I had to make as a non-Indigenous researcher was whether I should anonymize the data or not. Although I had verbal consent from all three participants to include their names in the thesis project, upon discussing further with my supervisor, I made the difficult decision to anonymize. Considering the historical nature of Indigenous research, wherein "Indigenous peoples have expressed skepticism and research fatigue" (Peltier, 2018), I did not want to call upon the participants for more of their time and energy after the interviews were completed. While from a more practical standpoint, gaining consent from participants is a bit more complex with regards to the Norwegian Centre for Research Data Processing (NSD), where signing and mailing consent forms while at the same time awaiting approval, as suggested by my supervisor can also be a challenging process. However, the main reason for anonymizing the data relates to researcher responsibility. Given the sensitive nature of the research topic and the political content of the memes, there is a lack of predictability when considering the possible reach of the research after publication. A question of transparency was also something to consider, as with the public nature of the internet there is no

way of knowing to which extent the participants movements might be observable by unsympathetic viewers (Landzelius, 2006). This was however a difficult decision, as I did not want to overshadow the consent of the participants by implementing a paternalistic constraint resulting in the negation of participant autonomy. However, after discussing the issues with my supervisor it was decided that to anonymize the data would be the most ethically sound alternative.

2 Contextualizing the Research Project Through an Historical and Situational lens

Before going further, it would be beneficial to define a few relevant key terms where I expand upon what is meant by *social media*, and *memes and memeing*.

2.1.1 What is Social Media?

As an overarching term, *social media* is varied in that it can include both online and offline media sources. Initially, social media was centralized and often one-sided. Television news channels are an example of this where information projections are done so by few sources whose content is received by viewers en masse. While referring to social media in a contemporary context what often comes to mind are social media networking giants like Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, and TikTok. These platforms syndicate the decentralization of information through user participation at high-speed¹¹ across various channels simultaneously. These particular social media sites, generated through the World Wide Web (www)¹² are heavily based on identity magnification and self-representation, and in so, require a certain amount of self-awareness by the user in curating and reflecting their identities into these spaces (Manning, 2014). However, it is the way in which these sites are utilized by users which activate these platforms as social

¹¹ High-speed refers to the rate at which data can be transferred between a server and a telecommunications device, i.e., The time it takes from when someone who shares a meme with a friend online, from the Instagram app on their mobile device, to how quickly their home modem (internet server) would receive the information and send it onward through virtual channels to their friend's internet server to the friend's mobile device. Technology is such that this time width can seemingly occur instantaneously.

¹² Built on top of the internet, the world wide web is an interconnected system which allows internet users to access public webpages, i.e., private internet users can type in www.instagram.com to access Instagram's webpage. While applications of the page are now typically downloaded to mobile devices for easier access. Mainly, application users avoid the step of having to open an internet browser to type in the address each time they would like to enter, rather they just tap the application icon on their device and are immediately directed to the site.

media spaces (Miller et al., 2016). Mainly, the social media sites exist, but it is up to the individuals themselves to choose how they engage and represent themselves. Similar to offline societies while set in the context of online realities, users interactions tend to result in a kind of socialization. Here, both articulated and unarticulated codes of conduct are established, tested, maintained, discarded, and/or shapeshifted to accommodate social online values.

Although an example more relevant to the thesis is desirable, due to the lack of academic research in this field I defer to a more general online social phenomenon for clarification. As it relates to the shifting and adaptation of social online conducts I refer to the following example. It is a popular phenomenon on Instagram for people to share selfies. Although women and men alike share these selfies, it was in the beginning predominantly women who showcased their faces in photos while wearing heavy make-up, applying specialized digital filters to flesh out undesirable attributes, like blemishes, fine lines, and such. In resistance, a movement emerged where other users contested these manufactured images through public shaming, by taking ‘natural’ , or unfiltered selfies including the hashtags¹³ #nofilter, #nomakeup. As a counter representation of mainstream beauty standards this was done in an attempt to promote ‘authenticity’, as a subversion to ‘manufactured perfection’ (Lanquist, 2016). These two positions, although originally in friction with one another have resulted in a discourse which has led to the online inclusion of beauty standards across the spectrum; Wherein an expanded tolerance for diversity now allows for online users to regulate their own forms of self-representation and expression, whether through the application of filters or in their absence. In this light, what becomes pronounced is the way in which social media constructs its own social biases, rules, and eventual evolutions.

In their functionality, social media platforms favour different modes of social expression. For example, Instagram initially promoted itself as a site for photo sharing through individual public and private user accounts. Photos, upon being uploaded, reflect the point of view of the

¹³ Hashtags are a digital instrument of social media used for identifying topic specific content.

administrator. Depending on the security settings administered by the user, where public settings allow for immediate access to photo content, private settings result in limited access. Followers access to the content depends on whether or not the user accepts a follower's request to subscribe to the account. Once granted access, however, follower participation can be expressed in the form of viewing content, commenting, 'liking'¹⁴ and even sharing other users' photos on their own personal accounts. While Instagram, up until recently has been a popular place for sharing photos, the social and creative demands of its users has resulted in its expansion to reflect user interests. Now in addition to photo sharing, Instagram users have also begun uploading other images in addition to personalized photographs. Here I am referring to the phenomenon of online memeing, where users are now establishing meme accounts as opposed to, or in addition to, their own personal accounts. Many users are now uploading, sharing, and/or creating memes themselves. The emergence of an Instagram memeing culture showcases social media's limitless potential as a space for social and creative development. Even as this thesis is being written, the phenomenon of memeing is already rapidly giving way to newer developments. For instance, to stay competitive with newer platforms like Tik Tok, a site based on short-film clip sharing, Instagram has now adapted its interface to include 'Reels'. Reels are short-film clips created by users to convey their own perspectives, thoughts, and narratives, and are emerging alongside the original interface intention of Instagram as mainly a photo-sharing site.

Although this thesis focuses mainly on Sámi memeing culture, a broader account of social media and Instagram was necessary in providing a foundational understanding of the dynamics at play in this virtual sphere. We cannot begin to understand where society is going virtually and socially, without first accounting for that which has come before.

¹⁴ 'Likes' are an interaction mechanism on Instagram made available under each post on the account where followers can show their support of the posted content by clicking the heart icon beneath the photo.

2.1.2 Memes and Memeing

The word *meme*, coined by ethologist, biologist, and author Richard Dawkins, is derived from Greek to mean ‘that which is imitated’. Dawkins used the word to describe the basic unit of an idea which replicates through natural selection and evolves along its pathways (Nissenbaum & Shifman, 2017). A meme could include anything from fashion, trendy dances, or even catchphrases. With reference to the cover photo meme, the phrase ‘I eat people like you for breakfast’ is an example of this. Dawkins compared the notion of memes to that of genes, where genes account for physical traits, memes represent ideas. Both of which, genes and ideas, go through replication, selection, and evolution (Nissenbaum & Shifman, 2017). Memes have existed well before the internet was created dating as far back as 79AD in the form of marble slabs with chiseled words from the time of Pompeii. While in more contemporary times, memes characterize, for example, the political graffiti of the late 1970s. Internet memes, however, refer to an often humorous viral or widely and rapidly circulating online visual which layers text, video, or images into its format. Internet memes are generally shared as a way to convey information or to express the content creator’s own perspective on a particular subject. Memes often take a familiar image from popular culture as the basis for their format and are subsequently appropriated, tweaked and replicated through content changes at the discretion and intention of the creator. The speed with which popular memes are shared is so rapid that longevity is fleeting. While a meme can go viral quickly, it has a very short shelf-life, as other memes which use the same format replicate and morph to emerge in their place.

The following is an example of a typical online meme progression:

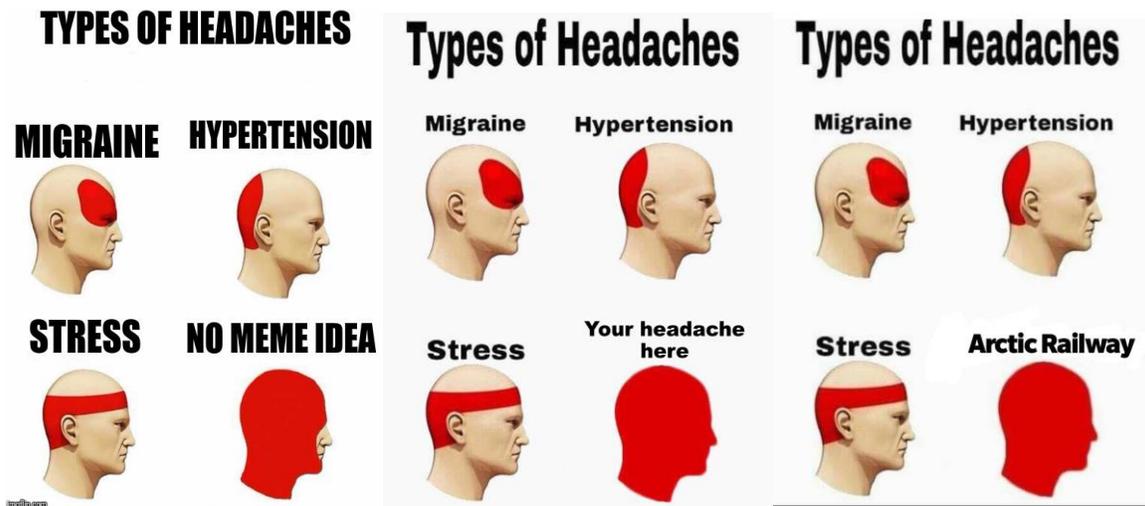


Figure 8 Meme Progression (2020)

The first meme in the series provides the base for the original template from which all other memes replicate. Presented in the next meme is the image of a man suffering from various forms of headache as represented by the red coloured areas. These red areas denote the location of his pain in various parts of the head. Depending on the interpreter's frame of reference, the humour might be understood in the final image; Where an interpretation of the meme could suggest that 'your headache' is so painful it accumulates in the entire head and face region. The relatability then resting on the notion that the interpreter has also experienced a headache so excruciating that it somehow negates any possible type of headache already existent in medical history. The final meme in the series is one taken from Sámi Resilience Memes. Here the creator expresses her frustration with the arctic railway project (2020c). This is a notoriously contested issue in Sápmi which if implemented, the railway project would impede on traditional Sámi grounds (Sagat, 2019). This demonstration of a meme's progression then, exhibits how the meme creator

from Sámi Resilience Memes utilizes a popular internet meme template to express their perspective on a highly contested topic relevant for Sámi people.

Although the majority of online memes are based in popular culture due to their ability to rise quickly in popularity and replicate, it is in this thesis where I explore memes which embed Sámi themes and perspectives. While there is some debate around the categorization of memes as essentially ‘Sámi’, I will comment more upon this sentiment in the discussion section.

2.2 Online Research and Sámi peoples

Historically research in Indigenous and Sámi communities has been a point of contention where traditional academia has at best favoured the non-Indigenous researcher perspective while at its worst been involved in subjugating its participants. Western research has often promoted racist research practices which stifle Indigenous and Sámi voices, knowledge, and visibility (Minde, 2003). In more recent years however, academia has witnessed a shift towards a more inclusive and diverse research paradigm. With the emergence of a more evolved ethical standard within academia, as well as an Indigenous research discourse, the centring of Indigenous voices in research has become a more common practice in the field (Nakata, 2012). Propelled by the activist themes of the 1960s, Linda Smith refers to this shift in academic research as the Indigenous Research Agenda (Smith, 2008). Where priority is given to the self-determination of Indigenous peoples through sound methodological approaches “situated within the decolonization politics of the indigenous peoples’ movement” (Smith, 2008, p. 115). While Nakata in his proposition of a cultural interface, deconstructs the implementation of dichotomy (Nakata, 2012). Promoting rather, the inclusivity of Indigenous and Sámi voices in research in addition to the participation of both insider and outsider researchers alike (Nakata, 2012).

Much has been contributed to an academic research body on the local lived realities of Sámi peoples historically, socially, politically, and economically. However, a newly emerging field, research into the area of Sámi online realities remains scarce. Though very little has been explored, what this thesis aims to trace are the ways in which Sámi are communicating and connecting socially and politically online in online spaces.

With global access to the internet, especially in technologically developed countries, online connectivity defines modern global society. In such, it would be a fair assumption that most Sámi individuals subscribe to social media channels. As modern society's online lived realities become more integrated into daily living, it is worthwhile to examine how this is being expressed in Virtual Sápmi; And even further, how Sámi online narratives are intersecting with Sámi offline realities.

In terms of online fieldwork within Indigenous communities, and research about Indigenous online realities, there have been numerous studies which address advancing technologies and Indigenous peoples' representation online. The anthropological collection, *Native on the Net*, edited by Kyra Landzelius (2016) has been particularly illuminating with regards to Indigenous online movements and initiatives. Relating to Indigenous memeing more generally, there were two studies in particular which provide context for the thesis. One of which I refer to in the discussion section as it explores Indigenous humour by evoking the Trickster figure as a theoretical framework for contextualizes Indigenous memes (Hinzo & Clark, 2019). In its use of an Indigenous epistemological approach, the article also illuminates how long-standing resistance to colonialism through Indigenous humour and cyberactivism is being reflected in these online memes (Hinzo & Clark, 2019). While the second article suggests Indigenous online memeing as a subversive tool. The article acknowledges how social media is “transforming the way Indigenous peoples interact” while “increasing social and political connectivity and impact” (Wilson et al., 2017, p. 1). This article further addresses the relevance of memeing, and Indigenous cyberactivism movements in connection to local activist initiatives, suggesting an Indigenous reterritorialization of online spaces (Wilson et al., 2017). When applied to the research project, this article supports my argument that Sámi online memeing culture is

contributing to both the indigenization of online spaces, as well as the emergence of a Virtual Sápmi.

2.3 Decolonizing (Virtual) Sápmi – Tracing the Local into Cyberspace

Sámi political visibility has remained at the crux of the global Indigenous rights movement since its onset after World War II and the rise of a human rights movement. Sámi participation in both the momentum of the World Council of Indigenous Peoples and subsequent conference, as well as their establishment of a Sámi parliament, and involvement in the United Nations Indigenous agenda, has set a precedent for pushing forward the rights of Sámi peoples domestically and regionally, and internationally (Minde, 2003).

While the cultural expanse of Sápmi is diverse what remains a unifying point of contention is the Sámi shared experience of colonization. Some historians and academics contest the notion of colonization as it applies to the Sámi experience. Although differing in its administration, colonization in a Sámi context “became part of a larger process related to the emergence of national states characterized by borders and taxation regimes”. (Sollid & Olsen, 2019). When referring to Sámi mobilization and decolonization agendas then, I refer to their collective movements to destabilize and transmute previous assimilation tactics brought about by national assimilation policies. While the policies themselves have resulted in the subsequent subjugation of Sámi people, as well as the erosion of their Sámi cultures, land, languages, and identities. The affects of which continue to ripple through Sámi communities to date (Minde, 2003).

Deferring to a mobilization timeline however, a shift occurs in the 1960s where Indigenous rights groups begin to organize, thrusting Indigenous agendas onto the political stage. A notable turning point occurs for Sámi communities when Sámi artists and activists came together during the Alta case where national protests in Norway are launched against the building of a dam on Sámi traditional territory, resulting in Sámi visibility in the media. This movement paved the

way for other decolonial activities to occur, such as Sámi language revitalization initiatives, cultural pride movements, and Sámi political advancements (Minde, 2003).

While these mobilizations continue to occur on the ground what is observed with the emergence of telecommunications technologies like the internet and social media is an expansion of decolonial activities into online spaces. There are numerous Sámi individuals and organizations representing themselves online in the spirit of Sámi self-determination. For example, we see the Sámi parliament represented on social media where Sámi and non-Sámi communities have access to information with regards to what is occurring politically within Sámi communities on local, national, and international levels. Additionally, Sámi social and activist groups are utilizing social media to their advancements. While too numerous to list, these groups are positioning themselves online, representing all facets of Sámi self-determination.

Sámi peoples, like many Indigenous groups are not culturally homogenized (Sollid & Olsen, 2019). Incidentally, Sámi diversity extends far beyond the traditional territorial borders of Sápmi with Sámi people living and thriving across the world. While most Sámi people tend to speak the majority language of their current nation of residence, most Sámi online users are also engaging in the majority default language of Cyberspace. Where English as the primary language of the internet is being utilized to express Sámi narratives as highlighted by its use in Sámi memes. Many Sámi people are also engaging in the online experience through Sámi languages¹⁵, also exhibited by their representation in Sámi memes. Sámi diversity is not limited to language however, as expressed in Sámi memes, their cultural ‘citizenship’ online

¹⁵ Current Sámi languages include, Southern Sámi, Ume Sámi, Pite Sámi, Lule Sámi, Northern Sámi, Skolt Sámi, Inari Sámi, Kildin Sámi, Ter Sámi.

also encompasses traditions of duodji¹⁶, dáidda¹⁷, yoik¹⁸, shared stories, customs, livelihoods, clothing, knowledges, and identities.

2.4 Sámi Humour as Resistance and Catharsis

After an initial email exchange with Lill Tove Fredriksen whose own research body includes academic contributions to the understanding of a Sámi humour paradigm, what became apparent was the gap in academic knowledge pertaining to the field. However, through her articles, “Elveland”-Irony and Laughter as Power Media in Sea Sámi Folk-Song Tradition (2004), and The Trickster and the Engineer (2018) I was able to contextualize a Sámi memeing culture as it relates to Sámi humour and Sámi self-irony. While Fredricksen’s works point towards an insider Sámi humour embedded in their oral folk-traditions, it mainly juxtapositions how Sámi humour is used to antagonize and resist oppositional and subjugating systems of outsider power, while also providing a traditional framework for coping and catharsis (Fredriksen, 2018). Fredriksen’s presentation of the Trickster figure, although not traditionally a Sámi cultural archetype, when applied to a Sámi memeing context demonstrates how humour through the guise of the Trickster results in the subversion and indigenization of Cyberspace.

¹⁶ Duodji: traditional Sámi handicrafts like, clothing, belts, jewellery, tools, cups, etc.

¹⁷ Dáidda: A modern Sámi word for what is considered art my contemporary standards.

¹⁸ Yoik refers to a traditional Sámi singing style.

2.5 Indigenous Cyberactivism and the Indigenization of Online Spaces

Cyberactivism in and of itself refers to the utilization of telecommunications technologies as a mode for expediting, organizing, and expressing local approaches to political engagement and resistance amongst groups. While an Indigenous cyberactivism positions and centralizes local Indigenous activism initiatives within an online context (Landzelius, 2006). With reference to various literatures pertaining to Indigenous online activism there appears to exist an ever-growing body of research within the field. Much of this activism tends to be decolonial in nature whereby these movements, reflected in cyberspace, focus on a variety of Indigenous centralizing initiatives. While Indigenous cyberactivism can encompass any issue impacting Indigenous communities. The article 'Rahte' - Contextualizing Sámi uses of Digital Media provides research into Sámi knowledge sharing, within both an online and offline context, demonstrating a link between Sámi activism and the overarching Indigenous cyberactivism movements (Cocq & Dubois, 2019). Similarly, this article also presents a crucial point of reflection when considering the emergence of a Virtual Sápmi and the consequent indigenization of social online spaces more generally.

3 A Sámi Memeing Culture – Exploring the Data

3.1 Interviews with Three Sámi Meme Creators

Despite the fact that the memes are publicly accessible, for ethical reasons I decided to message the administrators of the three top known Sámi meme accounts on Instagram. That is to say those which have accumulated the most followers representative of their popularity amongst Instagram users. The administrators of Sámeme¹⁹ (*meme_sapmi*)²⁰, Čájjet Sámi Vuoigŋa’s (*decolonizesapmimemes*), and Sámi Resilience Memes (*saamiresiliencememes*) were thus contacted in hopes of receiving their consent to analyze the memes on their sites.

To give a better overview of the Instagram interface and layout, I have included screenshots of their respective meme accounts below:

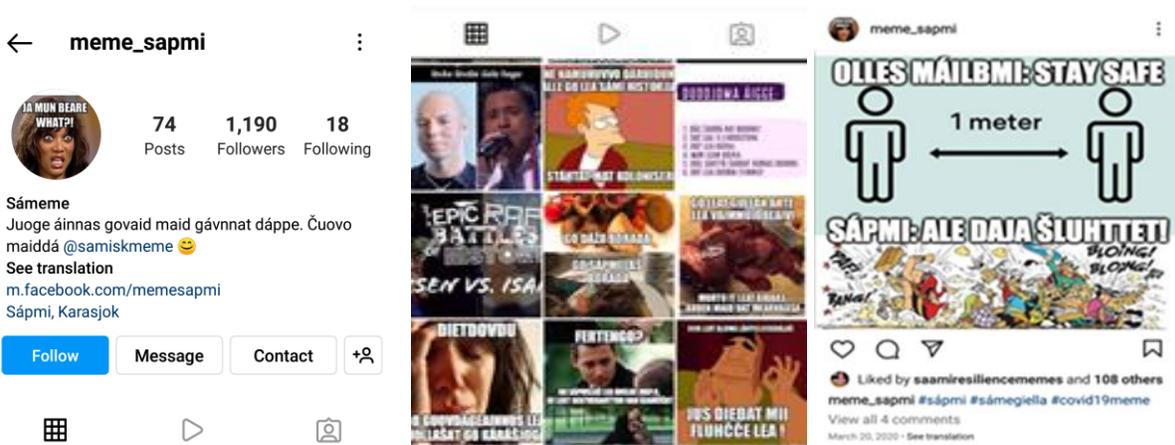


Figure 9 Screenshots from Sámeme. (1) Account information, (2) Photo layout, (3) Meme photo interface (2022)

¹⁹ Note that Sámeme, although an Instagram account, is actually the counterpart to the more updated and trafficked Facebook account of the same name, administered by the same content creator.

²⁰ In parenthesis beside the Instagram account name, I have included the user handle which acts as a secondary form of identification under the registration of the account.

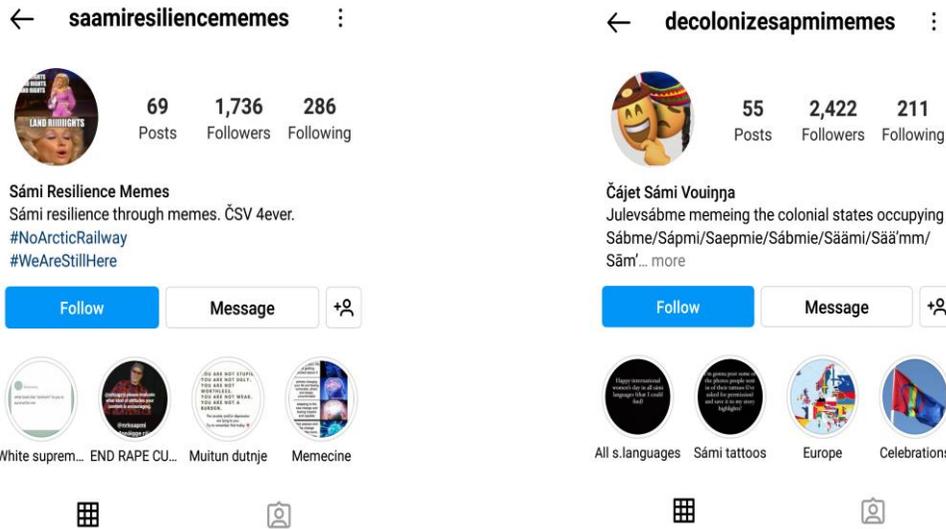


Figure 10 Screenshots from Sámi Resilience Memes and Čájjet Sámi Vuoiŋŋa accounts (2022)

In figure 9, I show how the account interface appears to the viewer. When scrolling down on either a mobile device or computer, users first see the account information (1), followed by the photo layout (2), when the user selects a photo from the montage they would like to view more fully, the individual photo then appears on the user screen (3) whereby the user can then choose to click on the like button (heart icon) to show their support, or add a comment to the photo below.

In the initial message I also inquired about the possibility of meeting for an interview which would assist in supporting the data I had anticipated gleaned from the memes. With all three account administrators agreeing to an interview, due to the Covid-19 pandemic as well as the online nature of the thesis, I decided it would be more practical to conduct online interviews as opposed to meeting in person. Using the Zoom application, I conducted three separate one-to-one interviews which were recorded, with copies of the audio and video outputs saved to a secure device. The termination of data occurring upon completion of the project.²¹ The

²¹ With one copy being sent to one of the participants as per their request, project commencing.

interviews were done separately instead of in a group format so as to protect the anonymity of everyone involved.

The interviews commenced in Autumn 2020, lasting between 1-1.5 hours in duration, beginning with informal introductions. Additionally, a brief read-through of the ethics consent form and interview guide sent via private email to each participant beforehand was completed during the interview. Before engaging in the formal interview process, upon completion of the introductions and initial protocols, each participant was given the opportunity to ask questions they might have pertaining to the project. This was then followed up by verbal and recorded consent from the participants of their willingness to participate in the project.

The identities of the interviewees remain anonymous to the extent that no identifiable characteristics are presented in the data findings, analysis, or the thesis. However, it can be noted that all three interviewees self-identify as Sámi and are female with ages ranging from 19-38 years of age at the time of the data collection in 2020. The participants reside within Scandinavia. Where one participant is located in Northern Norway (Sápmi), one in Southern Sweden (Saepmie), and one in Northern Finland (Säämi). I was unable to locate any Sámi meme administrators from the Russian part of Soame, nor did I find a Sámi meme account in relation to this group of Sámi. Though all three participants have different points of inspiration for creating their respective Sámi meme accounts, each are actively interested in strengthening the larger Sámi community both online and offline through their online content. Where the overarching focus of each account is variable, much of their content converges thematically, which will become apparent in this chapter's data analysis section.

The first participant, and creator of Sámememe, attended the online interview on October 26, 2020, which lasted approximately 1hr. Upon consenting to the ethics protocols and after informal introductions, we loosely followed the research interview guideline. Initially the participant created Sámi memes for use on her own personal Facebook page. However, in lieu of the positive online response and engagement from her Sámi friends, she began receiving Sámi memes created by others with requests for her to post. It was because of this increasing interest

and popularity that she decided to create a separate public Facebook account dedicated specifically to Sámi memes (2013). Although the meme account itself was first generated on Facebook, the administrator created an Instagram account to extend content reach. With a following of 1206 Instagram users at the time of this research, her first meme on the Instagram account was posted July 20, 2019.

During the interview, the participant presented her background. Growing up with access to some of the Northern Sámi language, the participant revealed that it was mostly spoken within her household. However, much of her upbringing however, circulated around the Norwegian language due to Sámi language loss on her paternal side. It was through the *norwegianization* process and applied assimilation policies of the government that her family's use of the language became suppressed. This has partly been at the heart of her motivation for learning the Northern Sámi language in her adult years. Contributing also to her dedication to promoting and teaching the Sámi language to others through classes, writing, podcasts, and memeing. As a Sámi speaker, it was natural for her to meme in the Sámi language regardless of the overarching intentions for her creation of the meme account. The main focus of her memeing initiative, however, was to create an online Sámi space where an emphasis on sharing Sámi memes for educational purposes was done so in the spirit of fun and lightheartedness (2020a). With the realization that memes were an effective mode of communication due to their simplistic nature in combining an image with very little text, the participant revealed that memeing also proved to be an effective tool in highlighting particular issues affecting the Sámi community (2020a).

The second interview with the administrator of Čájjet Sámi Vuoiŋŋa took place on October 22, 2020, and lasted 1hr 19 mins. Following the same process as the previous interview, after brief introductions and audio consent to the ethics protocols, an informal discussion ensued which adhered loosely to the interview guide. The participant, residing in Southern Sweden, informed the research through her lens of being an activist memmer²². Displaced from her Lule Sámi roots,

²² 'Memer' used in this context as a descriptive noun for someone who engages in memeing, or 'memes'.

she regrets that because of generational assimilation she has been unable to publicly claim her *Sàminess* due to her family's denial of their cultural roots (2020b). The participant has however been open in recent years to her closest friends about being Sámi. However, concerns remain that revealing her identity and reclaiming her Sámi culture publicly might cause disruption within her family due to their negative associations with their Sámi background (2020b). Desiring to participate more in the Sámi community however, this participant felt that the safest way to explore her Sámi roots while at the same time become more politically active within a Sámi context was to do so through the anonymity of social media (2020b). While it was also expressed by the participant that a more personal reason for creating Sámi memes was in their usefulness as a coping mechanism. In creating humorous memes targeting difficult issues, the participant found that in sharing her perspectives through memes, she was able to temporarily alleviate feelings of fatigue and frustration (2020b). The participant noticed that when interacting with non-Sámi friends both on and offline, she found herself often coming up against misinformation, ignorance and even blatant racism when discussing her *Sàminess* and Sámi related issues.

With her first post dated June 2, 2019, this participant's Instagram account houses 68 Sámi memes, and has garnered a large user base with a following of 2 437 users at the time of research. The account has also accumulated a number of well known Sámi activist followers which has assisted in promoting her meme content through their shares and likes. The account itself through the lens of decolonization aims to foster an understanding of Sámi issues through education and awareness (2020b).

The final interview between myself and the creator of Sámi Resilience Memes, upon presenting the consent protocols and interview guide commenced on October 30, 2020, lasting approximately 1hr 17mins. Introducing herself both in Inari Sámi and Finnish, the third participant, in addition to her own personal Sámi activist work, actually conducts Sámi meme-making workshops. Her endeavour aims to empower Sámi youth and their voices through Sámi memeing. Originally this participant had just been following *Sámeme* and sharing and reposting other people's memes on her own personal social media accounts. However, the catalyst for inspiring her own Sámi meme account on Instagram came as a result of online engagement

fatigue (2020b). Coming from a place of exhaustion and frustration, similar to the second participant, she began creating her own memes as a type of catharsis for dealing with the complex issues impacting her as a Sámi person (2020c). Additionally, the account serves to encourage discourse around these difficult themes which also impact the larger Sámi community. Sámi Resilience Memes is a co-creative initiative, started by the participant and a friend, who also happens to be a notable Sámi activist in Sámi activist circles (2020c). Together, sharing the administrative duties of maintaining the account, they create, curate, and post mainly activist memes promoting Sámi self-realization and representation. While their first meme post is dated May 13th, 2019, at the time of research, they have launched 68 Sámi memes on their account.

3.2 The Inspiration for, and Outcomes of, a Sámi Memeing Culture – an Analysis

3.2.1 Sámi Memes in the Context of Language Reclamation and Revitalization

Quantitative data was gleaned and analyzed from each of the Sámi meme accounts, with each meme being categorized individually on the basis of its incorporation of the Sámi languages. Although the data is acute, in the analysis section below, I present it ultimately as a consideration of language. Using my own mobile device²³ and private Instagram account, I accessed the online Instagram application and scrolled through each of the three Sámi meme accounts, respectively. Since it is not permitted to download posts from Instagram, i.e., the memes themselves, I decided to create a simple document where under the heading of each meme account I placed a checkmark for each meme which incorporated one of the Sámi languages. The data shows that

²³ My personal device is a Sony XZ mobile where I have a downloaded version of the Instagram application for private use.

the *Sámeme* account has posted a total of 74 memes with 74 memes presented in the Northern Sámi language. That is to say that this site is geared towards Sámi people, and non-Sámi individuals who have a comprehension of the Northern Sámi language (2020a). Given the casual nature of online memeing, unless determined to understand the Sámi meme content, someone who does not comprehend one of the Sámi languages might otherwise overlook a Sámi meme in the language. It is this researcher's assumption that the majority of people subscribed to this meme site have some knowledge of the language. This sentiment was echoed by the first participant when asked who she believed her audience to be, with the response being most likely insider Sámi culture (2020a). This participant's sentiment that "we cannot translate everything", perhaps points to the internal struggle felt within the Sámi community around language inclusivity and exclusivity (2020a). Though not meant as an exclusionary tactic, to meme entirely in the language was rather a decolonial tactic aimed at language reclamation and revitalization efforts (2020a). The participant was able to circumvent any problematized feelings associated with possible exclusivity through the knowledge that there were other ways for users to interpret and find translations of their own volition. This position was validated for the participant when she noticed that people she knew, who did not speak the language were also liking and sharing their meme posts, providing evidence that the account followers were able to either appreciate the meme without comprehending the message in its entirety, or more likely through their own language seeking initiatives (2020a). Although there is no definitive data on the subject, at the very least Sámi speakers and non-speakers are still sharing memes in the language.

While Čájjet Sámi Vuoiŋŋa and Sámi Resilience Memes accounted for 8/68 and 11/54 memes incorporating the language. These particular memes, incorporating few words, reflect predominantly the Lule and Inari Sámi languages, respectively. In this way, the content creators use the Sámi language in their memes as an inclusionary mechanism acknowledging the Sámi language tradition, as well as the Sámi speakers within these spaces (2020bc). As a decolonial tool however, within cyberspace through Sámi language visibility, what occurs then is the

indigenization of predominantly Scandinavian and English language online spaces in social media.

Subsequently, one of the main objectives of the Sámememe account comes from the participants own sentiment that “everything that can be done in any other language can also be done in the Sámi language” (2020a). It is for this reason that the participant decided to create a meme account dedicated to creating and sharing memes in the Sámi language. In this way the participant demonstrates to the younger Sámi generations that it is possible to indigenize popular online content rather than to only engage in the majority languages of English and Norwegian (2020a). This is also reflective of the research participant’s gaining interest in creating online memes after a negative language learning experience which occurred for her within a Sámi online group. An experience which inspired her to communicate her frustration in a humorous manner (2020a). The participant expanded upon the issue to suggest that there exists a language hierarchy between those that hold Sámi language knowledge and those that have lost the language. The resulting tension of which often gives way to demotivation amongst Sámi youth. The participant noticed that not only did memeing in the language get Sámi youth interested in using the Sámi language, but it also seemed to promote a solidarity amongst the youth, exhibited in their increased participation in Sámi memeing culture (2020a). The participant also expressed that while language education through memeing is an overarching goal, memeing is multi-functional in that the Sámi meme content itself becomes the message. Essentially, it is the transmission of Sámi knowledge within the language, not only the language itself, which contributes to a distinctly Sámi memeing culture.

As a consequence of initiating a Sámi memeing culture, this participant now creates very little of her own meme content. Rather, she shares memes sent to her by others undertaking the creation process (2020a). This participant’s individual meme venture has thus gained momentum as a collective endeavour amongst the Sámi community. That is to say, her initiative has resulted in imagining a contemporary creative cultural movement. One of which not only enriches the community itself but also reinforces Sisson’s sentiment that Indigenous cultures are fluid, adaptive and imaginative (Sissons, 2005). Essentially challenging any outsider impositions of

oppressive authenticity. Thus contributing to the decolonization of outsider assumptions and stereotypes relating to *Sáminess* (Sissons, 2005).

Meanwhile, the second participant is reclaiming Lule Sámi through self-learning initiatives both on and offline. As a beginner in the language the memes are mainly presented in English. However, the participant also expressed that this was due to her desire for the Sámi memes to reach across borders, globally. In addition to Sámi speakers, she wanted to encourage participation from the Sámi collective, as well as her non-Sámi friends, and other Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. Some of the meme content incorporates Sámi words as an act of Sámi language recognition and inclusivity. While as it relates to Sámi insider language issues, this participant echoes some of the first participant's concerns. When she says:

“It is a barrier to me every time I use Sámi...as Sámi [people] who don't speak [the language] are seen as kind of less Sámi, so if I were to make errors and things like that I'd be seen as less Sámi” (2020b).

Consequently, a contributing factor to memeing mainly in English is brought about by her nervousness around making errors in the language. Which as previously discussed tends to be a detractor for Sámi youth and adults in learning due to the negative insider attitudes of older fluent speaking Sámi. Yet this has not problematized her decision to use other areas of her Instagram account interface to focus more on her own language revitalization efforts. This participant uses the ‘story’²⁴ function of her account to post Sámi language content as a way to educate others while also reinforcing their own learning. For example, the interviewee decides on a theme, i.e., words relating to holidays, geography, food, etc., and will post the Lule Sámi

²⁴ The ‘story’ function of Instagram allows users to post temporary content lasting on a loop for 24 hours before being automatically archived. The function is embedded in the account profile picture, where a user clicks on the highlighted photo to access the content at any point during the 24hour time period.

translations of the English words into her story channel. In doing so, the participant also connects with other Indigenous accounts from North America who also inspire her and her Instagram content. More specifically, this participant has garnered connections with both Roma and North American Indigenous peoples, accumulating followers from these cultures and networking across geographical borders. These connections have even resulted in her posting translations of words not only in Sámi but also in the languages of the people she is connecting with (2020b).

Similarly, the creator of Sámi Resilience Memes in her initiative to contribute to an inclusive Indigenous cyberactivism movement, upon rigorous reflection took the decision to meme mainly in English. It was decided that since there were already memes being created in the Sámi language with Sámeme, the administrators opened up to the possibility that memeing in English might generate more engagement across linguistic lines (2020c). While with respect towards humour, this participant had some reservations about articulating jokes in the language (2020c). Again, echoing the insider Sámi language issue highlighted in the other two interviews. Ultimately however, one of the aims of Sámi Resilience Memes is to connect with other Indigenous meme and activist accounts, where memeing predominantly in Sámi would perhaps complicate this possibility.

In considering Sámi language as it applies to Sámi memeing culture, what emerges from the data analysis is how this might be reflected in a Sámi language intersectionality. Where Sámi identities become more ambiguous in the cultural interface. While what also becomes illuminated is how the inclusion and exclusion mechanism traversed through this intersectionality leads to a commentary upon the notion of Virtual Sápmi. Where membership becomes problematized by the question of who belongs and who does not. A question of which will be explored further in the next chapter.

3.2.2 The Art of Sámi Humour – as Guise, Catharsis, and Medicine

While Sámi memes exhibit cultural, familial, political, linguistic, and environmental aspects of Sámi knowledges, they also promote expectations around particular codes of social conduct in both the online and offline Sámi community. During the first interview, the participant suggests that humorous elements of a Sámi memeing culture assist in expressing these expectations in a digestible manner (2020a). For example, one of the first memes created and posted by this participant was done so with the intention of expressing their own frustration surrounding language divisiveness within the Sámi community. Yet wanting to do so in a respectful and non-confrontational manner, she applied Sámi humour to the content as a way to address the issue. In such, she was able to express an issue impacting the Sámi community while maintaining a relative distance between herself, the issue, and the community, as opposed to the intimacy associated with face to face confrontation (2020a).



Figure 11 uncaptioned, Sámememe - govat mat soitet leat suohttasat (2013)

This particular meme, geared towards the Sámi language community was used to mirror the negative attitudes held by some individuals within the community. The meme itself highlights

the issue of devaluing non-Sámi speaking youth for not knowing the language, or for using the language improperly, i.e., pronouncing words incorrectly. The participant felt that this negative attitude was a large barrier and demotivator for youth who would otherwise perhaps be interested in learning the language (2020a). The participant in a humorous and jovial tone says that with the intention of her meme, “I was just trying to make people understand that [by criticizing], you are not doing anything to help make the Sámi language [revitalization efforts] better” (2020a). The response was positive and garnered a lot of shares and likes. Consequently, through the use of humour and self-irony, the meme as a catalyst instigated reflection within the Sámi community. In its commentary, which up until that point had been a divisive issue within the community, became instead a motivational source for change. The response of the account followers, in the form of likes and shares, not only increased its content reach but also reflected a solidarity within the community. Against such negative attitudes, the popularity of the meme also became a show of support for Sámi youth in their attempts to learn the language. Simply by creating and sharing this meme, what resulted was dialogue around the issue, instigating change from within the community to foster a more inclusive, thoughtful, and supportive language learning environment. The meme itself, in expressing community expectations, also disguises itself as a tool for social regulation, defining cultural codes of conduct as well.

In a similar vein, while humour was part of the appeal, Čájjet Sámi Vuoiŋŋa initially came into existence out of the meme creator’s own desire to tackle outsider ignorance. As a means of educating her friends and peers about Sámi issues and culture, she turned to creating Sámi memes as a mode of expression. The participant expressed not wanting to deflect the Sámi tokenism, as she felt like “their Sámi google” and as the only Sámi person in her peer group was always being called upon to educate them (2020b). In this way the memes are useful in place of one-to-one discussions with her friends about Sámi issues. The participant posited that memes prove to be an effective deflector in this respect, and rather than having numerous debates with her friends about a particular subject she could just post a meme for them to view instead (2020b). The participant in her outset did not realize the impact her site would have on the online Sámi community. In generating positive response and gaining notable Sámi activists as

followers, she was pleasantly surprised (2020b). The popularity of the site gave her a new sense of purpose, motivating her to continue expanding her online initiative (2020b). The participant's decision to use memes as a mode of online expression, similar to the sentiments of the other participants, was due in part to their simplicity and digestibility. She suggests that the appeal of memes also comes from their usefulness as a form of self-irony. Yet they also act as a mobilizing force wherein this participant felt more courageous in communicating sensitive material. Due to their non-confrontational format, memes easily bring the element of humour to darker themes that can afflict Indigenous peoples (2020b). Themes which can include, racism, cultural genocide, colonial oppression, mental health, sexuality, and even rape culture²⁵. In her words:

“Its just me letting out some of my frustrations. I see activists use my [memes] sometimes and it makes me happy. I do have a difficult time talking about [some issues]...I feel like I need to lighten the mood sometimes” (2020b).

She explains even further that as a sugar-coating technique for transmitting messages to non-Indigenous people, memes are handy for creating an atmosphere of receptivity rather than contempt (2020b).

The third participant suggests that the memes themselves as a humorous mode of simple and non-confrontational communication also serves as a method for educating both Sámi and non-Sámi online users (2020c). Rather than resorting to more fatiguing online interactions where discussions can quickly devolve into hostile debate, memeing provides a certain protection from that type of vulnerability (2020c). For example, writing and sharing opinions can at times cause

²⁵ Although not discussed in the interview, there is a highlighted story on Sámi Resilience Memes account which specifically tackles issues of white supremacy and rape culture.

unnecessary distress in the form of gaslighting and tone policing²⁶ by online debaters wishing to control, dominate, and undermine the opinions and perspectives being expressed. While the humorous nature of memes, alleviates some of this tension.

Though the meme content on the account may pull from a variety of topics, it remains mostly dedicated to Sámi culture and issues, as well as activist themes. For example, those topics that intersect with the meme content include but are not limited to identity, feminism, sexuality, gender, racism, (de)colonization, politics, mental health, addiction etc. However, the main objective of Sámi Resilience Memes plays as more of a hobby, with humour and fun at its crux (2020c). This participant illuminates an important point as well where she highlights that not each person viewing the meme content will necessarily comprehend their meaning. As some of the memes integrate themes of Sámi humour and cultural knowledge that would remain obscured to outsider audiences (2020c). This insight interrogates the more theoretical elements of the thesis where the concept of a Virtual Sápmi begins to appear. Grounded in the understanding of a Sámi epistemological belonging, a Sámi humour paradigm set in a memeing context might suggest perhaps the need to question notions of citizenship as it applies to the realization of a Virtual Sápmi.

While the humour embedded in Sámi memes acts as a sort of catharsis for the meme creators, in their integration of self-irony, the memes also help to alleviate tensions within and between insider and outsider cultures. The healing power of Sámi memes for both community and individual are amplified in their ability to diffuse and soothe generational wounding, while simultaneously creating an atmosphere of playfulness and imagining when it comes to Sámi futurisms.

²⁶ Tone policing refers to a conversational tactic where the expressions of another are dismissed due to being perceived as too negatively charged with emotion for the discussion. It is a method of control which essentially shuts down conversation by silencing the voices and dismissing the experiences of another.

3.2.3 Sámi Memes as Cyberactivism – an Indigenizing Presence

When asking the first participant if her intention was political when starting Sámeme, she exclaimed quite matter-of-factly that:

“It is political to just make memes in Sámi language, even though it should be normal, but everything we [Sámi] do is political (laughingly), it is just how it is because of the history and the way we are living” (2020a).

Both Čájjet Sámi Vuoiŋŋa and Sámi Resilience Memes position themselves as Sámi political activist sites, but even more specifically as a platform for Sámi activist youth. Though everyone is welcome to engage, both insiders and outsiders, the focus remains youth oriented. Each meme, in its content, intends to engage in the decolonization process by tackling issues affecting Sámi people today, like loss of language, culture and land use. Consecutively, they also position their platforms as ‘safe’ space with aims of fostering Sámi unity and visibility.

In an Indigenous cyberactivism context, during the third interview with the creator of Sámi Resilience Memes, I came to understand the importance of positioning her memes as distinctly Sámi. In doing so, the participant posits that her first priority when creating the site is to reach and engage the Sámi community with emphasis on creating Sámi online space for Sámi youth (2020c). After which the priority then extends to other Indigenous peoples, with an agenda of solidarity, engagement, and Indigenous mobilization (2020c). While a tertiary priority of the site emphasizes sharing knowledge with non-Sámi followers (2020c).

In creating a Sámi online space through memeing, the participant was careful not to make it a purely educational page as she expressed some concern with carrying too much responsibility in terms of time, energy, research, and accountability, with respect to the meme content. While still taking a considerate and accountable approach to the meme content, the participant settled on a

more casual relationship to the site, where she creates from her own informed understandings and perspectives (2020c).

Regarding content, memes typically incorporate images from popular culture. However, this participant has been incorporating templates from Sámi popular culture. Though Sámi meme templates are scarce, she has been finding adaptation opportunities through screenshots of Sámi themed films such as *Pathfinder* (2007) and from the *Frozen* franchise (2013/2019).

The participant also uses images of notable Sámi people, as highlighted below:



Figure 12 "What have you done to make Elsa proud today?", Sámi Resilience Memes (2019)

Where Elsa Laula Renberg (1871-1931), a popular Sámi activist icon, is positioned here in a cheeky manner to demonstrate 'her' disdain relating to the issue of sexism in Sámi media. However, it must be noted that she only uses Sámi images in expressing themes and messages that uplift the Sámi community, rather than for critical expression or punchlines (2020c). While in the spirit of innovation, the participant has been using more and more of her own ideas by adjusting templates as a way of incorporating Sámi imagery. Using images and knowledge that are typically associated with Sámi identity and culture, she suggests that this distinguishes her

memes as uniquely ‘Sámi’ (2020c). For example, she might manipulate a template through an online software program like Photoshop²⁷ to include a Gákti²⁸. In this way, the meme becomes contextualized, while also decolonizing and indigenizing virtual spaces through Sámi online visibility.

Although stimulating Sámi visibility through meme content and imagery ultimately indigenizes the online space around it, Sámi ‘safe space’ is created more delicately. While the memes themselves undergo critical reflection before posting, it is also imperative that the discussions which can take place in the comment fields remain respectful and constructive (2020c).

According to the participant there is zero tolerance for hate speech, racism, sexism, trolling²⁹ or abuse of any kind. The consequence for which, is blocking³⁰ or banishment from the account by the account administrator, i.e., the participant herself (2020c). In contrary, the site aims to foster constructive and respectful discussion where tolerance is encouraged. These codes of conduct, according to the participant, allow for followers to produce their own narratives in a productive and supportive online social learning space.

The participant was also candid in detailing her methods for achieving ‘safe space’ as it relates to the insider community. She suggests that rather than exposing the insider Sámi community to potentially harsh themes, her meme process is scrutinized through thoughtful and critical reflection as it pertains to highly sensitive topics (2020c). Where there might not be a lot of public discussion amongst the Sámi community around a particular topic due to the difficult nature of a given issue, this creator will instead first put out a simple and digestible meme

²⁷ Photoshop is a software program that allows for the manipulation of digital photographs.

²⁸ Gákti refers to a traditional piece of clothing worn by Sámi people at their discretion.

²⁹ Trolling refers to any form of online harassment. Trolls, or online bullies are essentially anyone who intentionally tries to disrupt online spaces by provoking, gaslighting or otherwise upsetting other users for their own amusement or gains.

³⁰ Blocking is a technical function of the Instagram interface which allows administrators to control follower access to content. If blocked, a user can no longer interact or gain access to the account information.

relating to a topic; She will then follow up, perhaps a few days later with another meme that goes a bit further into the issue (2020c). The participant identifies her own need to challenge her community in that she:

“Really want[s] to promote the Sámi way of thinking, and narratives...[yet] there are still a lot of attitudes and colonial mentality that needs to be shaken and questioned...we need to improve within the community too” (2020c).

What is being demonstrated here, is how Sámi youth cyberactivism in the context of a Sámi memeing culture is taking place in Virtual Sápmi, yet symptomatically challenges outdated modes of thinking held within local Sápmi. Relating to larger discourses of Indigenous cyberactivism however, Sámi Resilience Memes necessarily contributes to these movements online through their positioning as a Sámi activist meme site. In connecting with other Indigenous peoples³¹ through their respective meme accounts, the participant has expressed that doing so has resulted in a deeper understanding and awareness of the way in which Indigenous people are connected through their shared experiences of historical and systematic oppression (2020c).

³¹ Where the participant noted that their memes were being shared by other Indigenous meme accounts, in particular Inuit accounts. The participant thought that perhaps this could be due to the arctic connection with both the Inuit and Sámi being traditionally from the Northern regions, while no definitive conclusion was made on this.

3.3 Reflections on the Sámi Memeing Analysis

What becomes apparent from the data presentation of the first interview is how Sámi memes in the language serve as a method for language revitalization. In embedding the Sámi language into the meme content what also occurs inadvertently, is the indigenization of online social media space. While the second and third interviews point to a decolonization process which occurs by way of communicating Sámi knowledges in those same online spaces through more inclusive language considerations. To similar ends however, both considerations of language use within the memes serve to establish their positions in Virtual Sápmi through the representation and visibility of a Sámi language intersectionality. This assists in moving discourses away from language dichotomies favouring instead the cultural interface where Sámi identities becomes characterized by diversity and ambiguity rather than singularity.

While the second participant expresses the hope that her memes will inspire more support from other Sámi and those trying to reclaim their Sámi identity she would also like for her account and content to foster more kindness, understanding and acceptance of the Sámi community by outsider groups and individuals. In parallel, she would also like for the Sámi memeing culture to instigate more solidarity amongst Sámi people as a group. Wherein a more unified front would perhaps lead to an increase in positive political change for the community as a whole (2020b). Similarly, the third participant underscores the significance of a Sámi memeing culture in its ability to foster networks between Sámi communities and other Indigenous peoples globally. In such, Virtual Sápmi membership seems to encourage a flexibility in its borders in its projection of a welcoming extension to all Sámi people and their allies based on mutual respect and tolerance.

4 A Discussion on Sámi Memeing Culture – from Practice to Theory

In the following chapter I aim to expand upon the findings within the data analysis section by implementing theoretical frameworks which assist in illuminating the original research inquiries. As stated in the introduction chapter the aim of the thesis is to explore three main components of a Sámi memeing culture. The first, an inquiry into the role of Sámi memes in Sámi language revitalization efforts and identity expression. The second, to examine the role of humour within a Sámi memeing context. While the third aim explores how Sámi memeing culture contributes to Indigenous cyberactivism movements and the resulting reimagining of Sápmi cultural borders into Virtual Sápmi. With reference to Nakata's 'cultural interface', I attempt to contextualize the way in which a Sámi memeing culture promotes the decolonization of cyberspace while similarly contributing to the *indigenization* of these social online spaces. Similarly, I antagonize the notion of citizenship as a way to demonstrate the significance of a Sámi memeing culture in determining the membership parameters of a Virtual Sápmi.

What the notion of a cultural interface serves to do is to highlight the necessity of breaking down binary expectations as it applies to a Virtual Sápmi. By removing the need for dichotomies in the context of decolonial theorising, what becomes apparent is the manner in which Sámi identities and cultures ultimately intersect. As a reflection of the Sámi memes themselves, the cultural interface allows for "open, exploratory, and creative inquiry in these difficult intersections" (Nakata, 2012, p.121). In terms of intersectionality, there is the recognition that Sámi identities diverge from past assumptions of insider and outsider dichotomies. For example, the queer Sámi community exists within the larger Sámi community, or essentially, they exist as a minority within a minority (Giertsen, 2003). Where the traditional continues to exist, Sámi identities rather embody a multi-faceted network of converging expressionisms (Giertsen, 2003).

In reference to the indigenization of online spaces I examine the process of incorporating Indigenous epistemologies into these areas through a Sámi memeing culture. While characteristic

of cyberspace, online reality has been considered an extension or adaptation of deeply ingrained western and colonial ideologies (Pete et al., 2013). That is not to suggest that Sámi online presence is intentionally engaging in this process of indigenization, but that simply by existing in these spaces through visibility and movement, these spaces become inadvertently indigenized. More specifically, in considering Sámi memes and memeing culture as a tool for decolonization, I do so from the position that technology is not neutral and in so neither is social online space.

To suggest decolonization of online space then, in its adverse form it must also hold the assumption that colonization has also occurred in these areas. While in no way intended to liken the colonial experiences of Indigenous peoples to the upstart of the internet, the following reference is used merely in the interest of theoretical context. Albeit slightly crude, William Taggart, in his account of virtual occupations draws parallels between indigeneity and online hackers (Taggart, 2006). While he suggests that hackers, or digital programmers with a “counter-establishment ethos”, who were responsible for building the internet in its onset, devised the codes which essentially created cyberspace (Taggart, 2006, p. 241). In such, he also protests that hackers were the original peoples to maintain these “first communities which were largely free from the institutions of government and corporate power” (Taggart, 2006, p. 241). Inadvertently, with the implementation of “propriety code and security” this “ethic had...been betrayed” (Taggart, 2006, p. 241). Ultimately, Taggart is suggesting that through the systematic establishment of control online, cyberspace has undergone a type of colonization. While even further, it serves the research to consider technology as an “extension of the knowledge and belief system which has led to its creation”, i.e., as the product of a Western ideological paradigm (Meighan, 2021, p. 397). Mainly, the hegemonic institutional complexes responsible for the curation, administration, and governance of online systems (Landzelius, 2006).

4.1 Language and Identity

Relating to Sámi language reclamation and revitalization initiatives, all three Sámi meme content creators express variable approaches to the Sámi language in their memeing processes. Significantly, their individual considerations of the language and diverse language backgrounds identifies a language intersectionality within the Sámi community. Memeing in the language, although considered normal practice for Sámi language holders becomes also a political motivation when expressed in online space. Through a decolonial lens, memeing in the Sámi language essentially indigenizes the space with which it is occurring. As communicating ideas and knowledge in Sámi is not only culturally relevant but is also culturally affirming in destabilizing “preconceived and stereotypical notions of indigeneity” (McGloin & Carlsen, 2013). In this way memeing in Sámi or any Indigenous language asserts power and promotes self-determination through representation. In using Indigenous languages online, in the context of memeing, it inadvertently “asserts..identity against cultural homogenization” and provides “opportunities for those who challenge English language hegemony” (Warschauer, 2000, p. 154, cited Lee, 2006). While the other two interview participants in their choices to meme mainly in the English language, become equally a source of empowerment for Sámi people moving in online social spaces. Sámi memeing in English rather than in Sámi, instead of creating an insular Sámi online space seeks to antagonize identity boundaries and Sámi language hierarchies through language accessibility to key Sámi discourses and knowledges which would otherwise be obscured to insider and outsider memeing participants alike. In this way, the indigenization of social media occurs through an intersectional Sámi lens where language inclusion magnifies and expands Sámi visibility and representation. In relation to identity and language as revealed in the data section, Sámi memeing content also challenge issues within Sápmi locally. Through the interrogation of language hierarchies between older generations of Sámi language speakers and new speakers or between those that have Sámi language knowledge and those that do not, the creation of an online Sámi space via memeing also reflects an ambiguity in the boundaries of a Virtual Sápmi.

For example, the following meme highlights the use of both English and Sámi languages:



Figure 13 #crymeajohka #whitetears #landback #memeeducation #sámasmuinna #deanusoahpamuš #justinmuorrajávri, Sámi Resilience Memes (2020)

“Cry me a johka and give me the land back – another anon submission by a meme baller who is learning North Sámi.” (Sami Resilience Memes, 2020)

With the caption following the image above, the meme displays how language intersectionality traverses the inclusion/exclusion dichotomy, reinforcing the cultural interface. Additionally, the meme becomes an instigation for online discourse regarding Sámi intersectionality.

Consequently, fostering an atmosphere of support and inclusivity within the community to expand its definition of Sámi identity as it relates to language.

Virtual Sápmi also then becomes a space for diversity and unity where cultural boundaries are re-negotiated through a Sámi memeing culture. With reference to another cases study pertaining to the instigation of a Greenlandic webpage, considerations of language ultimately determine

online territorial boundaries with respect to the group represented in these spaces. The case of Sámi memeing culture is echoed here where the Greenlandic webpage in the languages of Greenlandic, Danish, and English are utilized to “direct content towards in-group or out-group visitors” and administered as both a “conscious act and at times...merely a legacy of language skills and use” (Christensen, 2006, p. 91). In this way it becomes apparent how Sámi memeing at its discretion aspires to determine membership of Virtual Sápmi through the use of language. While superseding language, memes in their implementation of Sámi images and knowledges aims to “give a sense of bounded locality distinct from the memoryscape of neighboring communities” (Nutall, 1992, p. 92, cited Christensen, 2006).

Even further, as it relates to the superposition of the inclusivity/exclusivity mechanism, in her case study of the Tongan Indigenous group, Helen Lee highlights the dynamics of Indigenous language use as it relates to an online context. Where the Tongans who reside mainly in the ‘Western’ nations of the United States and Oceania, also admit complexity with regards to Indigenous language and identity intersectionality. Lee problematizes the assumptions around language and language revitalization online in connection to identity. It is assumed that the dominant language used online in cyberspace is English. However, what is actually being reflected statistically, is the radical change which is occurring online with the emergence and organization of online minorities. This includes those Indigenous peoples residing in westernized countries who are communicating and producing content within their own languages (Lee, 2006). Consequently, online Indigenous, and diasporic peoples are indeed changing the linguistic landscapes of once thought to be dominated by a homogeneously English cyberspace (Lee, 2006). Conversely, Lee refers to the minority Trinidadian group, in the use of their native language for communicating and instigating the indigenization of specifically Trinidadian online spaces (Lee, 2006). The above examples of both the Tongans and the Trinidadians speak to the power of how memeing in the Sámi language not only acts as a decolonizing agent, but also as an indigenizing tool. In this light, a Sámi memeing culture in its representation of a variety of languages alleviates the dichotomy of insider and outsider culture. By superseding both parts of

the language mechanism, Sámi memeing culture creates liminal space within Virtual Sápmi which allows for more fluid movement within this indigenized space.

While the internet in its ability to connect small pockets of people over vast areas becomes an integral tool for creating a culturally enmeshed cyber space, it also allows for the emergence of diverse identities within its virtual borders (Lee, 2006).



Figure 14 @sapmipride, Sámi Resilience Memes (2019)

With reference to the Queering Sápmi movement, as expressed by the authors themselves, without social media they would never have been able to connect with the queer voices of Sápmi (Bergman & Lindquist, 2014). While the movement itself has been instrumental in creating queer Sámi visibility both locally and virtually. Where what is taken for “granted on a societal level...become[s] patently absurd and possible to challenge” (Bergman & Lindquist, 2014, p. 16). Through which their project of compiling life stories of queer Sámi individuals, has resulted in a societal shift within Sápmi. Where the intersectionality of Sámi identities magnified in virtual spaces has led to the telling of more stories, the establishment of more queer Sámi organizations, and has even instigated the manifestation of a Sápmi Pride movement.

Although social media allows for a certain amount of transparency as determined by the user, it also harbours an anonymizing mechanism where users are free to conceal their local identities. In

reference to the second participant, this mechanism has proved ingenious. Locally, while she has been unable to express her Sàminess due to possible familial consequence, through the anonymizing feature of social media she has found it possible to participate in Virtual Sápmi. In such, the creation of Sámi Indigenous online territory not only offers a countering affect to the possible homogenizing nature of cyberspace but also instigates a space for displaced Sámi people wishing to reconnect with their traditional roots. While “differing visions of the possibilities of cyberspace” by Indigenous peoples are emerging, decolonial action is simultaneously occurring through representations of language and identity in these spaces (Lee, 2006, p. 158). In this way, Sámi memeing culture satisfies the cultural interface by asserting Sámi knowledges and intersecting narratives into these online spaces.

4.2 Sámi humour and an Indigenizing perspective

Going further into the discussion I also apply a decolonization framework to the notion of humour in its significance to a Sámi memeing culture. Memes above all else are intended to deliver their messages through the vehicle of humour. As suggested by each of the participants, humour and having fun with memeing is of paramount importance to each of their initiatives (2020abc). While on a personal level the humoristic aspect of memes is most often used as a digital survivance method for healing and self-soothing the wounds of colonial and generational trauma (Hinzo & Clark, 2019). Additionally, humorous Sámi memes act as a subversion to the current challenges of existing as a minority within cyberspace’s majority systems of power (Hinzo & Clark, 2019).

Relating to the relevance of Sámi meme humour in a decolonizing context, an article written by Shannon Leddy, an Indigenous woman from the University of British Columbia, explores the theme of Indigenous humour as a decolonial tool in education. In her article, *In a Good Way: Reflecting on Humour in Indigenous Education*, she articulates three ways in which humour is significant to an Indigenous pedagogy which becomes easily transferrable to the realm of Sámi

memes in social online space. Firstly, Leddy suggests that humour has a humanizing affect, allowing people to see one another more clearly (Leddy, 2018). In such, it also encourages people to share in the processes of identifying and reflecting on problematic behaviours which without the added cushion of humour, might otherwise be difficult to discuss (Leddy, 2018). Another benefit to introducing humour into challenging spaces lies in its cultural relevance. Where humour has the ability to promote and normalize desirable social outcomes and values within the community (Leddy, 2018). While lastly, as a decolonial agent, humour assists in healing colonial wounds, tempering tense situations and emotions in challenging spaces (Leddy, 2018). In the context of a Sámi memeing culture, the humorous foundation of Sámi memes proves instrumental in self-soothing, while at the same time promotes collective healing. As a mirroring apparatus, Sámi memes also assist in tackling darker themes which exist both within and outside of the Sámi community. The humoristic nature of memes both problematize and illuminate the challenging aspects of Sámi lived realities. However, in its dualistic nature, Sámi memes also diffuse states of defensiveness instigating instead, a neutralizing affect. This anomaly encourages receptivity amongst the memeing community and welcomes the opportunity for its members to reflect and relate to the content. In this way, humour becomes a decolonial tool in its ability to promote the inclusivity of Sámi perspectives within the larger memeing paradigm, while at the same time fosters healing within the Sámi community.

While more generally, as a socialization tool Miller suggests that the appeal of internet memes lies in their humorous disposition. Wherein having an undeniable visual aesthetic, memes have now begun to supersede textual and oral traditions (Miller et al., 2016). Although this sentiment might prove debatable in that it presupposes itself above traditional modes of communication, he goes further to clarify that memes are a classic example of contemporary social regulation. Deeming memes, the “the internet police”, Miller suggests that it is now more commonplace to express difficult themes through humorous online memes than it is to address these issues in a more confrontational manner (Miller et al., 2016, p. 172). Even further, he predicts that it is within these virtual spaces where the moralization of societal values is now occurring more rapidly, than was previously occurring in local settings (Miller et al., 2016). With its aim set at a

specific target, internet memes are hitting their mark without necessarily compromising their confrontational affects. In shifting societal values, local cultures might not otherwise have been able to adapt so readily without the added layer of humour (Miller et al., 2016). While Hinzo suggests that the dualistic nature of memes, although can illicit humour for some also runs the risk of triggering offence in the other (Hinzo & Clark, 2019). This points to a discrepancy which challenges the underpinning “structural inequalities between groups” and highlights an opportunity for discourse in the interest of narrowing this gap through decolonial rhetoric (Hinzo & Clark, 2019, p. 802).

Although there is not much research found in the field of Sámi humour, Lill-Tove Fredriksen suggests that Sámi self-irony and satirical humour has been an integral tool for resistance and healing within Sámi communities (Fredriksen, 2004). As a coping mechanism, Sámi humour contests the impacts of the previous assimilation practices applied during the time of *norwegianization* (Fredriksen, 2004). Through the use of humour and a “cunning” self-irony as a form of resistance, Sámi humour then becomes an “ingenious way of...reclaiming power”, within the confines of cyberspace (Fredriksen, 2004, p. 71). In a Sámi memeing context then, wrapped in a guise of humour, Sámi memes ultimately contribute to resistance discourse in their ability to subvert societal and governmental impositions of power on Sámi communities.

In an attempt to broaden our discussion on humour as it relates to Sámi memeing culture, I would also like to call upon the notion of the Trickster through an Indigenous epistemological framework. Although a full investigation into the Trickster concept exceeds the scope of this thesis, I think it an important parallel to understanding a decolonial and indigenizing approach to Indigenous online space. As expressed by Hinzo, the Trickster figure is predominantly a living entity of the imagination presented in the oral and storytelling cultures of many Indigenous groups³² (Hinzo & Clark, 2019). Characteristic of the Trickster figure is its ability to shape-shift

³² The Trickster archetype, although found in various literatures among non-Indigenous people, is characteristic of an Indigenous oral tradition. However, is most commonly localized within the Indigenous oral traditions of the Americas.

and promote critical reflection through irony and humour upon “the way things are and how they ought to be, highlighting lessons that must be but are not yet learned” (Hinzo & Clark, 2019). While Trickster’s intrinsic value also lies in its ability to foster hope and healing (Vizenor, 1995, p. 69-70, cited, Hinzo & Clark, 2019), Hinzo argues that the Trickster entity finds itself awakened in ‘Indigenous social media’ through an Indigenous memeing culture. More broadly, Indigenous humour through memeing sets to question government policy, as well as intrinsic racism and oppression. While also focusing on the more localized issue of land rights, in online spaces, issues of media practices and the Indigenous right to be “seen, to exist, and to maintain cultural practices.” is also highlighted within an Indigenous memeing context (Hinzo & Clark, 2019). The Trickster’s presence in memes, also contextualizes them through an Indigenous epistemological lens, contributing to their function as an indigenizing force within these online spaces. Parallel to the Sámi memeing culture what is witnessed are the similarities with which Indigenous humour performs as a subversive mechanism. While localizing the Trickster in a Sámi context, Fredriksen implements the Sámi trickster figure to comment upon the clever subversive elements of Sámi humour. Where Juvvá, a hospital patient who crosses societal boundaries, “demonstrates a flexibility in finding a creative space to exercise his abilities to coping” with his “hostile roommate”. While his roommate represents stállu, “a set of structures that represent the majority’s values system” (Fredriksen, 2018, p. 17). When applied to a Sámi memeing context what becomes reinforced again, is the way in which Sámi humour is applied as a method for subverting and decolonizing the majority space within which the culture is existing. Subsequently, when asked during the first interview if she applied the Trickster concept to any of her own memeing process, with a hint of irony the first participant responded laughingly, that it was all part of her “evil plan, to make people read Sámi language...and trick them into sharing it”, (2020a). The quote, in reference to some of Sámi youths’ resistance of not wanting to engage in Sámi language learning, the participant highlighted the necessity of humour and self-irony in spurring this motivation. The above examples also further highlight how a Sámi Trickster epistemological framework functions as a site for Sámi knowledge production and dissemination within these majority spaces. While at the same time through the implementation of these

frameworks in online spaces, what results is the indigenization and reinforcement of Virtual Sápmi ideological boundaries.

4.3 Indigenizing Cyberspace through Activism

While Indigenous cyberactivism is occurring on a global scale via telecommunications technologies such as social media it does so mainly through a continuity of the local, anchoring itself in groups along virtual lines (Landzelius, 2006). In such, we can ask how these online interfaces are being indigenized or “creatively integrated...into practices and beliefs rooted in a local cultural logic” (Landzelius, 2006, p. 2). As it relates to a Sámi memeing culture, observably, local solidarities, knowledges and issues are being expressed through memes. This inadvertently has resulted in an indigenization of what up until recently has predominantly been a culturally homogenous online space. While the local serves as a source of Sámi cultural expression, the global then becomes a “source of change” (Landzelius, 2006, p. 2). Sámi narratives and identities although rooted in local traditions, as expressed through memeing, persists in antagonizing the parameters of cyberspace.

In indigenizing parts of cyberspace, whether intentionally or as a consequence of existing in these online spaces, Sámi people are also demonstrating socio-political change within their own communities. On and offline, Sámi cyberactivism through memeing is strengthening the Sámi community through education and by creating awareness amongst insider and outsider groups (2020bc). These online negotiations rooted in the local become magnified in a Sámi online social context by reinforcing and re-informing the local. Where “virtual bridge[s] between localities” as “cultural and social practices [are] strongly anchored in...offline” realities (Cocq & DuBois, 2019, pp. 202-203). This showcases the possibility that the local and virtual are not separate spaces, but rather exist in the cultural interface where they instead become an extension of one another in a spiraling dance of tradition, innovation, and movement.

In terms of cultural online boundaries, it has even been suggested that Indigenous cyberactivism leads to a natural “reterritorialization of social media spaces” (Wilson, et al., 2017, p. 1). While activism ‘on the ground’ is important in Indigenous movements, social media provides a gateway for activists to expand their causes and allows Indigenous peoples to organize and spread information more rapidly across borders than has ever been witnessed before. In an Indigenous cyberactivism context, networking is also a “form of resistance” in that it “implies taking a stand as expressed in activist movements” (Cocq & DuBois, 2019, p. 214). In this way, Indigenous cyberactivism is transforming previous activist frameworks where a reterritorialization is taking place along Indigenous virtual lines (Wilson, et al., 2017). As a contributor to Indigenous cyberactivism movements, a Sámi memeing culture then, also contributes to the distinction of online territorial borders, in the form of a Virtual Sápmi.

4.4 Virtual Sápmi a case for citizenship

When asked if it was imperative that the memes hold a distinction of being labelled ‘Sámi memes’, all three interview participants responded positively that it was necessary to do so (2020abc). The main reason given relates to the nature of Sámi memes as an expression of Sámi perspectives, knowledges, and cultural understandings when created by Sámi memers themselves. My line of inquiry was directed at the interrogation of cyberspace as a merely chaotic and homogeneous cyberculture space. Warranting the question as to whether Sámi memes were perhaps something more in their own right, as acute cultural collateral. Their collective sentiment of the need for Sámi distinction is echoed in Nissenbaum’s assertion that online memes are indeed “a product of societal and communal coordination” and “function as part of a culture, contributing to the set of ideas around which communities gather and act” (Nissenbaum & Shifman, 2017, p. 485). As an indigenizing force then, Sámi memes persist in challenging the conformity of cyberspaces through the articulation of Sámi narratives within those online realities. Reflecting upon this sense of online cultural belonging then, through the

lens of a Sámi memeing culture, I also inquire into how citizenship as an indicator of membership might function in the context of a Virtual Sápmi.

The notion of citizenship traditionally entails an administrative and ideological allegiance to nation-state through documentation and collective protection vis-à-vis citizen rights. While in the case for a Virtual Sápmi I argue that a Sámi memeing culture satisfies these preconditions for citizenship and in such becomes an agent in determining its membership.

“Citizenship [as] a social contract in a state of flux that at one level is expressed through formalised rights and responsibilities (citizenship as status) and, on another level, manifests in terms of how people engage (citizenship as practice). Furthermore, in addition to these accepted frameworks, citizenship can be expressed through actions that create social belonging and relations (citizenship as acts).” (Sollid & Olsen, 2019).

With reference to the above quote, as a microcosm and facet of Virtual Sápmi, a Sámi memeing culture functions as a determinant for citizenship within its online territorial space. Although each meme account fulfills various aspects of the citizenship framework, to focus the discussion, I defer mainly to Sámi Resilience Memes in exploring this mechanism.

As a reflection of citizenship as status, the second participant grants membership to her account by bestowing certain rights and responsibilities to her followers. Members of the account have the right to participate in the daily underpinnings of a Sámi memeing culture so long as they adhere to particular codes of conduct which foster mutual respect and tolerance within the community. As a security measure, the administrators of the site offer protection to other memers in the form of patrolling comment fields for ‘trolls’ which would otherwise wish to infringe upon Sámi online territory in an antagonistic manner. In controlling membership to the account by blocking problematic entities, and through accepting followers wishing to contribute to the

development, support and well-being of the Sámi community, Sámi ‘safe space’ is maintained and reinforced.

While indicative of citizenship as practice, membership engagement is socialized through community anticipated codes of conduct and behaviour. Essentially, by centring Sámi perspectives and narratives in the meme content, members with embedded Sámi knowledge also engage in a manner which is culturally relevant. In this way, citizenship as practice, rooted in local knowledges, becomes magnified online and as a consequence defines the social parameters of Virtual Sápmi.

Subsequently, citizen as acts within a Sámi memeing context enunciates itself through the actions of its members. In demonstrating their support for particular meme content through the actions of sharing, liking, and contributing their own memes, what ensues then is the nurturing of Sámi solidarity and belonging.

Virtual Sápmi then, exists as both a theoretical and practical space of inclusion. Where Sámi memeing culture as but a mere aspect of Virtual Sápmi displays how the Sámi community and their allies, through their active contributions and in adhering to certain online social protocols, are granted a type of citizenship. A membership which allows for innovative and dynamic movement within Virtual Sápmi’s expansive borders.

5 Indigenous Academic Futurisms, Summary & Reflection upon the Research Project

5.1 *Tracing Virtual Sápmi: In the Age of the Meme*

Tracing Virtual Sápmi: In the Age of the Meme explores but a minute cross-section of a Sámi memeing culture. Yet in addressing queries into current Sámi online movements, contributes what is hopefully considered relevant research to the contemporary field of Indigenous studies. In gaining perspectives from three Sámi meme creators, who in their own right were instrumental in initiating a Sámi memeing movement, I was able to explore various facets of the Sámi memeing movement more closely. Giving special consideration to Sámi language reclamation and revitalization efforts, Sámi memeing, in its processes and content curation becomes a reflection of local Sámi narratives and identities. While indicative of the online Sámi memeing community, in showcasing how local issues are being expressed through memeing and humour, what becomes apparent is how Sámi people in their own agency are instigating Sámi collective healing.

Although the memes themselves pull from elements of popular culture, it is their anchoring in local Sámi knowledges, framed through a contemporary and intersectional lens, which leads to their necessary distinction as ‘Sámi memes’. Subsequently, while Sámi memes emerge in cyberspace, as a reflection of their cultural affiliation, ultimately challenge the virtual spaces around them. As a consequence, Sámi memeing culture in its decolonization and indigenization of these online spaces through Indigenous cyberactivism, becomes significant in its contribution to a burgeoning Virtual Sápmi. While the territorialization of Virtual Sápmi can be imagined by Sámi people themselves, in terms of a virtual citizenship it serves the research to muse about future possibilities for Indigenous groups in this regard. Where Indigenous peoples’ have found themselves subjugated and displaced from their traditional land and resources, the imaginings of

virtual lands might well be a new frontier for integrating traditional and contemporary knowledges into future Indigenous creationisms.

5.2 Prospects in the Virtual field of Indigenous Studies

When inquiring into future research possibilities, it is apparent that there is room to expand on all areas included in this thesis. As the research project ends, I am left with even more questions. As it applies to the notion of a Virtual Sápmi I would like to inquire as to how various Sámi groups in addition to a Sámi memeing culture, are contributing to the instigation of a Virtual Sápmi. Moreover, it might serve the research to explore how Sámi social, political, and economic spheres are intersecting in these online spaces.

While from a theoretical perspective, I think it warrants to investigate more deeply the notion of cyberspace as a homogenous state. Where I purpose to hypothesize that this is perhaps more of a complex issue. Although the internet in its outset and administration does so through a westernized technological lens, contributors to the creation of social media platforms harbour diverse backgrounds and in such pull from differing knowledge and cultural bases. The popular social media site Tik Tok, for example, was created and administered through China, while Russia and India are also leading creators of social media platforms within their respective countries³³. The concept of cyberspace as a homogenizing force might hold negative connotation in a global society which celebrates and promotes diversity. While it might serve future research to antagonize this notion of cyberspace as innately homogenous. Rather, shifting to a perspective of cyberspace as more of a liminal cultural interface, or a blank canvas within which diverse groups can congregate and define their own territorial parameters through culturally relevant and

³³ For more information refer to, <https://www.intechinc.com/blog/top-international-social-networks-you-didnt-know-existed/>

creative expressionisms. Similarly, how might a social media platform be developed by and for Indigenous people or even Sámi specific users themselves?

In terms of a rapidly emerging online research field I suggest that academics, especially in the field of Indigenous studies, might continue to apply Indigenous epistemological frameworks to their research processes in these online areas. As highlighted in the Sámi humour section through the application of an Indigenous Trickster framework, perhaps there could also be more research undertaken in the area of Sámi humour as it applies to the establishment of culturally relevant epistemological frameworks. Folker Hanusch in his exploration of a theoretical framework for examining Indigenous Journalism suggests the importance of using culturally relevant frameworks when undertaking Indigenous research (Hanusch, 2013). I would suggest then, that such a framework could also be developed for charting not only Sámi memeing culture, but also in framing Sámi social media practices more generally.

While Sámi people are engaging with each other online, they are also connecting across Indigenous and non-Indigenous lines. In establishing these expanded networks and alliances it might also be interesting to explore how this sharing of knowledges and ideas might be resulting in the amalgamation of Indigenous online spaces. Even further, in moving away from the negative connotations of appropriation, it might also be worthwhile to investigate how Indigenous peoples in their own agency might be co-opting and integrating these knowledges. And in so, how is this impacting Sámi and Indigenous intersectionalities and identities?

5.3 Final Thoughts on the Research Project

Even as I am writing, this thesis is already quickly outdated itself. Characteristic of the rapid manner in which social online trends emerge, replicate, and vanish, just like their meme counterparts, the Sámi memeing community is already giving way to newer forms of creative expression. As continuity however, what remains is the knowledge. So, while these movements

seemingly disappear, this is but a misconception. Virtual Sápmi as a *metascape* reflects this continuity. In its characterization as both an abstract and concrete locale in cyberspace, Virtual Sápmi serves in providing the Sámi community as an ambiguous and creative space for the Sámi imagination to engage with limitless possibility.

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Appendix I – Interview Guide



UiT Norges arktiske universitet

Centre for Sámi Studies

Virtual Sápmi:

Communicating Identities in the Age of the Meme

Interview Guide

Welcome to what will hopefully be a fun, collaborative and fruitful interview regarding memeing culture within the Sámi community! Thank you so much for participating!

The questions are very open-ended, and this is ONLY a guide to refer to during our conversation, we may not get to all of these points while the discussion may go in various directions.

Please feel free to share as much or little as you would like 😊

Introductions

Social Media

- What are memes, i.e., what does the concept of memes/memeing mean to you?
- As a meme creator yourself, what inspired you to create the type of memes you do? Are there any goals or hopes in starting these sites? discuss.
- For which Social Media platforms do you create memes? What types of memes do you tend to create?
- On which Social Media platforms do you engage in meme culture yourself? most, least?
 - What characteristics would a meme have to have for you to engage actively, i.e., humour, politically or culturally relevant?
 - How do you interact, i.e., Liking, tagging, sharing, supporting other sites, or more just observing?
 - Who are they most relevant for, i.e., what kind of identities might they speak to?
- Do other people create memes and send them to you to upload on your meme site? If yes, how many others (estimate) are engaged in sending you their own creations and/or findings?
- In your opinion is there a distinction between Sámi memes and memes in general? discuss.
- From what you observe or experience online who is sharing, liking or viewing Sámi memes?

Language

- What language(s) do you meme in?
- What impact do you think language has on participation in meme culture?

LGBTQ2+ memes

- Have you observed any queer Sámi memes? What impact, if any, do you think these memes have online and/or locally, i.e., outside of social media?

Global movements

- To what degree do you know or believe your memes have reached various communities across the world?
- Have you observed a variety of diverse memes in your social media sphere, i.e., in terms of language, culture, identity?
- On social media what meme influences dominate your feed most? More generally, do you feel supported by your meme algorithms or are there also intrusive influences? discuss.

Meme exploration

Unpacking of specific memes (approximately 3 memes)

- What does this meme say to you?
- Who do you think this meme 'speaks' to?
- What do you think the creator's intention was by creating this meme?
- Are there other ways we or others can/could interpret this meme?

Concluding the discussion and debriefing

- How do you feel the discussion went?
- Is there anything you would like to be asked or something we have not touched on that you feel would be relevant and/or important for the topic and project?

Giitu, thank you so much for your time and participation! I will keep you posted on the projects progress if you so desire to be contacted or updated in the future 😊

Appendix II – Consent Form



UiT Norges arktiske universitet

Centre for Sámi Studies

Virtual Sápmi:

Communicating Identities in the Age of the Meme

Research Participatory Consent Form

Thank you for taking the time to read this information and consent form regarding participation in the project.

Administered by the Centre for Sámi Studies and University of Tromsø, this project aims to trace the Virtual Sápmi movement into online social space to determine empirically through interviews, surveys, and textual analysis as to what degree the Sámi narrative is represented. This project's findings will hopefully be of interest to the Sámi community in its attempt to contribute to expanding Sámi narratives within the field of research while also promoting collaborative and co-theoretical methods. This project will also contribute to the developing body of already existent virtual research in Indigenous communities.

After taking initial contact with Sámi online meme account administrators to assess interest and access for this study we are now going ahead with contacting between 10-15 youth in the 18-34 age range to discuss online memeing culture within the larger Sámi community through Zoom discussions with video and/or live sound-recordings. We aim to keep the interviews to around 45minutes. The questions are quite open-ended and will be directed at analyzing a few select memes and discussing memeing culture more generally as it relates to the diversity of Sámi cultures and communities.

Your personal privacy – how we will store and use your personal data

We will only use your personal data for the purpose(s) specified in this information letter. We will process your personal data confidentially and in accordance with data protection legislation (the General Data Protection Regulation and Personal Data Act).

- Only myself and the project supervisor will have access to the data
- Your name and contact details will be replaced with a code unless you wish to have your information published. Otherwise the list of names, contact details and respective codes will be stored separately from the rest of the collected data you will store the data on a research server, locked and encrypted.
- The survey will be administered through the university data processor while the Zoom discussions will take place on the Zoom system where recorded data will be terminated upon project completion.
- The project is set to end in June 2021 where in all data will be subsequently deleted.

Your rights

So long as you can be identified in the collected data, you have the right to:

- access the personal data that is being processed about you
- request that your personal data is deleted
- request that incorrect personal data about you is corrected/rectified

- receive a copy of your personal data (data portability), and
- send a complaint to the Data Protection Officer or The Norwegian Data Protection Authority regarding the processing of your personal data

What gives us the right to process your personal data?

We will process your personal data based on your consent.

Based on an agreement with *Centre for Sámi Studies at University of Tromsø*, NSD – The Norwegian Centre for Research Data AS has assessed that the processing of personal data in this project is in accordance with data protection legislation.

Where can you find out more?

If you have questions about the project, or want to exercise your rights, contact:

Centre for Sámi Studies via the project leader,

Faith Lahey-McCoy , +47 918 740 95 fla028@uit.no

Supervisor/Academic Director, Torjer Olsen , +47 776 469 12 torjer.olsen@uit.no

Data Protection Officer, Joakim Bakkevold , +47 776 463 22 personvernombud@uit.no

NSD – The Norwegian Centre for Research Data AS, by email: (personvertjenester@nsd.no) or by telephone: +47 55 58 21 17.

Consent form

I have received and understood information about the project *Memeing Virtual Sápmi:*

Communicating Identities in the Age of the Meme and have been given the opportunity to ask questions. I give consent:

- to participate in *(an online discussion)*
- to participate in *(an online survey) – if applicable*
- for information about myself to remain anonymous. *Leave unchecked ONLY if you wish for your information to be recognizable*

I give consent for my personal data to be processed until the end date of the project, approx.

(Signature of participant)

(date)

