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***Decolonising the Eye:  
Visual Sovereignty in Sámi Film and Storytelling***

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Thesis submitted in fulfillment of the requirements for the award of  
the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Social Anthropology

2021

Department of Anthropology  
Durham University

## Abstract

The Sámi indigenous people, who hail from the northernmost territories of Norway, Sweden, Finland, and the Kola Peninsula of Russia, have in recent years undergone a burgeoning of productivity in their visual media and cinema industries. This proliferation of creative material has been accompanied by a significant amount of international attention, collaboration, acclaim, and honours at both mainstream and indigenous film festivals, from Sundance in Salt Lake City, Utah, U.S.A. to the imagiNATIVE Media Arts Festival in Toronto, Canada. However, this primacy of Sámi narrative agency, as well as input and ownership over their portrayals in broader global media, is relatively new and has emerged only within the last few decades. Indeed, prior to the 1960s and 70s, roughly, depictions of indigenous peoples, their lives, and traditions were largely dominated by outsiders. As a consequence, the Sámi and other global indigenous groups have been forced to grapple with the widespread misapprehensions of majority cultures as well as stereotypical, simplistic, and reductive depictions of their lives, epistemologies, and identities in both ethnographic media and other forms of global cinema.

In this thesis, I will emphasise that the stereotypes that populate Nordic mainstream media, which often depict Sámi characters as victims, alcoholics, slum-dwellers, mystics, or as little more than combatants in territorial disputes, have emerged in part from narratives that have stemmed from the domestic colonial legacies of the nations they inhabit. Specifically, I will argue that Norwegianisation, a colonial paradigm that defined Norwegian politics from roughly 1850 to 1980 and aimed to acculturate and “civilise” the Sámi people for the benefit of the newly sovereign nation, still leaves a narrative trace that paints a reductive picture of the Sámi minority, and that this influence continues to impact the Sámi presence – or lack thereof – in Nordic media. Conversely, and perhaps more importantly, I will also explore how Sámi cinema constitutes a form of storytelling emancipation as well as visual sovereignty for indigenous peoples, allowing them to consume alternative, humanising, and diversified narratives and imagery related to their historical and contemporary lives and cultures. In this way, I will suggest that Sámi creativity is intimately related to a decolonial endeavour that has been blossoming since the events and activities associated with the Sámi Cultural Revival of the 1970s and 80s, one which champions self-determination, dignity, and the survival of indigenous epistemologies in Sámi communities.



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## Statement of Copyright

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## Introduction

Media images, whether cinematographic or photographic, are both reflective and constructive of social and cultural realities. They can influence public memory and perception, as well as our understanding of certain events or ideas, and “prescribe our understanding of the present and the past, including false narratives within our system of beliefs” (Sonza 2018, pg. 2). These principles also apply to media representations of peoples and cultures. Indeed, images related to certain topics, narratives, places, and indeed peoples can make all these variables more “real” to an audience through filmic mediums, as well as shape and reflect core narratives of and within many cultures.

For these reasons, in the past century anthropologists and ethnographers have engaged with media as a tool for understanding and depicting cultural realities, under the premise that media can serve as “a recorder of reality – and [is] hence a valuable tool” for ethnographic analysis (Holloway 2013, pg. 365). Throughout history, some anthropologists have also maintained that film allows for greater recordable reliability than “the deceptive world of words” (Collier 2004, pg. 59). Indeed, during the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, photography and film were perceived to cast an evidentiary and objective eye on the world (Mabry 2014). However, as Cobb reminds us, “power is involved in deciding who can talk, in what order, through which discursive procedures, and about what topics,” and this statement holds as true for the ethnographic writer as it does for the producer or creator of film and video (as quoted in Wolff 1999, pg. 55). Media is not simply a mirror placed upon reality; power dynamics inevitably influence how images are presented, received, and acted upon.

We cannot discuss power dynamics and issues of representation in ethnographic media without addressing the situation of the indigenous presence in film and media. Indeed, some of the very first films ever recorded were by ethnographers and ethnologists interested in documenting indigenous cultures. An issue comes to light here when we consider that, over the past century, portrayals of and about indigenous cultures have largely been dominated by majority culture-controlled narratives in film and media. This is particularly true of ethnographic media, which initially began as an enterprise steeped in colonial objectives, sometimes unwittingly and in many cases intentionally. With that being

said, indigenous peoples have often grappled with inaccurate and stereotyping portrayals of their cultures and identities in blockbuster Hollywood films and other forms of global cinema as well. Throughout film history and into the present day, indigenous peoples are often relegated to stereotypical custodians of nature and romantic nostalgia for “simpler” times (i.e., the “green Indian” or “noble savage” stereotype), reduced to living artifacts of the past, introduced merely as combatants in territorial disputes, or presented as little more than victims, alcoholics, or “slum dwellers” (Kearney 1993, pg. 57). Souza emphasises that most indigenous peoples have grown up “impacted by the way mainstream media depict [them], and [have felt the need] to excuse themselves for not answering the codes given by the mainstream” (Souza 2018, pg. 3). These codes have arisen directly from a storied history of unequal power relationships between indigenous populations and majority cultures.

However, in recent years, audiences have seen a gradual reshaping of the cultural landscape of film and media representation of indigenous and other minority groups, allowing for greater breadth and depth of contemporary portrayals of these individuals and their stories. This is because, over the past five decades or so, indigenous creatives have seized opportunities to assert greater control over their images and narratives in contemporary media. While ethnographers and anthropologists have certainly made enormous strides in engaging with responsible and reflexive scholarship with indigenous peoples and have thus made efforts to evolve away from the conditions that facilitated colonial media, it is the work of indigenous artists and filmmakers themselves that have been principally instrumental in correcting and disseminating new narratives and images surrounding their lives and cultures. To that end, indigenous peoples from North America to Polynesia have enjoyed global accolades for their works at large-scale media events such as the Cannes Film Festival and the Sundance Film Festival, and they also enjoy their own regional and national television networks, as well as a series of indigenous film festivals that have exploded in popularity in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Mayer 2018).

It is no coincidence that this gradual shift in media representation has occurred alongside significant political changes in terms of the dynamics between indigenous cultures and their majority counterparts in many countries. Concomitantly, these sociopolitical changes have heralded disciplinary changes in anthropology and sociology, which, in their earliest incarnations, burgeoned as part of a colonial culture that asserted primary control and exploitation of narratives regarding indigenous identities and interests. As indigenous

peoples have had greater opportunity to assert their rights to self-determination and cultural vitality, anthropologists and ethnographers have begun to recognise that their singular control over indigenous narratives and representations was and is not appropriate. My objective in reiterating this point is to drive home that media is inextricably linked to dialogues associated with hegemony and power and emphasise that this is particularly true in the indigenous context. We cannot discuss a history of indigenous film without acknowledging the role colonial sovereignty has played in controlling and usurping narratives and images of indigeneity. At the same time, I will argue throughout this thesis that indigenous-created media – more specifically, film – offers indigenous peoples the opportunity to create new narratives outside of and sometimes in direct opposition to the colonial agenda, narratives that represent their past and present realities more intimately and accurately.

In this thesis, I will be exploring the objectives, activities, and discussions going on in the Sámi film industry, a small community of filmmakers comprised of indigenous creatives from the northernmost territories of Norway, Sweden, Finland, and the Kola Peninsula of Russia. Sámi culture is multifarious and complex in its history, and its cultures and dialects span and transcend Nordic and Eurasian borders, but for the purposes of specificity in my thesis, I will concentrate principally on Norway as a territorial focal point. My fieldwork was multi-sited and took place in several locations throughout the Nordic countries (I will expand upon this point later in this chapter), but in terms of historical context, I believe that a history of Norwegian nationalist politics provides a particularly intriguing lens through which we can understand contemporary representations of Sámi identity in film and their collective need for self-determination in light of a long history of colonial subjugation. Further, I will explore how Norwegian politics have played a significant role in constructing public perceptions of the Sámi minority, which in turn have impacted how they are portrayed in contemporary Nordic media (Puuronen 2011).

From approximately 1850 to 1980, very roughly, Norway engaged in a strategic and ideological nation-building process now referred to as “Norwegianisation,” which arose in the midst of the country’s newly claimed independence from the Swedish crown. Norwegianisation postulated that there was no room for cultures other than Norwegian in Norway in an effort to homogenise and “perfect” the newly sovereign nation. The principles, laws, and ideologies espoused by the Norwegianisation paradigm greatly

disadvantaged the Sámi indigenous group. This is because a critical component of the Norwegianisation paradigm involved the systematic destruction of indigenous culture and language, as well as legislative control over native territories and traditional livelihoods (Steinlien 1989). These historic activities, which will be explored in greater depth in Chapter 2, have yielded pervasive and long-term consequences in terms of the health, well-being, and collective and individual self-confidence of the Sámi people. As a consequence of Norwegianisation, many Sámi individuals were and, in some cases, continue to be hesitant to speak their indigenous language or acknowledge their cultural distinctiveness in public settings (Minde 2005).

The 1960s and 70s heralded a time of tremendous political and cultural change for the Sámi people. Through a combination of tenacious involvement in legal disputes regarding their rights to land and water, efforts at language revitalisation, and a modern renaissance of traditional cultural activities, such as the musical convention of *joik* and the handicraft/artistic tradition of *duodji*, the Sámi people have effectively advocated for both their previously denied rights to language and culture and for the acknowledgment of their distinctiveness as an indigenous people. In Chapter 2, I will explore more particularly the role of art in what has come to be known as the Sámi Cultural Revival. As the first president of the Sámi parliament Ole Henrik Magga once claimed, “artists have done more in many arenas for the breakthrough of political power than our hundreds of resolutions which I myself have been a part of writing” (as quoted in Kraft 2015, pg. 235). Indeed, during the most active years of the Sámi Cultural Revival, creatives and activists utilised their arts in a socially constructive, self-making process that continues to evolve in present day. I will, throughout this thesis, explore how these creative efforts are continuing and manifesting in the contemporary Sámi film industry.

I will also explore how this creative engagement can be seen as part of the process of decolonisation, which Antoine, Mason, Palahicky, and Rodriguez de France define as:

...the process of deconstructing colonial ideologies of the superiority and privilege of Western thought and approaches. On the one hand, decolonisation involves...problematizing dominant discourses and addressing unbalanced power dynamics. On the other hand, decolonisation involves valuing and revitalising Indigenous knowledge and approaches and weeding out [non-indigenous] biases or

assumptions that have impacted Indigenous ways of being. Decolonisation necessitates shifting our frames of reference with regard to the knowledge we hold; examining how we have arrived at such knowledge; and considering what we need to do to change misconceptions, prejudice, and assumptions about Indigenous Peoples (Antoine et al 2018, pg. 6).

I will explore how the concept of decolonisation, though relatively fledgling in terms of academic discourse, has been creatively engaged with by Sámi artists and filmmakers for several decades. Decolonisation theory is complex, and it does not exclusively pertain to the removal or reduction of imperialist legislation from indigenous territories. The decolonial process is ideological as well as practical, related directly to challenging “a system of power which perpetuates the...repression of indigenous peoples and cultures, while normalising [non-indigenous peoples’]...exploitation of the resources with which indigenous people maintain a genealogical relationship” (Veracini 2011, pg. 4). Here, I refer to “resources” that are at once ecological, territorial, material, cultural, and ontological, none of which are mutually exclusive from one another. Decolonial theory champions indigenous ownership and agency over their epistemologies and cultural lives as direct combatants to colonial systems that have sought to devalue these aspects. This undertaking is directly linked to the concept of self-determination, which can be understood and defined as:

...the freedom to establish...mechanisms of collective deliberation and decision-making that reflect one’s own identity, language, and cultural norms; and perhaps, importantly of all, the freedom to make decisions that best reflect the values and priorities of the members of one’s community in the absence of external interference or domination (Murphy 2014, pg. 320).

With all this in mind, I will argue throughout this thesis that creative self-expression is well-allied with the self-making and self-determination principles that critically underlie decolonial theory and praxis. More specifically, I will explore how Sámi filmmakers are engaging with this theory through their art, in ways both intentional and indirect. I will outline how indigenous media can be used to “disturb...the dominant system of power, challenging the ideologies in place with the production of new meanings, images, and

narratives” (Sonza 2018, pg. 3). Further, I will analyse how Sámi film has the power to subvert the “colonial gaze” in favour of self-representational “Sáminess.”

In doing this research, I aim to fill what I perceive as a critical gap in knowledge that lies at the intersection of visual anthropology, Sámi film, and indigenous activism. There have been several innovative works conducted by scholars such as Monica Kim Mecsei, Kate Moffat, Coppélie Cocq, and Amalia Pålsson that address Sámi media and socio-politics in the Nordic nations based on the disciplinary foundations of film studies and media and/or social history. There have even been a few published works that address Sámi films specifically, both documentary and fiction, including some notable postgraduate theses, such as *Crawley’s Cinema Across Borders: National Differences in Sámi Filmmaking in the Nordic Countries* and *Pålsson’s Indigenous Perspectives: An Examination of How the Post-colonial State Affects Sámi Filmmaking in Sweden*.

However, per my knowledge, to date there has not been any monograph-length literature published addressing social problematics and Sámi film from an anthropological perspective. By focusing on fictional Sámi film from an anthropological point of view, my hope is that my thesis will offer an additional degree of innovation and fulsomeness to the field of visual anthropology, which often centers its lens of focus on and through ethnographic film. I aim to create an analytical monograph that exists within a fusion of visual anthropology, the anthropology of art, the anthropology of aesthetics, and anthropological indigenous studies. I will elaborate further on these points in Chapter 6, in which I delve in depth into the idea of indigenous “art” and aesthetics.

Further, though there has been much literature related to the ways in which indigenous film contributes to a global decolonial endeavour, there has not been any literature addressing this theme in relationship to Sámi film specifically. Coppélie Cocq and Thomas A. DuBois’ *Sámi Media and Indigenous Agency In the Arctic North* is one such text that addresses Sámi film, television, radio, social media, and other forms of digital media in the context of indigenous self-determination, so its themes are similar to those I will be addressing throughout this thesis [author note: Cocq and DuBois’ work was published in 2021, so I did not have the opportunity to read it until well into writing my own thesis]. However, I feel that Sámi film deserves its own exclusive focus, as many Sámi artists seem to be drawn to film and media specifically (my informants will elaborate their opinions on why this is in later writing). I feel that the film industry has become an essential component

of contemporary Sámi culture because it allows Sámi creators to tell their own stories, and on a broad, potentially international scale. Essentially, however, there is relatively limited academic literature devoted to Sámi film, particularly that which utilises ethnographic interviews and allows the filmmakers to be heard on their own terms. My hope is that my thesis will contribute to filling this aperture in scholarship.

### Research Questions

As I previously iterated, my research aims to evaluate the ways in which Sámi filmmakers are utilising fictional film (here I am referring to both filmmaking as an action *and* film as a cultural product) in the wider cultural process of self-determination and self-making in a post-colonial era. My concerns lie primarily with the perspectives of the filmmakers and their motivations for creating their art, but I am also interested in the films themselves and how the filmmakers' objectives come to visual and narrative fruition. With these elements in mind, my principal research questions are as follows: *How can film contribute to the process of decolonisation in an indigenous context (more specifically, in a Sámi context)? Related to this, how can indigenous film help Sámi communities heal from the ill effects of coloniality in their respective nation-states? Why and for whom are these Sámi films being made? Further, what makes a Sámi film and is there a Sámi aesthetic or series of aesthetics? What does a "Sámi aesthetic" reveal or conceal about Sámi culture(s) and epistemologies?*

My primary aim for this research is to centralise the perspectives of my informants and allow these filmmakers to be heard on their own terms. It is also my goal to provide some contextualisation that I hope will be useful to non-indigenous peoples who may be interested in viewing Sámi films. As has been emphasised by several of my informants, there are certain cultural codes and idioms – verbal and non-verbal, visually explicit and ambiguous – that are not accessible to those outside of Sámi communities and this confidentiality must be respected. However, it is my aim to provide some context for understanding how Sámi ways of knowing and being may manifest through a filmic visual repertoire. Finally, as addressed in the previous section, I hope to contribute to a dearth of published academic research in this very specific field.

The Sámi film industry is relatively young and quite small – according to filmmaker Marja Bål Nango, there may be roughly thirty Sámi artists creating short and feature films at the present time – but it has been experiencing an explosion of productivity in recent years. I suggest that fictional film particularly provides a compelling avenue of ethnographic research that has been historically neglected in the field of visual anthropology, and that the Sámi film community is existing in a pivotal moment for this topic to undergo further study.

## **Key Terms and Actors**

### **The Sámi People**

The term “Sámi” refers to an indigenous cultural group native to the northernmost parts of Norway, Sweden, Finland, and the Kola Peninsula of Russia, a territory summarily known as *Sápmi*. The Sámi people have been subject to assimilationist policies to varying degrees of severity in all four nations they inhabit, meaning their current population numbers are subject to debate (Hætta 1993). Further to this, there is much contention and uncertainty regarding the topics of Sámi identity and self-identification. For example, to be registered in the Norwegian Sámi Parliaments, one must speak the Sámi language at home or have parents, grandparents, or great grandparents who spoke one of the Sámi dialects. Due to the aggressive assimilationist paradigms that characterised Norwegian politics especially, there are many Sámi who have felt discouraged from identifying themselves in the electoral register, or who wish to but have lost their language due to the aforementioned assimilative policies. With this all being said, within the context of parliamentary criterion, an estimated 40,000 Sámi people live in Norway, with roughly 20,000 in Sweden, 6,500 in Finland, and 2,000 in Russia (Ledman 2012).

### **The Sámi Language**

The Sámi language belongs to the Finno-Ugrian branch of Uralic languages. However, “Sámi language” is really an umbrella term that encompasses a number of dialects, the estimates of which are currently imprecise in terms of number and usage. The Sámi dialects generally fall within three main groups: Northern Sámi (which includes the North Sámi dialect, which is used by an estimated 75% of Sámi speakers, Pite Sámi, and Lule Sámi



dialects), Southern Sámi (sometimes called Central Sámi, which includes South Sámi and Ume Sámi dialects), and East Sámi (which includes Inari Sámi, Skolt Sámi, Kildin Sámi, Akkala Sámi, and Ter Sámi). In Norway, roughly 20,000 of an estimated 40,000 Sámi people speak one or more Sámi dialects, whereas in Russia, it is approximated that there are fewer than 1,000 remaining speakers of the Eastern dialects (Lehtola 2002).

## Sápmi



Fig. 1: Mathisen H.R. (1975) *Sápmi (Samiland) med kun samiske stedsnavn (with only Sámi place names)* [Map, coloured pencil on paper, 88 x 73 cm].

Retrieved from: <http://www.keviselie-hansragnarmathisen.net/141466671?i=104841820>

*Sápmi* refers to the geographic and cultural area to which the Sámi people are indigenous. As previously stated, *Sápmi* encompasses the northernmost territories of Norway, Sweden, and Finland, as well as far northwestern Russia. However, there is a cultural characteristic of *Sápmi* that makes identifying these territories strictly as geographical demarcations on a map somewhat problematic. Specifically, I am referring to the fact that the Sámi people have not historically recognised borders as true delineations

of territory. I am reminded of a quote from Tove Anti, Staff Officer with the Norwegian Sámi Parliament, which offers a particularly salient example of the Sámi as essentially a separate nation within several nations with this statement:

We never say, 'We are going to Finland'...We say, 'We are going to the Finnish side of the border.' We also don't call this the Norwegian Sámi Parliament; we call it the Parliament of the Sámis in Norway (Alia 2010, pg. 64).

Historically, the Sámi people traversed national perimeters freely until border conflicts and regulations impeded their ability to do so. This semi-nomadic modality of engagement with their indigenous territory partially has its roots in historically nature-based occupations. Some have categorised Sámi populations by location and profession. For example, the term Sea Sámi refers to a series of coastal communities traditionally dependent on fishing and small-scale farming. Conversely, the Forest Sámi have historically relied on a combination of inland river fishing and small-scale reindeer herding. Finally, Reindeer Sámi (sometimes referred to as Mountain Sámi) are traditionally nomadic reindeer pastoralist herders, although most of this population now maintains a series of permanent or semi-permanent residences in core Sámi territories (Helander-Renvall 2009). Presently, a relatively new category has emerged colloquially referred to by some as City Sámi, which refers to those Sámi living in central metropolitan areas that may be outside Sámi core areas (Broderstad et al 2020). It is worth noting that, though I may refer to the importance of *Sápmi* as an indigenous territory many times throughout this thesis, many Sámi no longer live in what are considered to be cultural core areas.

### The West

Throughout this thesis, I will make several mentions of the cultural “West” as a category separate from the indigenous world broadly and the Sámi cultural world more specifically. When discussing the Sámi indigenous group, this distinction may initially seem strange, considering that the Nordic states to which they are indigenous are geographically Western. Indeed, according to most modern definitions, the Western world consists of the majority of Europe, Australasia, and most of the Americas. However, it is important to note

here that there are cultural, economic, and developmental factors and considerations that have greatly muddied and complicated contemporary conceptualisations of “the West.” For example, the West is often referred to interchangeably with the term “First World” or the “developed world,” which are political and economic terms that arose out of the Cold War (Hobsbawm 1999, pg. 8). However, the “developed world’s” association with Western civilisation becomes tenuous when we consider that there are countries that meet the economic qualifiers for being “developed” outside of the geographic West, such as Japan and South Korea, for example. My point here is that the exact scope of what constitutes the Western world is somewhat subjective and hotly debated depending on various economic and political criterion; “the West” is not exclusively a geographical or even a geopolitical term (Ferguson 2012).

I do not believe that it serves my scholarship to delve too deeply into the debates surrounding what constitutes “the West” in global economic and political terms. With that being said, I will acknowledge, as a scholar interested in decolonial theory, the definition of the Western world as Willis puts it: “that civilisation that developed in the continent of Europe and was carried to...areas in other parts of the globe that were colonised by people from Europe” (Birken 1992, pg. 451). I make this acknowledgement because, for the purposes of this thesis, I cannot discuss the definition of and the history of the West without addressing the legacy of Western colonialism and its impact on indigenous populations. With this being said, Willis’s definition becomes complicated even further when we consider the Sámi as a colonised people from and within Europe by Europeans, a complex topic and debate I will delve more deeply into in Chapters 2 and 4 particularly. The upshot of all this discussion is that “the West” as a geographical, political, and indeed colonial entity is deeply complex and sometimes contradictory. However, for the purposes of clarification, in this thesis I will be primarily associating the Western world with non-indigenous Western and Northern Europeans, the United Kingdom, and the United States (I make reference to the United States here only because it is my country of origin), given the geographical scope of my discussions and historic and contemporary observations and research.

For further specificity, I wish to make a broad distinction between ideological and cultural epistemologies that distinguish non-indigenous European or Western culture from Sámi culture specifically. Throughout this thesis, I will be characterising indigenous *Sápmi* as part of “the North” in contrast to “the West,” though these regions may be considered in

terms of a geographic overlap. When referring to “the North,” I do not mean to neglect Sámi core areas that are in the southern regions of the Nordic states. Instead I am taking a cue from Eriksen, Valkonen, Valkonen, and Ingold in *Knowing from the Indigenous North: Sámi Approaches to History, Politics, and Belonging*, in which the authors distinguish “the North” as a cultural and epistemic position in addition to a geographic location (Eriksen et al 2019). In this text, the authors refer to the “Northern world” as a series of cultural epistemologies and worldviews centered on Sámi ways of knowing and being. The Northern epistemic position is distinguished from its Western counterpart in many ways (the authors also make reference to the epistemic “East” as well, but for the purposes of this thesis, I will primarily be focusing on the non-indigenous West and the indigenous North). For example, Ingold maintains that “the West is inextricably bound to the project of modernity. It is a teleological, goal-directed history, whose aim is progress, led by societies in the vanguard which are supposed to pull the rest of humanity in their wake” (Ingold 2019, pg. 109). Conversely, Northern indigenous culture is characterised by “a kind of habitation [which] repudiates any division between humanity and nature” (Ibid 2019, pg. 111). Unlike the West, the North “has shamans but no priesthood, elders but no dynasties, memories but no monuments. Indeed, the North is not so much a monument as an improvisation; its concern is...to keep life going...the North stands for revitalisation rather than resistance” (Ibid 2019, pg. 111). These conversations problematising Western vs. indigenous epistemic positions will become particularly relevant in Chapter 6, in which I will conduct a brief analysis of Western vs. indigenous aesthetics to support three in-depth Sámi short film analyses.

The purpose of this section has been to illuminate my reasons for distinguishing the non-indigenous European West from the Sámi North in this thesis in relationship to the terminology that will be used in this thesis. To sum, I will maintain that, in part, the distinction between the West and the North is political, related to a legacy of Western colonialism that has historically subjugated the indigenous North in ways I will clarify in forthcoming chapters. On the other hand, the difference between these regions is also ideological and cultural. I will reiterate here that these cultural distinctions between the non-indigenous West and the indigenous North will become particularly relevant in Chapter 6, when I discuss aesthetics in the Western “canon” of art theory (which emerges largely, if not exclusively, from the Enlightenment thinkers of the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries in Western Europe) as they stand in contrast to indigenous philosophies of art and aesthetics (Roberts

1991). I will, in Chapter 6, relate indigenous philosophies of art and aesthetics to filmmaking, and argue that the integration of indigenous epistemologies into visual anthropological research is inherently part of a greater decolonial project.

### **Fieldwork Location: Situating Myself in the North**

In order to engage with filmmakers and gain deeper understanding of their work, lives, and culture, it was of course necessary to situate myself in the region(s) the Sámi people lay ancestral claim to. As such, my doctoral research took place in numerous locations in the Scandinavian North, though I centralised the city of Tromsø, Norway as my base of operations. Initially, I planned to position myself in the Sámi village of Guovdageaidnu (or Kautokeino in the Norwegian language) but due to the family circumstances of my anticipated landlord I was unable to take up temporary tenancy in a seasonal home in the central area. I conceived of an alternative plan in which I might be able to secure lodging at the Sámi University College and perhaps take up some Northern Sámi language coursework, but unfortunately was not able to make this endeavour work at the last minute. As of 2019, Guovdageaidnu has a population of approximately 3,000 people, making the municipality's density roughly 0.3 inhabitants per square kilometre (Bakke 2001). As one of the core Sámi cultural territories, Guovdageaidnu is comprised primarily of permanent or seasonal residencies of Sámi individuals; in other words, it is not an area in which advertisements or listings for sublets frequently appear. Previously, I secured my lodging on a reconnaissance fieldwork trip to Guovdageaidnu in July 2017, during which an employee at the local hotel recommended me to my anticipated landlord. However, due to circumstances outside of this individual's control, I was compelled to relocate and commence my fieldwork elsewhere.

I abruptly relocated to a sublet on the top of a hill in Tromsø, an area in which many Sámi and Norwegians live together without much outward distinction in terms of lifestyle and presentation, though there is estimated to be a significant Sámi population in the city. Though I was initially very concerned about my relocation, this move actually proved to be fortuitous to me as a researcher without independent transportation (i.e., my own vehicle). Based out of Tromsø, it was quite easy for me to access public transit and an international airport, both of which were highly necessary for my fieldwork. Indeed, it quickly became

clear to me that my research was necessarily going to become quite nomadic and multi-sited. The International Sámi Film Institute itself is located in Guovdageidnu, which was my primary impetus for attempting to place myself there. However, my informants were widely dispersed and often on the move for the purposes of their creative projects. I traveled within Tromsø and outside to Guovdageidnu, Oslo, Gáivuotna, and Alta, Norway, Helsinki and Inari, Finland, and Stockholm and Dearn (in Swedish, Tärnaby), Sweden to secure interviews and participate in cultural activities related to Sámi media arts, storytelling, and film.

## Methods

### Fieldwork

My research has its foundations in qualitative methods, as my data collection process took place primarily via on-site fieldwork and semi-structured interviews with informants. Specifically, my research is comprised of nine interviews with filmmakers and four primary fieldwork expeditions to large and mid-sized film festivals. As I previously stated, I centralised my research in Tromsø, Northern Norway and traveled extensively to speak with informants and attend film events. Further, I attended the following festivals as a participant observer:

*Riddu Riđđu* in Olmmáivággi, Gáivuotna (Kåfjord Municipality), Norway

*Skábmagovat* Film Festival in Inari, Finland

Tromsø International Film Festival in Tromsø, Norway

*Dellie Maa Sápmi* Indigenous Film and Art Festival in Dearn, Sweden

The Tromsø Film Festival premiered several Sámi short films, one of which I will thoroughly analyse in later chapters, though the works of indigenous filmmakers were not the primary focus of the event. Given its placement in a central metropolitan area, it was easy for me to access the venue on foot and enjoy the event with a variety of national and international viewers, both indigenous and otherwise. The events focused exclusively on indigenous arts and media were much more challenging for me to access. This is not because these events were non-inclusive; all attendees with valid tickets are welcome at

*Riddu Riđđu* and *Skábmagovat*, and *Dellie Maa* is a free event. However, geographically access to *Riddu Riđđu* was particularly daunting without my own vehicle. To attend this event, I stayed at a small lodging on an islet just off of Kåfjord, then took a ferry and a van with several other festivalgoers. After getting lost in the mountains once, we eventually redirected and were able to locate the festival thanks to our spotting a gentleman wearing a traditional Sámi *gákti*. The road to *Skábmagovat* was similarly adventurous; I flew from Tromsø to Oslo to Alta to Inari and took a bus to another small lodging from which I was able to find *Sajos* and *Siida* (the two buildings in which festival events were held) on foot. At *Skábmagovat*, I was able to reconnect with some informants I had previously spoken to and enjoy their dialogue on a panel that will feature significantly later in my thesis. Finally, to access *Dellie Maa*, I flew from Stockholm to Umeå and then took a five-hour bus ride to Dearná (or Tärnaby in Swedish), a village in the Storuman Municipality with roughly 500 inhabitants.

## Interviews

My thesis is heavily interview-based, with nine total informants providing insight and information into Sámi life and culture generally and the Sámi film world more specifically. Each of my interviews took place during the fieldwork period, and I met my informants at locations suggested by them. Those who I contacted (who responded to my inquiry) were very friendly, accommodating, and open to discussion. As filmmakers, these individuals of course have at least somewhat publicised careers, so they are accustomed to conversations with interviewers and public media. None of the filmmakers outright rejected my request for an interview; however, some simply did not respond to my emails or phone calls. There were a couple of incidences in which I began a conversation with a potential informant and then he/she stopped responding, seemingly as a result of becoming quite busy or being distracted by other priorities. One individual informed me politely that she would expect some form of compensation for her time interviewing; I was not at all opposed to offering some sort of recompense or service in exchange, but because I had already conducted several interviews without offering compensation, I felt it would be unfair to the previous interviewees for me to suddenly start doing so. We ended up not doing the interview, but the brief conversation we had was nevertheless very kind and cordial.

I feel it is necessary to admit here that I had some difficulty with my fieldwork in Norway. In terms of some personal issues that arose, I promptly lost roughly 1 stone upon moving to the north (within the first couple weeks), ostensibly as a result of some health issues alongside a struggle to acclimate to the Northern Norwegian autumn and winter. I was quite unwell during this time and I feel that, upon reflection, I was not as assertive as I could have been in terms of reaching out and placing myself into the film community in *Sápmi*. I conducted several productive and positive interviews, of course, but when conducting fieldwork in the future I would strongly advise myself to be more community-oriented and socially engaged. I also believe my fundamentally introverted personality may have played a significant role here, which is something I will aim to overcome in my future endeavours. With all that being said, I will also note here that the Sámi community is much more cautious regarding outsiders and researchers than I had initially anticipated; and I hope the reader will understand that this is not a criticism of Sámi people and/or their cultural character. As I will elucidate further throughout this thesis, the Sámi people and other indigenous groups have very salient reasons for being vigilant and perhaps a bit restrained when it comes to dealing with outsiders, particularly foreign researchers and academics. I feel that I was lucky that several filmmakers were quite willing and happy to speak with me more than once, even though there were many who did not respond to my efforts to make contact or become involved with film organisations such as the International Sámi Film Institute.

Cultural anthropologist James Spradley describes the ethnographic interview as a particular type of “speech event” comprised of a “series of friendly conversations into which the researcher slowly introduces new elements to assist informants to respond as informants” (Spradley 1979, p. 58). I kept this model in mind during the process of ethnographic interviewing; in particular, I felt an emphasis on establishing a friendly and sincere rapport would be most valuable and productive. For this reason, I chose to utilise the semi- or lightly structured formal interview technique, which I felt would allow conversations to flow naturally without lacking in focus. To be specific, I arrived at my interview appointments having pre-prepared questions available at my disposal, but I also allowed spontaneous questions to generate based on the natural flow of dialogue with each informant.



Spradley explicates on three primary types of ethnographic interview questions: descriptive, structural, and contrast questions. Descriptive inquiries are most closely related to the social milieu in which the informant lives and works (Spradley 1979). For example, one of my research questions was, “Can you tell me about your background and describe how you got into the arts and film?” According to Spradley, these types of questions “enable a person to collect an ongoing sample of an informant’s language.” Structural questions, on the other hand, “enable the ethnographer to discover information about *domains*, the basic units in an informant’s cultural knowledge” (Ibid 1979, pg. 60). An example of this might be my line of inquiry regarding the significance of the oral tradition in contemporary Sámi culture, and if or how it relates to film and filmmaking in the informant’s opinion. Finally, contrast questions ask the informant to distinguish between particular topics in the framework of his or her culture (Ibid 1979). These were the least commonly used type of questions in my lines of inquiry, but they did arise naturally with some informants.

### The Interviewees

My informants will be referred to by their real names throughout this thesis, with their consent. The filmmakers and artists interviewed include the following individuals:



Fig. 2: Leinonen A.J. (2016) *Anders Sunna* [Photograph]. Leinonen Productions. Retrieved from: [https://www.kulttuurikauppila.fi/en/resident\\_artists/anders-sunna-2/](https://www.kulttuurikauppila.fi/en/resident_artists/anders-sunna-2/)

Anders Sunna is a visual artist and filmmaker, born in 1985 in Kieksiäisvaara, *Sápmi*, Sweden. He currently lives and works in Jokkmokk, *Sápmi*, Sweden. Raised in a reindeer herding family, Anders studied at the Umeå Academy of Fine Arts (2004 – 2006) and later at Konstfack – University of Arts, Craft, and Design (2006 – 2009). He describes his art, which combines painting with collage and street art techniques, as explicitly political, often addressing themes such as discrimination, colonialism, and general public ignorance about Sámi culture in Scandinavia (Bohman-Knäpper n.d.). In 2022, he will present his work at the illustrious 59<sup>th</sup> International Art Exhibition of the Venice Biennale. He is one of three selected Sámi artists (alongside Paulina Feodoroff and Máret Anne Sara) who will exhibit at this event (Breivik 2020).

In 2019, Anders premiered his first short film, which was co-created with fellow Sámi artist Inga-Wiktoria Påve. The film is a stop-motion animated piece entitled *Morit, Elena, Morit! (Wake Up, Elena, Wake Up!)*. In Chapter 6, I will spotlight and analyse this film.



Fig. 3: Unknown (n.d.) *Inga-Wiktoria Påve* [Photograph]. Retrieved from: <https://www.ingawiktoriapave.com/about>

Inga-Wiktoria Påve is a visual artist and filmmaker based in Kiruna, Sweden. She was raised in a reindeer herding community and it is from her upbringing and heritage that she draws inspiration for her creative works. She holds a dual degree in Education in Northern Sámi and in Art Education from Umeå University. She also studied Sámi crafts (or *duodji*) at *Samernas utbildningscentrum* in Jokkmokk. In 2015, Inga-Wiktoria won the Young Artist of the Year Award at the *Riddu Riđđu* Festival in Olmmáivággi, Norway. Since then she has

worked industriously on her craft and has exhibited her work at many notable institutions like the Lilla Galleriet in Umeå and at the Adäka Festival in Whitehorse, Canada.

In 2019, Inga-Wiktoría created a short stop-motion animated film alongside fellow Sámi artist Anders Sunna. The film, titled *Morit Elena Morit!*, has merited several awards, such as Jane Galssco's Award for Emerging Artists at the imagiNATIVE Film Festival in Toronto, Canada and Best Sámi Short Film at the *Skábmagovat* Film Festival in Inari, Finland (Inga-Wiktoría Páve n.d.).



Fig. 4: Smith K. (2017) *Marja Bål Nango* [Photograph]. Retrieved from: <http://www.nordicwomeninfilm.com/person/marja-bal-nango/>

Marja Bål Nango, born 1988, is a filmmaker from Galgo/Skibotn in Storfjord in *Sápmi*, Northern Norway. She was raised in a traditional reindeer herding family. In 2011, she directed her first short film, *De abstrakste*, while studying at Nordland School of Art and Film. Her film first premiered at the renowned Cinemateket in Oslo, and in 2012, it was shown at the Short Film Festival in Grimstad, and later at the Tromsø International Film Festival. Marja has also studied film at the University of Lillehammer and Sámi University College (Parker n.d.).

In 2012, Marja received a three-year working grant from the Sámi Artists' Council in Karasjok. Since then she has premiered the films *Julletrollet* (2012), *Før hunk om, etter han dro* (2012), *Halvt ditto g halvt datt* (2014), and *Hilbes Biigá* (2015), which was one of eight Sámi short films exhibited at the Tromsø Film Festival in 2015. In 2018, Marja was one of twelve filmmakers selected to participate in the Development Program for Female Filmmakers (UP), established jointly by the Norwegian Film Institute and Talent Norway. Her most recent film is titled *Njuokčamat, or Tongues* (2020), which deals with sexual assault in *Sápmi* (Parker n.d.).



Fig. 5: Gunnerud E.F. (2017) *Egil Pedersen* [Photograph].  
Retrieved from: <https://mubi.com/cast/egil-pedersen>

Egil Pedersen is a filmmaker and director from Jessheim, Norway. Drawn to film from a very young age, he made his first films with Lego and clay animation as an early teen with his father's Super 8 film camera. Before graduating from the Norwegian Film School in 2002, Egil worked in many diverse fields, from the fish processing industry to high school puppet theater. He has also served in the military. Egil has directed twelve short films and fourteen music videos as of 2020. He utilises absurdist humour and unique imagery to convey meaning in his works (Egil Pedersen n.d.).





Fig. 6: Unknown (n.d.) *Elle Sofe Sara Henriksen* [Photograph].  
Retrieved from: <https://ellesofe.com>

Elle Sofe Sara Henriksen, based in Guovdageaidnu/Kautokeino, is a choreographer, dancer, and director who works at the intersections of filmmaking, movement, and theater. Her work primarily addresses the political, social, and cultural concerns of the Sámi people (Reyjavík International Film Festival n.d.). Elle Sofe Sara holds a Master's degree in Choreography at the Oslo Academy of the Arts. She also studied dance at the Laban School in London. In 2019, she won the Moon Jury Award for her short film *Ribadit* at the imagiNative Film Festival in Toronto, Canada. She is also one of four talents in Talent Norway's filmmakers' program and the founder of *Dáiddadállu/Sámi Artist Collective* in Guovdageaidnu (Elle Sofe Sara Henriksen n.d.).



Fig. 7: Olsen T. (2012) *Sara Margrethe Oskal* [Photograph]. Retrieved from: <https://www.norden.org/en/nominee/sara-margrethe-oskal-savkkuhan-savrri-saniid>

Born in 1970, Sara Margrethe Oskal was raised in a traditional reindeer herding family in Guovdageaidnu, Norway. She commenced her career as an actress and attended the Theatre Academy in Helsinki. Later she earned her PhD in Performing Arts from Oslo National Academy, Norway, where she researched Sámi humour and jester tradition in *joik*, storytelling, and theater. She is an experienced screenwriter and poet and her written works have been translated into English, French, Breton, Finnish, Hungarian, and German. In 2016, she was nominated for the Nordic Council's Literature prize for her poetry (Nordic Women in Film n.d.).

In 2015, Sara Margrethe made her debut as a film director with the short film *Aurora Keeps its Eye on You*. Her second short film *Beaivvi nieida* (2018) premiered at the Sydney Film Festival and has been touring festivals worldwide (Nordic Women in Film n.d.). Sara Margrethe is also the director of the North Sámi language version of Disney's *Frozen II*.



Fig. 8: Somby M.L. (2012) *Per Josef Idivuoma* [Photograph]. Retrieved from: <https://www.daidadallu.com/medlemmer/per-josef-idivuoma/>

Per Josef Idivuoma, or P.J., was born and raised in a reindeer herding family from Idivuoma, Sweden. He graduated from film school in New York, and now runs his own production company, idi Studios. Aside from filmmaking, P.J. enjoys painting and video games. He is perhaps most well-known for his humorous takes on Sámi history. He has directed six films, including *Boom Boom* (2018), which follows the Sámi and Norwegian resistance to Nazi occupation, *Ellos Sápmi* (2015), the story of charismatic Klemet and his fall from leadership among the Sámi people, and *Curte-Niilas* (2010), which chronicles the misadventures of a Sámi superhero (Film Freeway n.d.).



Fig. 9: Holmgren A. (n.d.) *Ann Holmgren* [Photograph]. Retrieved from: <https://www.nfi.no/eng/film?name=nuit&id=2012>

Born in 1975, Ann Holmgren is a writer, photographer, director, and producer from Idivuoma, Sweden. She is half Swedish and half Sámi. She graduated from the Norwegian Film School in 2008, after which she directed numerous short films and published two novels under a pseudonym. Her film *Edith & Aljosja* premiered as a part of the film project *Seven Sámi Stories*, an initiative created by Sámi Film Lab and the Sámi Film Institute. The film is an allegory for love that defies cultural differences (Ann Holmgren n.d.).





Fig. 10: Aguirre J. (2016) *Hans Ragnar Mathisen* [Photograph]. Retrieved from: <https://saemiensijte.no/aktiviteter/kunstnermote-ragnar-mathisen/>

Hans Ragnar Mathisen is a prolific artist, writer, aspiring videographer, and mapmaker who was born in 1945 in Narvik, Northern Norway. He was a member of the Masi Artists Group, a collective of Sámi artists who were instrumental in opposing the Alta Dam Project that would effectively flood out crucial Sámi herding areas in the 1980s (I will discuss this artist's collective in more depth in Chapter 2). Hans is perhaps most well-known for his innovative maps of *Sápmi*, which have been described as “decolonising documents” by scholars (Stephansen 2017, pg. 112). In 1992, he was awarded the Troms County Municipality's culture prize for his contributions to Sámi culture (Mathisen 2015).

## Thesis Outline

In Chapter 1, I frame my thesis in terms of the ethics of indigenous research. I provide a relatively brief history of anthropological research in indigenous communities and analyse the ways in which Western paradigms of social sciences have historically been used to disadvantage these individuals, as well as the ways in which contemporary Western social science and indigenous research epistemologies can accommodate and benefit one another. While this introductory topic is not immediately related to film or art, I feel this discussion is crucial in terms of framing my research, the foundation of which is centered upon decolonial theory in ethical praxis as well as ethnographic analysis. Further, issues of representation are pivotal topics underpinning my thesis. I cannot discuss the issues relating to indigenous representation without addressing this idea's controversial history in the discipline in which this thesis centers itself. Further, in this chapter I discuss the concept of reflexivity as an essential component of ethical fieldwork and ethnographic writing on topics related to indigenous peoples. To thoroughly engage with this principle, I must analyse why it is important and explain how I have employed it in my field research and writing. To that end, I explore the components that constitute decolonial theory – one of which is critical reflexivity on the part of the anthropologist – and explain how my research falls in line with these principles.

Chapter 2 spotlights the history of the Sámi people in Norway, with some lesser focus on their history in Sweden and Finland as well. I did not address the history of the Sámi people in Russia only because I did not conduct fieldwork in the country and because my informants all come from the Scandinavian nations. As was previously discussed in this introduction, I chronicle the events leading up to the Norwegianisation paradigm that characterised the period between roughly 1850 and 1980 (to varying degrees of severity) and explore the early years of the Sámi Cultural Revival, which arose in response to anti-indigenous policies and ideologies in Norway and the other Nordic states. I also provide context regarding the pivotal role of the arts and artists during the Sámi Cultural Revival. I describe how history has facilitated and necessitated the vivid and complex dialogues regarding decolonisation and self-determination presently occurring in Sámi society. Finally, I provide some historical background regarding the institutional history of the Sámi film world in Norway, as well as a brief analysis of the small indigenous media industry's

relationship to the broader Norwegian film world. The purpose of discussion in this chapter is to provide some contextual foundation from which we can understand how and why contemporary Sámi artists and filmmakers are exploring certain topics and issues, particularly those related to cultural revitalisation.

In Chapter 3, I briefly widen my topical lens and address more broadly the history of indigenous peoples *in* film, as well as the history of indigenous peoples *making* film. These two topics are inextricable from one another, and further, the topics of indigenous individuals as film subjects and as makers is inseparable from the history of anthropology and ethnographic film. As such, to begin the chapter, I provide a chronicle of ethnographic photography and film and explore their roots as colonial enterprises. I then follow the trajectory of ethnographic film through the “reflexive turn” in anthropology, which necessitated more ethical, dialogical, and collaborative methodologies in ethnographic praxis and in anthropological filmmaking. I lead this discussion up to the era in which indigenous-made film (to be more specific, film that is created and directed by indigenous people, typically without the involvement of anthropologists) began to proliferate (from roughly the 1980s and onward). I describe why insider control over indigenous stories is so important in terms of self-determination, and circle back to the Sámi film industry specifically to spotlight some of the watershed films in their history. Further, I highlight and explore the multiplicity of perspectives and stories offered in these films, which often counter, recharacterise, or play with colonial stereotypes. Finally, I explain the reasons why I have chosen to focus on fictional film as opposed to documentary or ethnographic film in the Sámi creative community. I address the concept of “storytelling emancipation” and emphasise the cruciality of stories in Sámi culture, arguing at the same time that fictional film is a present-day extension of the Sámi world’s rich oral tradition with an added visual component. I explain the ways in which storytelling and film allow Sámi communities to revitalise and resist erasure in the face of overwhelming historical and colonial prejudice.

In Chapter 4, I address the concept of decolonising the mind, and explore how this can be done through contemporary media arts. I revisit how the Norwegianisation paradigm remodeled “the mental landscape of Northern Norway” to frame Sámi culture in terms of lesser overall value to Norwegian culture, and address with greater specificity the psychosocial and health-related ills that emerge in response to colonial activity in indigenous territories (Rautio-Helander 2008, pg. 27). I explore the ways in which

Norwegianisation (as well as similar paradigms in the other Nordic states) has impacted majority public perceptions of the Sámi people as well as the self-image of many Sámi individuals, and evaluate the ways in which these perceptions have influenced popular Nordic media. I then argue that Sámi film provides an effective conduit for decolonising the mind by combating stereotypical, monolithic, and reductive narratives and images about Sámi people and allowing indigenous individuals to perceive themselves in different ways. In the latter half of this chapter, my interviews with filmmakers play a key role, and I highlight and explicate their theories regarding many of the questions I posited at the beginning of this introduction. More specifically, they discuss their motivations for making the types of films they create, for whom their films are made, and what the “burden of representation” means for them as indigenous creators. Finally, I discuss the concept of silence in Sámi culture, and explore how these filmmakers negotiate this culturally specific type of social pressure with the desire to speak out on certain taboo topics that are particularly relevant to contemporary Sámi communities.

In Chapter 5, I spotlight the idea of healing from history as well as the concept of stories as medicine in indigenous culture. I explicate on the concept of intergenerational trauma and discuss the ways in which the cultural and familial memories of displacement, discrimination, and inequality can lead to a phenomenon called internalised colonisation, which occurs when “individuals presented with various forms of bio-psycho-social and cultural violence identify with the coloniser” (Begun & Beltrán 2014, pg. 160). I then launch into a discussion regarding how my filmmaker informants utilise their arts to counter these negative experiences. I explore the idea of art as a resilience strategy in Sámi culture, one which is embedded into the very fabric of Sámi identity for many individuals and is often passed down through family traditions. Finally, I describe my fieldwork experiences at two Sámi film festivals, both of which thematically focused on decolonisation as a component of healing, and the arts and film as avenues for successful psychosocial decolonisation.

In Chapter 6, I delve into an exploration of indigenous aesthetics, explaining that an understanding of the “Sámi aesthetic” or series of aesthetics requires insight into the “Sámi way of thinking,” which, as Elle Sofe Sara Henriksen asserts, “is not just one thing.” As I have previously mentioned, there are certain codes in Sámi culture that are not accessible to outsiders, and this boundary must be respected and adhered to. However, in this chapter I explain that we can glean some insight into Sámi aesthetics by exploring, more broadly, the

difference between Western aesthetics and indigenous aesthetics. To that end, I provide a brief historical overview of some of the most prominent aesthetic philosophies emerging out of the European Enlightenment of the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. I establish a few crucial differences between, generally speaking, Western aesthetic philosophy and indigenous aesthetic philosophy; namely, Western aesthetics tend to focus on compartmentalisation and problematisation, whereas indigenous aesthetics are more holistic and evaluate beauty based on a series of interrelated several factors, including the visual, tactile, serviceable, and spiritual. I also address indigenous land relations in terms of ethics and aesthetics, which I argue are inextricably linked in the Sámi context, and provide a brief analysis of the political and social dimensions of the Sámi nature relation. In Chapter 7, I then analyse in depth three short films created by three of my filmmaker informants and evaluate them from a holistic perspective. Put another way, I explore the metaphorical, visual, material, and narrative presentations in these films and, perhaps most importantly, analyse the ways in which Sámi spirituality and cosmology influences these aspects. These analyses are complemented by the insights and comments of the filmmakers.

I conclude my thesis with a revisitation to the general ideas explored in each chapter, this time contextualised in the wholeness of my research. I draw some conclusions regarding the relevance of film scholarship to the anthropology of indigenous cultures, and briefly touch on some debates regarding the idea of the filmic product as a cultural artefact. Finally, I complement my arguments with an anecdote from the *Dellie Maa Sápmi* Indigenous Film and Art Festival, which I believe epitomises and validates a key point that underpins my thesis; more specifically, that indigenous film is both personally and socially transformative for both Sámi creators and viewers.

## Chapter One: The Ethics of Indigenous Research

### Decolonisation Theory: A Guide for Principled Research and A Foundation for Analysis

Prior to commencing my multi-sited field research in the Nordic states, it was required that I complete an ethics questionnaire per university guidelines for supporting academic research in the field. In comparison to some of my scholarly peers, many of whom appeared to be pursuing more politically or socially sensitive lines of inquiry, I was under the initial impression that my field experience would be one entailing fewer political, environmental, or legal implications. I posited that my work would primarily concern the ethical issues of indigenous representation, a matter that could be quite easily addressed by privileging indigenous perspectives in film and engaging in ethical qualitative research practices. While I was not entirely incorrect in that respect, it quickly became clear to me, through my fieldwork and upon reflection in the after period, and through a confluence of academic reading and onsite conversations and experiences, that the issues related to researching and representing indigenous concerns and peoples as a non-native researcher are far more complex and involved than I initially considered.

Throughout this chapter, I will argue that the historically embedded ethical complexities underlying research with indigenous peoples can be understood as constituents of a broader prescriptive framework called “decolonisation,” which is comprised of a series of principles that will guide my research and analysis in two fundamental ways. Put more simply, decolonisation theory provides a theoretical keystone to my research in a two-fold manner. In the first capacity, the principles of decolonisation provide a series of ethical guidelines that have directed my fieldwork praxis. Secondly, in a more theoretically guided sense, decolonisation has provided a framework of analysis through which I have been able to contextualise my findings. In other words, the philosophies of “decolonising research” have informed my ethnographic practice, while the notion of “decolonising the visual” has offered the context by which I have been able to understand the objectives and practices involved in Sámi filmmaking. For the purposes of this chapter, I will explicate further on the concept of decolonising research and why it is vital to the practice of principled ethnography with indigenous peoples. In later chapters,

decolonisation theory as a method of analysis will become more evident through a discussion of various Sámi artists' filmic projects and the intentions underlying their work.

In the context of anthropology, decolonisation theory critically underlies principles of ethical indigenous research in academic and sociopolitical spheres and engenders a sense of moral responsibility on the part of individuals conducting ethnographic investigations. As described by Olsen, decolonisation partially entails “the critical exploration of the foundations and approaches of research in order to find out how or if it can be said to be marked by a colonialist bias” (Olsen 2016, pg. 29). This is somewhat of a simplification (I point this out because, among other aspects, decolonisation also advocates for the active integration of indigenous thought paradigms and methodologies into research, a concept I will elucidate in more detail later), but Olsen’s statement provides a basic understanding of the theory in terms of its intentionality. In order to understand the necessity for decolonisation theory as it underlies principled indigenous research, researchers must be cognizant of the ways in which the colonial legacies of various nations have impacted knowledge production and continue to influence their interactions with the indigenous peoples in those regions. Historical knowledge and present awareness related to issues that stem from those legacies constitute a form of respect with regard to the indigenous communities and individuals participating in ethnographic studies. Indeed, respect, responsibility, and reciprocity are vital and inseparable components of decolonised indigenous research (Drugge 2016). In later sections, I will describe in greater detail the specific ethnographic practices that facilitate these aspects.

For now, I wish to clarify my own stance regarding decolonisation and explicate briefly upon why I have centered a thesis about film on this particular concept. As will be made more evident throughout this thesis, decolonisation (both in theory and praxis) is a critically important component of indigenous life and contemporary culture because, essentially, it is tantamount to survival. In the introduction to this thesis, I offered a definition of decolonisation from Antoine et al, which maintains the necessity of “shifting our frames of reference with regard to the knowledge we hold; examining how we have arrived at such knowledge; and considering what we need to do to change misconceptions, prejudice, and assumptions about Indigenous Peoples” (Antoine et al 2018, pg. 6). This may initially sound like a principally theory-grounded explanation of decolonisation, but I believe it is important to note here that the reframing of knowledge and perception yields real-

world consequences that impact indigenous peoples directly and dramatically. This is overwhelmingly true for the Sámi people in ways I will explicate further and in greater detail throughout this thesis. For example, in Chapter 6, I discuss the ways in which Sámi herders often find themselves embroiled in development disputes that involve majority institutions threatening the well-being and sustainability of their herding and grazing territories. Despite the Nordic nations' apparent outward institutional support of Sámi peoples' rights to self-determination, indigenous land, and water, we often see majority states approaching Sámi interests in a paternalistic way, which emerges from a storied history of authoritarian and assimilationist policies founded upon a *perception* of the Sámi people as childlike, inferior, backward, etc. Put more simply, I suggest that paternalistic outlooks yield disadvantageous policies that threaten the Sámi in numerous concrete ways (which, to reiterate, will be explored in greater specificity in later chapters). Decolonisation, I argue, requires rectifying destructive and reductive ideologies about indigenous peoples – in the minds of the majority and those of the indigenous themselves – and replacing them with more nuanced, complex, and empathetic understandings of indigenous life and culture, which I believe will yield more constructive and balanced approaches to Sámi issues and global indigenous policies more generally.

I maintain that there are many large and small ways to decolonise – from institutions to public narratives – in ways that make space for indigenous peoples to navigate the world more comfortably and fairly. Anthropological research is one such sphere that has been recently engaged in discussions regarding decoloniality in research praxis, and it is this topic to which this chapter is broadly dedicated. However, I am not simply exploring the decolonisation of research with indigenous peoples out of a sense of moral necessity; I also believe it relates to the overarching theme of this thesis, which addresses the ways in which audiovisual storytelling in the Sámi film industry contributes to a broader decolonial endeavour in *Sápmi* and in the global indigenous world. I believe storytelling is the thread that binds these two topics together. Indeed, I believe the stories that we as scholars and as members of majority cultures tell ourselves and others about historical and contemporary indigenous lives concretely impacts indigenous communities in ways I have touched on previously. In turn, the stories films tell about indigenous peoples impact the way the world sees them. This is why, in decolonial practice, storytelling has “long been championed as a rich tool for justice-seeking, truth-telling, and indigenous self-determination” (Caxaj 2014,



pg. 1). In an interview with multidisciplinary arts scholar Robert Goodwin at *Howlround Theatre Commons*, Cherokee playwright Mary Kathryn speaks to the ways in which storytelling may yield or subvert colonial, paternalistic perspectives of indigenous peoples:

I think those people don't understand storytelling's role in colonisation and colonialism. They're just really not aware of why they live in the world they live in. American colonialism utilised—and continues to utilise—a very specific form of storytelling that dehumanised different groups of people and characterised the land we live on and with as a commodity, and that's the narrative and the story that got told. And it's still told today. We're still living and breathing and consuming a Manifest Destiny, 'go west young man,' 'this land is yours' narrative... (Kathryn as quoted in Goodwin 2018, pg. 2).

Of course, the speaker is referring to the United States specifically, but it will become more evident in Chapter 2 how similar colonial narratives are applicable to the Nordic states and their historic dealings with indigenous populations as well. And, for the purposes of this chapter, I must address here that the genesis of anthropology as a discipline also perpetuated and found its roots in what I might describe as “colonial storytelling.” Here I am referring to the fact that, historically, anthropological endeavours were frequently acted out by explorers, missionaries, and ethnographers who were, for example, commissioned by European monarchs and colonial authorities to acquire and disseminate information for expansionist purposes. It is clear from the resulting data that narratives perpetuated by these explorers, which often persisted into the post-expansionist period in Europe, were particularly insidious in that they were used to propagate or directly perpetuated “hierarchical concepts of race,” which placed indigenous peoples on the lowest rung of a social evolutionary ladder (Boekraad 2016, pg. 1). The stories that were told about indigenous people still leave a narrative trace that impacts the way they are dealt with politically in present day. Therein, I believe, lies the necessity for decolonisation – in a broad sense but also in relationship to indigenous research specifically.

To that end, I will here return to the idea of decolonisation in a more general sense and provide a brief historical and political context for the theory's genesis and current methods of implementation. Though the concept is arguably quite young in the milieu of

academia, in the past several decades decolonisation theory has gained a greater sense of legitimacy in the academy and in other socially/politically discursive circles. For example, officiating bodies in New Zealand, Australia, and Canada have provided specific outlines for principled research with their indigenous populations, which researchers are now expected to follow in a formalised capacity. In terms of indigenous research in the Nordic states, discussions pertaining to ethical guidelines in ethnography and other research related to Sámi issues are generally most prevalent on the Norwegian side of *Sápmi*. Unsurprisingly, these conversations rose to prominence during the 1960s, 70s, and 80s, a period that heralded new moral considerations related to social scientific inquiry specifically and the treatment of the Sámi minority by majority governments in general (Drugge 2016). In Chapter 2, I will guide a discussion more keenly focused on the colonial paradigms that informed Sámi-majority relations in the Nordic states (more specifically, in Norway) and the subsequent remodeling of the indigenous sociopolitical landscape, which emerged in part to combat these paradigms. At present, I will broaden my lens related to the topic of ethical research with indigenous minorities in a globalised capacity and discuss the conditions that necessitated contemporary discussions regarding decolonisation in ethnographic practice.

### **Ethics and Social Evolutionism in Early Indigenous Research**

In *Handbook of Critical and Indigenous Methodologies*, Denzin, Lincoln, and Smith write, “The issue of ethics...is unfinished business in both the West and among First Nations Peoples” (Denzin et al 2008, pg. 564). The authors are referring to the ongoing discourse and continuing sociopolitical and developmental negotiations between indigenous peoples and their non-indigenous counterparts, many of whom have historically engaged in and implemented social policies and academic tactics aimed at subjugating, assimilating, and/or eliminating indigenous cultures entirely. As I touched upon in early writing, historic activities are well-documented, particularly in terms of the European imperialist tactics wielded against Australian and New Zealand Aborigines, Native American and First Nations peoples in North America, and Sub-Saharan African indigenous peoples, to name just a few of the world’s many aboriginal groups.

Between the period of 1850 to roughly 1950, many Western European nations conceptualised, presented, and categorised their colonised subjugates in Australia, India,

Canada, New Zealand, Africa, the West Indies, and Southeast Asia as “brutish savages without any education [or] cultural values [who], therefore, needed to be controlled by the civilised, educated...Western people” (Sadeghi & Royanian 2016, pg. 139). These ideas were catalysed and justified in part by the publication of Lewis Henry Morgan’s *Ancient Society* in 1877, which delineated “a specific chronology to account for the origin of humanity and the putative stages of cultural evolutionary development” (Asch 2015, pg. 485). I cite Morgan here because *Ancient Society* was one of the first volumes that was demonstrably influential in crafting and perpetuating colonial racial hierarchies. In his first chapter, Morgan states that: “The latest investigations respecting the early condition of the human race are tending to the conclusion that mankind commenced their career at the bottom of the scale and worked their way up from savagery to civilisation through slow accumulations and experimental knowledge” (Morgan 1877/2019, pg. 3). Asch agrees that these evolutionary paradigms, though entirely theoretical, were integral to the justification of colonial activity:

There is no doubt that, at least since the latter part of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the stadial theory of universal history provided the paradigm to ‘explain’ the course of that history as a series of steps from most primitive (hunter-gatherers in our present terminology) to ourselves. We planted in ourselves the idea that came to justify the colonial project; namely, while some might develop on their own or with our benign encouragement, others may fail to progress and die off or make strides only by great effort and through our direct intervention (Asch 2015, pg. 484).

It can be said that a belief that the “human race was governed by a universal law in which what comes later is superior to what comes before” prevailed during the early years of colonial activity and, correspondingly, partially formed the genesis of anthropological inquiry (Asch 2015, pg. 485). However, social evolutionism was not the only factor at play in the development of colonial anthropology. Matters such as taxation, nationalism, and governance in remote territories also informed early ethnographic activity. And indeed, many historical texts inform us that some anthropologists of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries would align themselves with and/or work directly for colonial authorities. For example, some seminal works in the history of anthropology emerged from the activities of German scholars working within and on behalf of the Russian empire. These early ethnographers

collected the material artifacts and oral histories of the indigenous peoples in Russia and Siberia, with the objective to “(first) describe...a large number of cultural groups...and (second) to...control and tax them” (Shimizu & van Bremen 1999, pg. 27). From this expedition emerged the science of *Völker-Beschreibung*, or “the description of peoples,” which was then generalised into *Völkerkunde* or *ethnologia* and proliferated in prominent academic centers in Russia, Germany, and Austria (Ibid 1999). However, it is also worth noting here that some early anthropologists and ethnographers may have contributed to colonial activities unwittingly or indirectly, without any insidious intent outside of knowledge acquisition.

To summarise, historically anthropological inquiry and research was frequently utilised to legitimise the biases and further the objectives of non-indigenous European or Eurocentric knowledge production centers and/or political bodies. Thus, early qualitative discourse privileged a particular way of perceiving the world, people, cultures, and ultimately social reality. It can be said that the philosophies underlying 19<sup>th</sup> century cultural evolutionism were, in part, the “handmaiden[s] of colonialism” (Asch 2015, pg. 485). And indeed, social evolutionism was posited to be an undisputable scientific theory during this time; there is certainly irony in that, given that it was a social theory engineered in part to, again, legitimise the expansionist objectives of Eurocentric scholarly and political entities. Mary Kathryn’s quote, cited earlier in this chapter, comes to mind here when she speaks to storytelling’s role in colonisation. I suggest that social evolutionism constitutes one such form of “colonial storytelling,” informing the ways in which majority cultures thought, felt, and dealt with indigenous peoples. This leads to the crux of my thesis, which postulates that indigenous storytelling through audiovisual film and media offers a different, more constructive and empathetic perspective on indigenous lives and issues because their stories are written and disseminated by the indigenous storytellers, artists, and producers *themselves*.

Very generally, I will argue throughout this thesis that fictional film provides a window into the indigenous perspective in a way that is humanising, complex, and nuanced based partly on the subjective nature of its production. Further, I will suggest that using film as emic data in anthropology allows the researcher to establish an empathetic commonality by participating in indigenous stories, rather than treating indigenous individuals as simply research subjects. Indeed, the aim of my research is not to unveil some sort of indisputable,

objective, scientific truth about Sámi culture, but to facilitate greater understanding, using film and the visual arts as mediums to do so. Again, I will explicate upon this particular topic more thoroughly in Chapter 3.

### **The Reflexive Turn**

In 1973, anthropologist Diane Lewis described the initial incarnations of anthropological and scholarly-cultural inquiry as belonging to an “era of violence,” ultimately giving way to a disciplinary “state of crisis, demonstrated by the marked estrangement between anthropologists and the...people they have traditionally studied” (Lewis 1973, pg. 581). I cite Diane Lewis here because she was an intellectual activist who is largely considered instrumental in the transformation of anthropology from a colonial to a postcolonial discipline. With that being said, previously, in 1966, ethnographer and anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss *also* described this “era of violence,” characterising the historic setting of anthropological practice as (Ibid 1973, pg. 581):

...the outcome of a historical process which has made the larger part of mankind subservient to the other, and during which millions of innocent human beings have had their resources plundered and their institutions and beliefs destroyed, whilst they themselves were ruthlessly killed, thrown into bondage, and contaminated by diseases they were unable to resist (Lévi-Strauss 1966, pg. 124).

As a result of these historic injustices, Lewis, Lévi-Strauss, and many of their contemporaries began to experience and observe instances of rejection by government representatives of the culture groups anthropologists wished to study during the mid-twentieth century. Both Lévi-Strauss and Lewis maintained that the aforementioned epoch of exploitation and subjugation in both politics and research yielded a pervasive relationship of distrust between anthropologists and their prospective informants. To rectify the situation, Lewis and many other scholars began advocating for what would ultimately be called the “reflexive turn” in cultural anthropology (Lewis 1973).

The “reflexive turn,” largely attributed to the time period between 1960 and the late 1990s, refers to a shift away from positivist attitudes (I refer to positivism as an approach to

the social sciences that is based on the belief that all life can be concretely and tautologically understood through the application of the scientific method; generally, I believe it does not tend to stand up to scrutiny in the social sciences) and toward a more engaged, reflective approach in the social sciences (Roscoe 1995). The foundation for this shift lies partially within the social theory of reflexivity, which is critical to qualitative research in particular and to cultural anthropology in its current incarnation. According to anthropologist Philip Carl Salzman, “no idea has been so wholeheartedly [and] unanimously...adopted into contemporary anthropology as ‘reflexivity’” (Salzman 2002, pg. 805). In the first definition put forth by the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the term literally means “capable of bending back,” a definition with origins in the 16<sup>th</sup> century (Ibid 2002, pg. 805). Its secondary definition is a bit more pertinent when discussing social theory: “turned or directed back upon the mind itself” (Ibid 2002, pg. 805). Reflexivity in the social scientific disciplines refers to the scholar casting a critical eye back toward him/herself and examining the ways in which his/her social, cultural, and epistemological points of reference may impact his/her behaviours and perceptions within an alternative sociocultural context. It is within these interactions that the scholar constructs his/her image of an “other,” but also of a “self.” In 1940, Reverend Edward Reynolds of Norwich suggested that true reflexivity exists “in those two Offices of Reason, the Transient and Reflexive act, that whereby we looke Outward on others; or Inward on our selves” (as quoted in Salzman 2002, pg. 805). Earlier, in *Mind, Self, and Society*, George Herbert Mead espoused a similar ideology:

It is by means of reflexiveness – the turning-back of the experience of the individual upon himself – that the whole social process is thus brought into the experiences of the individuals involved in it; it is by such means, which enable the individual to take the attitude of the other toward himself, that the individual is consciously to adjust himself to that process, and to modify the resultant of that process in any given social act in terms of his adjustment to it. Reflexiveness, then, is the essential condition, within the social process, for the development of the mind (as quoted in Mead 1934/1967, pg. 134).

Note that, though the “reflexive turn” as such did not take root in widespread academic consciousness until the end of the twentieth century, some earlier scholars were

making conceptual strides in this area. Bronislaw Malinowski, whose most renowned ethnographies were published in the early 1920s, demonstrates a notable example to this end. The anthropologist was certainly a product of his time; in his famous ethnography *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*, he refers to his informants as “savage and barbarous peoples,” and determines the Trobriand Islanders to be “comparatively high” on a scale of primitivism (Skalnik & Thornton 1993, pg. 236). While these personal judgments are assaults on the sensibilities of contemporary anthropologists, Malinowski does break with the social scientific convention of his time by acknowledging his own subjectivity and placing himself in the narrative as a “character” in the story. In this sense, Malinowski “[abandons] the positivist pretense of aloof scientific objectivity by inserting a witnessing self into the narrative” (Young 2014, pg. 2). While he unabashedly exposed his own culturally rooted prejudices, he did not falsely perpetuate the idea that his judgments were objective. Put simply, Malinowski introduced the notion of self-reference, or the capacity of an ethnographer to recognise forces of socialisation, which may influence his or her understanding of and interaction with informants.

Reflexivity certainly has its detractors. For example, Lynch criticises reflexivity as an epistemological idea that “opens the door of a hall of mirrors in which the real object becomes indistinguishable from the infinite play of its images” (Lynch 2000, pg. 46). He further suggests that such “demonstrations of infinite regress...[reduce] relativism to absurdity” (Ibid 2000, pg. 46). Similarly, Pillow suggests that ethnographers who champion reflexivity often focus too much on themselves in their writing, ultimately descending into narcissistic or solipsistic autobiography rather than focusing on their subject of study (Pillow 2010). Indeed, reflexivity in excess and over-complexity can be potentially destructive rather than constructive of knowledge. However, when theorised with some temperance, reflexivity is understood to be a critical component underlying ethical social scholarship in contemporary academia. This general statement holds particularly true if the academic chooses to use decolonisation theory as a guide for robust and ethical anthropological inquiry, as I will do throughout this thesis. I am suggesting here that the theoretical model of decolonisation is directly allied with the theory of ethnographic reflexivity. Put another way, I am arguing that reflexivity is considered to be a critical component underlying the methodological umbrella that is decolonisation theory.

In terms of my research specifically, I will suggest here that reflexivity plays a role in a manner that is two-fold. First, I must reflect upon my positioning as a non-indigenous researcher and acknowledge the ethical complexities inherently embedded in my relationships with my indigenous informants in order to engage in constructive ethnographic research. I hope I have conveyed and will continue to convey my willingness to do so throughout this chapter. Second, in later chapters (more particularly, Chapter 6), I will utilise my positioning as a non-indigenous Euro-American academic as a discursive springboard from which I can conduct a comparative analysis between the aesthetic philosophies embedded within indigenous visual arts versus non-indigenous visual arts and media.

### **Principles and Strategies in Decolonised Research**

As a non-indigenous person operating within the parameters of Western academia, I am necessarily bound by a series of research methodologies that have been established and respected in my field for decades. Fortunately, many of these methods (such as participant observation, interviewing, and qualitative data analysis), are not incongruent with indigenous methodologies. Throughout my fieldwork, I have endeavoured to orient myself as closely to indigenous methodologies as possible without excluding classical anthropological methods. This refers to a process that has been analysed, constructed, and reproduced by both indigenous and non-indigenous scholars that can be generally described as “decolonising” the research sphere. In the opening chapter of *Decolonising Indigenous Research*, Linda Tuhiwai Smith reminds the reader that “research is probably one of the dirtiest words in the indigenous world’s vocabulary... Just knowing that someone measured our ‘faculties’ by filling the skulls of our ancestors with millet seeds and compared the amount of millet seed to the capacity for mental thought offends our sense of who and what we are” (Smith 2012, pg. 1). *Decolonising Indigenous Research* served as a pivotal resource in terms of guidance in terms of my research, in both theory and praxis. Smith is known colloquially as the “Mother of Indigenous Studies,” and the aforementioned text is considered to be one of the most influential texts advising scholars (especially those who are members of majority cultures) on research with indigenous peoples. First published in 1999 and re-released in 2012, the book “launched a wave of indigenous-led critiques of



academic power and proposals for indigenised methodological interventions” (Darder 2019, pg. i). I note here that, in the book, Smith is particularly concerned with the dehumanisation and marginalisation of indigenous peoples and perspectives in research, two topics that I am also concerned with in relationship to my media research.

From my vantage point as a non-indigenous PhD scholar interested in Sámi culture and social concerns, I am of course unable to rectify the injustices of the past. What I can do, per the principles outlined in decolonisation theory and in Smith’s book, is honour indigenous perspectives, both discursively and methodologically. Certainly, this necessitates an understanding of how research is framed in an indigenous context and where Western and indigenous frameworks can accommodate each other. However, this can become somewhat tricky in terms of discussion, because, as Smith puts it, there is no “standard model or practice” that strictly outlines the decolonisation of research methodologies (Smith 2012, pg. 43). Similarly, the decolonial methodologies that work effectively for one field study and/or cultural group may not be applicable or prescriptive to others. However, in *Decolonising Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*, Smith does summarise a series of strategies that can be employed by scholars aiming to conduct productive, respectful, and reciprocal research with indigenous communities.

First, Smith proposes a three-fold framework of principles aimed at bridging the gap between indigenous and non-indigenous research methods and providing guidelines for indigenous research. The first aspect necessitates “increasing the number of ethnically indigenous persons in research,” implying the second step: “prioritising indigenous individuals and (third); using culturally compatible ontological and epistemological approaches and maintaining indigenous communities’ control over the identity of the researchers including their ethnicity, contents and methods of research” (Boekraad 2016, pg. 2). Next, the author delineates a series of practicable strategies that may aid in researchers’ critical approaches to indigenous ethnography, which include: “(1) drawing on multiple ontological realities and worldviews; (2) situating contemporary political struggles within the structures of settler colonialism, white supremacy, heteropatriarchy, and capitalism; (3) engaging in critical self-reflexivity; (4) seeking to embody practices of decolonisation not only in...research but as a life praxis; and (5) creating long-term and sustained relationships across and between the participants of the study” (Fortier 2017, pg. 21). Finally, she accentuates the importance of “an emphasis on claiming and reclaiming

Indigenous ways of being, the validation of storytelling and oral histories, [and the] documentation of the survival of Indigenous peoples rather than their demise or assimilation” in principled research (Ibid 2017, pg. 21).

In the previous paragraph, I delineated some of the theoretical/conceptual emphases indigenous peoples wish for researchers to consider and engage with in ethnographic practice. Here I will outline some of the more practicable aspects of indigenous research methodologies and explore the ways in which they are congruent with Western social research paradigms. Like non-indigenous qualitative researchers, indigenous scholars utilise “a variety of methods, such as conversations, interviews, and research/sharing circles” in order to gain understanding (Kovach 2010, pg. 99). In Margaret Kovach’s *Indigenous Methodologies*, (which I cite previously) another notable and highly influential text providing guidance and reflection upon colonialist paradigms in research with indigenous peoples, the author complements theory with praxis by interweaving perspectives from six indigenous researchers who share their stories in her writing. Similarly, classical anthropological methods in the Western academy emphasise that candid and incisive conversations with numerous consenting individuals are crucial to understanding social concerns in varying cultural contexts. Related to this, Kovach argues that qualitative research in the social sciences corresponds comfortably with the indigenous practice of storytelling as a legitimate way of knowing and learning. While qualitative researchers may not expressly categorise in-depth interviews as storytelling techniques, many indigenous peoples do not differentiate these two concepts. Indeed, according to Tuhiwai Smith, “most indigenous communities do not differentiate scientific or ‘proper’ research from [other] forms of...collecting, journalistic approaches, [or] filmmaking...” (Smith 2012, pg. 2). Kovach also emphasises that it is imperative to “honour this integral quality of indigenous inquiry” (she refers to storytelling as a legitimate way of knowing) if we wish to appreciate indigenous knowledge production in confluence with established Western research methodologies (Kovach 2010, pg. 102). Storytelling, she suggests, is not strictly unique to Native epistemologies, and thus has the capacity to effectively transcend cultural boundaries. For this reason in particular, in forthcoming chapters I will place significant emphasis on and analysis regarding the relationship between indigenous film and storytelling, as well as the use of cultural stories and associated media as forms of emic

data. For now, I will return to the idea of information sharing and gathering in decolonised ethnographic practice.

I structured my interviews with filmmakers and artists in a semiformal manner, which I would describe as quite conversational and individualised. Though oral interviews are imperfect mediums for capturing the full essence of moving, fluid dialogue between two parties, I did the best I could to capture the tone and experience of the discussions by using transcriptions taken directly from audio record. I kept some standard questions in my inventory, sometimes as conversation openers; for the most part I presented individual-specific questions based on any information I had previously gleaned from film viewings and online research (such was the benefit of interviewing individuals with at least somewhat publicised careers). Furthermore, I made sure there was time dedicated (insofar as each informant was willing to speak) to a discussion of upbringing and home, to narratives of place and experiences. As I will reveal in greater detail in later chapters, I found that narratives of home, identity, and belonging did indeed feature very prominently in my discussions with informants.

As Carriere recounts, “the best methodology that I found was in-depth interviews, because that gave me space...to at least guide people...but not be very strict in terms of what to say and when to say it” (as quoted in Kovach 2010, pg. 107). I too found this method to be most effective, and for this reason I concentrated on the quality of time spent speaking with informants as opposed to engaging in a series of quick, businesslike discussions. The longest interview I conducted took place over coffee at a restaurant in Tromsø and took just over three hours. These observations may seem to be self-evident to the seasoned ethnographer, but prior to reading Kovach’s and Smith’s works, I was somewhat concerned that my sample size was too small. However, upon reflection it was quite easy to shift gears and acknowledge that a more holistic understanding of my informants’ lives and artistic influences would be more fruitful – and perhaps more respectful – than the rapid collection of data.

Smith suggests principally that “prioritising indigenous individuals” in research is essential as an ethical research practice (Boekraad 2016, pg. 2). She also advocates that indigenous communities must enjoy a degree of control over the material that is produced from the research process (Smith 2002). This relates to an argument made by Fortier, who similarly intimates that one of the most important aspects underlying ethical research

practice is “engaged and active consent” on the part of the scholar’s informants (Fortier 2017, pg. 29). As I emphasised earlier in this chapter, my research is heavily interview-based. Active and engaged consent in this context means “opening up the research process to...the possibility that participants might want to disengage from the project, revise their interviews, or play a more hands-on role in the writing process. It may also mean seriously considering terminating research prior to completion if it risks hampering any of the social movements you are working with” (Ibid 2017, pg. 29). I felt it was very important to give each interview participant the opportunity to review and edit their transcripts for content, language, context, missing or misheard information, etc. I also gave them the option to retract or delete information they may have felt uncomfortable disclosing in hindsight. On some occasions, I conducted follow-up interviews in order to delve deeper into areas that seemed to be of particular importance to each participant after reading their initial transcripts.

### **Analysing a Related Debate: Indigenous Research and Social Advocacy**

In the previous section, I discussed the ways in which indigenous ontologies and research methodologies are comparable to and compatible with their Western counterparts. I have loosely described the ways I have utilised decolonisation theory, which postulates that it is possible, ethical, necessary, and productive to integrate native methodologies into research conducted by non-indigenous scholars, to guide my ethnographic practice in the field. However, the discussion of decolonisation as it relates to research is incomplete without evaluating a somewhat contentious related debate regarding sociopolitical advocacy and ethical engagement in this context. Indeed, considerations related to principled action take on critical weight when discussing indigenous issues particularly. As stated by Stefan Mikaelsson, President of the Sámi Parliamentary Assembly in Sweden:

The world’s 370 million Indigenous peoples suffer from disproportionately, often exponentially, higher rates of poverty, health problems, crime and human rights abuses, the first ever United Nations study on the issue reported during 2010, stressing that self-determination and land rights are vital for their survival. It cannot

be reliable for the science and researcher to investigate in eternity while our culture and survival as an Indigenous people are bleeding to death (Mikaelsson 2016, pg. 22).

Mikaelsson's quote comes from a text based on the contributions to the international workshop *Ethics in Indigenous Research, Past Experiences – Future Challenges* that was held in Umeå in March 2014. The workshop gathered around fifty scholars from different parts of Sápmi and abroad and discussed the ways in which indigenous research ethics in Sweden can decolonise and move forward by addressing research ethics in the indigenous research field. Notably, in Sweden, Drugge's text is the first published in English that explicitly addresses ethics with Sámi research. As a result, I consider it to be a very important document to reference here.

The concept of researchers "investigating in eternity" unearths a new layer of conversation regarding decolonising ethics in indigenous research (Mikaelsson 2016, pg. 22). Note that, in her outline of practice and principles of indigenous ethnography, Smith references a type of active interface with decolonisation theory that goes beyond the theoretical when she references that researchers should "[seek] to embody practices of decolonisation not only in...research but as a life praxis" and potentially "[intervene] politically and socially in the struggles of Indigenous communities" (Fortier 2017, pg. 21). At this point of discussion, the idea of "giving back" to the indigenous populations and communities being researched becomes pivotal (Lawrence & Raitio 2016, pg. 118).

Lawrence and Raitio describe a history of indigenous research characterised by "bitter recollections of fleeting visits by researchers from far away, disappointments over deafening silences that follow such visits, and frustrations over the feeling that research findings do not provide benefits to the community themselves" (Lawrence & Raitio 2016, pg. 122). To ameliorate these frustrations, decolonisation theory advocates that researchers engage in some degree of ethical reciprocity with the communities they engage with. Types of reciprocity may include "facilitating correspondence between indigenous peoples and multinational corporations, mobilising media attention, or helping a community appeal a local planning decision" (Ibid 2016, pg. 123). Put more simply, decolonisation theory stresses the importance of active engagement with indigenous issues on the part of the researcher.

As is the case with all social theories, decolonisation theory has its detractors, and in particular the theory gives rise to some controversial discourses regarding the involvement of researchers in indigenous social and political activism. Here I will briefly outline some of the most critical points raised in these debates. First, it must be acknowledged that engagement with the theoretical framework of decolonisation necessitates the recognition of various colonial histories, their lasting impacts on contemporary indigenous populations, and, correspondingly, a concession that “research is inherently political” and must then “respond to the political context in which it takes place” (Lawrence & Raitio 2016, pg. 117). While the colonial legacies of Norway and Sweden, for example, are not and should not be perceived as the only context in which Sámi life and culture can be conceptualised, they do constitute pervasively influential social settings within which we can contextualise many contemporary issues in the Sámi world. Decolonisation theory asserts that this statement holds true for essentially all indigenous populations.

It follows that social communities, political bodies, scholars, etc. that might be skeptical of decolonisation theory would also be doubtful of the lasting impact of colonial or imperialist activities. In some cases, these communities and/or individuals may doubt the legitimacy of characterising various national histories as colonial or imperialist in the first place. According to Lawrence and Raitio, who were also contributors to the international workshop I previously mentioned in Umeå, in the Nordic states (perhaps more particularly in Sweden and Finland), some political and even academic circles “have yet to meaningfully engage with their colonial histories and recognise ongoing injustices in the present time” (Lawrence & Raitio 2016, pg. 119). For those discursive bodies, it may appear that decolonisation theory advocates for an unnecessary or superfluous type of “special treatment” for indigenous communities. Lawrence and Raitio further maintain that, in the Nordic countries, “positivism still rules the roost” (Ibid 2016, pg. 118). Here I must note that I am not entirely in agreement with Lawrence and Raitio’s assertion in relationship to the social sciences in Norway at least. The professionals and scholars I engaged with at the University of Tromsø, for example, were interested in indigenous social and cultural concerns and were thus invested in more progressive forms of social scholarship. However, if Lawrence and Raitio’s intimations were true, it would follow that advocates of a more detached and consciously “objective” form of scholarship would also take issue with decolonising methodologies, which emphasise political and social engagement with

indigenous issues. In relationship to the first point of opposition, I will in later writing return to debates surrounding the idea of colonialism and/or imperialism in the Nordic states and more specifically establish my stance on why the legacy of these activities remains a topic of concern in Norway specifically. For now, I will address this point of contention, and explore the nuances of the opposing argument, which maintains that socio-politically conscientious and ethically reflective engagement in indigenous research “does in fact lead to both better research and, in the long run, to better policy” (Drugge 2016, pg. 13)

First, I will briefly iterate my stance regarding the issue with perceived objectivity in social research. As has been previously discussed in this chapter, positivist scholars especially may operate under a belief that detachment or objectivity leads to more coherent and “accurate” social research. However, historically speaking, the issue with positivist principles in social science is that they: 1) have sometimes allowed scholars to legitimise their own cultural biases in an official or academic capacity under the pretense that their social reality is the only true and objective one, ultimately disadvantaging the communities they study through scholarship, and 2) have provided a philosophical avenue through which researchers have been able to excuse themselves from ethical considerations in research, under the guise of impartiality. The principles underlying decolonisation emerge to de-problematise and counter the ill impacts of these types of approaches in social research. The emergence of these principles gives rise to some contentious questions regarding ethics and research with indigenous peoples. In the first place, is there, in fact, an obligation on the part of the social researcher to contribute to a more just and ethical sphere of research? The second inquiry follows from this: does more critically engaged and morally conscientious research indeed result in more robust outcomes in anthropology, sociology, cultural studies, and/or ethnography?

In relationship to the first line of inquiry, it could be said that morally responsible research praxis in itself is ultimately a choice on the part of the academic. According to Drugge:

Ethics are about choices and about what lies behind as well as follows the choices you make. It is about right and wrong, and about what is the foundation of good deeds. Hence, we are surrounded by ethics. For scholars, everything is to some

extent about ethics. The challenge is to articulate the ethical reflection (Drugge 2016, pg. 28).

As may be evidenced by the fact that I have dedicated the first chapter of this thesis to an analysis of ethical considerations in indigenous research, I am in agreement with Drugge. Further, I believe that the ability to “articulate...ethical reflection[s]” in social sciences contributes to a more intellectually vigorous analysis of social and cultural situations in a general sense (Drugge 2016, pg. 28). Put more simply, reflections upon ethics in social contexts provide another layer of scholarly analysis and thus understanding. In my view, this partly legitimises the essentiality of reflexivity in social research; a scholar who is capable of “bending back” and evaluating his or her own cultural frame of reference has engaged in an intellectually complex exercise in social analysis, one that addresses his or her own culture, another culture, possibly the ethical frameworks propagated by both, and their potentially incongruous or harmonious relationships to one another. Further, social science and social relationships are heavily enmeshed. The researcher is not simply an information-gatherer; he/she is also a social actor, and if he/she is unable to establish constructive relationships with his/her informants, the outcomes of his/her research will undoubtedly suffer due to a lack of trust between parties. My suggestion here is that principled and socially constructive engagement in social sciences is not only relevant to a fundamental human imperative to “do good deeds” – it is also logical (Olsen 2016, pg. 28). While I do personally feel a moral responsibility to avoid perpetuating historical injustices in social research with indigenous peoples out of a sense of empathy for the ways in which they have been historically and systematically disadvantaged, I also believe that the construction of robust social analyses is also directly related to socially conscientious research ethics.

The discussion regarding the necessity for ethical research practices unveils another aspect of debate regarding decolonisation in the academy and in the field; this conversation relates directly to social advocacy and intervention as strategies of engagement with indigenous issues. Olsen explains the impetus behind these conversations:

When an Indigenous activist gets arrested for being an Indigenous activist, when Indigenous people lose their land to extractive industry, and when sexual minorities



within Indigenous communities experience harassment, I find keeping a critical distance has become more difficult (Olsen 2016, pg. 25).

The upshot of this passage is that, if researchers find it useful, productive, and meaningful to employ research strategies from a point of ethical reflection, it follows that those same researchers would feel an obligation or desideratum to intervene socially/politically in potentially controversial circumstances related to the populations they study. Olsen relates the logical follow-through of this argument to the categorical imperative espoused by German philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724-1804):

Here, Kant states that your actions are to be based on a maxim or a principle that can be turned into a general law. Hence, if you as a researcher act out of a principle stating that it is wrong to observe people without them knowing you are watching, you cannot in another situation act against this principle. Furthermore, Kant's imperative is directed towards basic values of humanity: You should never use a human merely as a means to an end, but always as an end in itself. For the scholar this means that she should not see her informants or those affected by the research only as a means to write a research article. Each informant and each person affected by research has autonomy and is to be treated as an individual, following this Kantian ethics (Olsen 2016, pg. 29).

From this philosophy we can surmise that, if a researcher truly believes in the ethical imperatives championed by decolonisation theory (namely, that principled research necessitates meaningful and morally consistent interface with indigenous issues), he or she must then act upon these moral paradigms when involved with or exposed to ethically controversial situations in the context of the culture he or she is studying. However, this idea becomes somewhat disputable in the academic realm. In a broad sense, contemporary anthropologists are guided by a series of principled paradigms that direct ethnographic research, which include, very generally, being conscientious and protective of the well-being, autonomy, safety, and dignity of all research participants by utilising informed consent and avoiding ethnocentricity, for example (Arnould 1998). However, these

guidelines do not necessarily integrate or champion the idea of intervention or direct engagement with social issues related to the populations they study.

Lincoln contends that “advocacy should not be confused with scholarship” (as quoted in Fitzgerald 2006, pg. 392). Essentially, he maintains that students of the world are not necessarily required to become activists. On the other hand, there are many advocates of decolonial research methodologies that contend that complete engagement with this model often calls for social mediation, including Antonio de Souza Lima, who has argued that the study of anthropology is “synonymous with efforts to expose ethical issues and help defend against actions that compromise the rights of indigenous peoples” (de Souza Lima 2004, pg. 11); and Nancy Scheper-Hughes, who has advocated for a “militant anthropology” that is “ethically grounded” and “morally engaged” (Scheper-Hughes 1995, pg. 209). Similarly, Tuck and Yang assert that an “incomplete” commitment to the decolonisation model turns it into a metaphor rather than an ethical imperative: “the easy adoption of decolonising discourse by educational advocacy and scholarship, evidenced by the increasing number of calls to...use ‘decolonising methods,’ or, ‘decolonise student thinking’ turns decolonisation into a metaphor” (Tuck & Yang 2012, pg. 1). Appleton agrees, asserting that decolonisation has turned into something of a buzzword in academia, resulting in what she criticises as “sloppy attempts to ‘decolonise’ a syllabus or a programme without real structural changes” (Appleton 2019, pg. 2). Here, Tuck, Yang, and Appleton all criticise the opportunistic use of the term “decolonisation” (particularly in academia) and assert that it is often used without actual consideration for what is being done in social research, ethnography, and in the academy in general. Tuck and Yang’s article has been quoted frequently in decolonisation literature since its publication in 2012; “decolonisation is not a metaphor” has become something of a moniker or a mantra for scholars and activists interested in decolonial studies.

With this all being said, it is important to bear Smith’s suggestion in mind when she points out that not all methodologies championed by decolonisation theory are prescriptive or applicable to all situations. Accordingly, I believe that it is inappropriate to suggest that all research with indigenous peoples necessitates or calls for political intervention on the part of the researcher. Instead, I would contend that in most situations there is a tension to be negotiated in terms of researchers’ engagement with advocacy on behalf of indigenous peoples and their scholarship. Lawrence and Raitio seem to echo this sentiment when they

concede that it is important to “strike a balance” in this regard (Lawrence & Raitio 2016, pg. 119). Principally, researchers’ insertion into the political activities of indigenous groups can potentially become problematic in that it “can easily centralise the role of the settler [or non-indigenous person] as the primary actor in anti-colonial and decolonising actions” (Fortier 2017, pg. 21). In other words, what might be a well-intentioned and intuitive instinct to speak out on behalf of marginalised communities might result in the researcher taking advantage of discursive hierarchies in public spaces. As Alcoff points out, “we, as non-indigenous researchers, do not have an unqualified right to speak...on behalf of indigenous peoples” (Alcoff 1995, pg. 99). As a social researcher, one must be mindful of the power relationships that might be perpetuated in this circumstance.

Lawrence and Raitio further contend that, while critical and conscientious engagement with indigenous issues is essential in terms of ethical research praxis, the degree to which the researcher can and should intervene must be evaluated carefully and on a case-by-case basis. “In our earlier projects,” the authors explain, “we have sometimes, as researchers, chosen to ‘disengage’ as activists in particular contexts, because we have deemed that the ethical issues at stake are too great, and the conditions too complex for us to facilitate constructive change” (Lawrence & Raitio 2016, pg. 128). In one circumstance, Raitio decided to step down from her formal positions in environmental NGOs when starting her PhD research regarding Sámi concerns in relationship to these organisations. By way of another example:

In Lawrence’s research on development encroachments in the Sámi community of Vilhelmina Södra, she first considered interviewing IGE Nordic – a Nordic mining company – regarding negotiations during 2007-2008 between IGE Nordic and Vilhelmina Södra Sámi community over the reopening of a decommissioned mine in Stekenjokk on the community’s reindeer grazing lands. Second, she considered interviewing Fred Olsen Renewables, in order to give an account of their role in the negotiation of an agreement between themselves and the Swedish state, which gave them the exclusive right to explore the feasibility of a wind power park in Stekenjokk. However, given the fact that Lawrence had acted as advisor to Vilhelmina Södra Sámi community in their negotiations with IGE Nordic, and had acted as advisor to two other Sámi communities in their negotiations with Fred

Olsen Renewables, she judged that it was simply too complicated – both ethically and methodologically – to negotiate informed consent and construct a robust research process. These situations were simply too ‘hot’ given her then very recent engagement with these companies as an advisor to Sámi communities. Instead, Lawrence chose to focus on the relations between the Sámi community of Vilhelmina Södra and the Swedish state (Lawrence & Raitio 2016, pg. 128).

### **Reflections on My Positioning**

For my part, the way I am engaging with decolonial ethics roots itself more squarely in the ways in which I am contextualising my research rather than the ways in which I might engage in political advocacy in the Sámi world. If I am engaging in a form of social advocacy, it could be said that I am contributing to a rather limited body of research related to Sámi film and visual arts and facilitating a space for these topics to occupy greater consideration in the academy. However, if we return to Tuck and Appleton’s criticisms of metaphorical decolonialism, it might be argued that my own engagement with the decolonial ethical framework is incomplete, given that I have not actively engaged in politically enmeshed activities that might instigate or support institutional changes for the benefit of Sámi peoples. I do understand the follow-through of this argument. However, I would argue in response that my own research situates itself somewhat unusually in the context of decolonial ethics and thus necessitates a different kind of social engagement with indigenous issues on my part. I will return here to my primary objective in conducting this research: my aim is to spotlight indigenous individuals who are *already* actively doing the work to decolonise the media sphere both directly and tangentially. I am not invested in centralising myself as a primary actor in the sphere of decolonising media; instead I would characterise myself as more of a conduit through which these activities can have a greater discursive place in the academy.

I maintain what I asserted at the beginning of this chapter, which is that the ethical and methodological considerations of my research have ended up being far more complex than I initially considered. However, I also concede that, though my research does involve delving into many socially contentious discussions, it does not involve direct participation with heavily politicised “hot topics” in and around *Sápmi*, which might include, for example,

developmental and environmental encroachment on indigenous territories. Instead, my research primarily concerns the ways in which Sámi filmmakers are conceptualising and interacting with those issues through their art. With this all being said, I must note here that I do plan to maintain a positive presence in the Sámi world to the extent to which I am able as a foreign researcher. For instance, I will maintain contact with my informants and amplify their works where I am capable and perhaps refer them to opportunities that might be constructive to their careers if I come upon them. For example, I recently came into contact with an Italian filmmaker on LinkedIn who is vitally interested the Sámi way of approaching land relations and contemporary ecological concerns. I plan to refer her to some of my contacts, while emphasising to her that indigenous representation in any film project requires a tremendous amount of collaboration, respect, and mindfulness.

To reiterate, my professional and academic objective as a visual anthropologist in this context was and is to 1) provide thoroughly researched ethnographic material that might facilitate greater empathetic understanding of Sámi lives and contemporary concerns through an exploration of various artists' filmic works, 2) to amplify the voices of Sámi filmmakers who are and have been doing critical work related to decolonising the media sphere, and finally, 3) to contribute to the normalisation of indigenous artists in the study of films and filmmaking. In other words, I wish to treat these filmmakers and their works as artists and films in their own right (not simply as "indigenous subjects") while at the same time maintaining a critical awareness of decolonisation theory and practice. In keeping with the discursive trajectory of this chapter, I am not suggesting that I can or should remove myself from the narrative; I am instead suggesting that my role lies principally in the observation and analysis of *how* Sámi individuals are decolonising the arts and media and achieving greater representation on their own terms, while those Sámi artists should take center stage as the primary actors.

Ultimately, as Lawrence and Raitio suggest, engagement with decolonial methodologies in indigenous research is a choice. They also conclude that the choice for researchers is not necessarily between disengagement and activism; instead it lies between "those who are able [or willing] to reflect on their role in (de)colonising academia, and those who are not" (Lawrence & Raitio 2016, pg. 132). I hope that, throughout this chapter, I have conveyed my willingness to reflect upon my positioning and impact as a non-indigenous researcher engaging critically with contemporary indigenous issues. Related to this, I hope

that I have effectively communicated the ways in which I have utilised the principles outlined by decolonisation theory to guide my research praxis. To summarise these points, I will maintain here that I have: 1) employed the use of critical research methodologies compatible with indigenous ways of knowing and being, which will become more evident through my analysis in forthcoming chapters; 2) privileged indigenous perspectives by conscientiously and carefully interpreting and transcribing thorough interviews with indigenous informants; 3) allowed my informants to enjoy a degree of control over the process of research and knowledge production and, more specifically, over their own words; and 4) endeavoured to sustain constructive long-term relationships with my informants. In later chapters, it will also become clear that I: 1) emphasise the validation of storytelling as a vital component of indigenous knowledge production and as a method of analysis, and 2) focus on, as Fortier puts it, “the survival of indigenous peoples rather than their demise” by discussing the ways in which the arts and film are presently being utilised in a decolonial context that acknowledges the enduring vestiges of colonial oppression but also celebrates the ways in which Sámi communities are constructively dealing with these aspects (Fortier 2017, pg. 21).

### **Concluding Remarks: Why Decolonisation Theory?**

To bring this discussion to a close, I will briefly re-assess why I have deemed decolonisation theory to be an appropriate theoretical and practicable lynchpin underlying my particular research interests. As was evidenced throughout this chapter, the emergence and prominence of decolonisation theory as it applies to indigenous research is one that requires significant and thorough historical contextualisation. In other words, a social researcher must understand the ways in which the colonial legacies of various cultures have impacted and continue to impact contemporary indigenous lives and concerns in numerous different social, political, and institutional contexts. More specifically, the scholar must acknowledge and appreciate the social ills (the specifics of which I will specify further in later chapters) that the colonial legacy has spawned in contemporary indigenous communities around the globe. It is only through this historic contextualisation that the scholar may truly understand the necessity for decolonisation in the research sphere (i.e. in terms of knowledge production and dissemination) and in more practical, institutional

aspects of indigenous societies. Though the history of colonisation in Norway, for example, is not the only milieu through which we can engage with and understand Sámi culture, acknowledging and understanding this legacy is imperative in terms of understanding some of the work contemporary indigenous artists are doing in terms of cultural representation in and around *Sápmi*. It is an increasingly complex knowledge of indigenous historicity, in part, that has spurred me to utilise decolonisation theory as a vital underpinning supporting my analytical claims in this thesis.

Related to this, decolonisation theory asks for critically engaged research, or a style of scholarship that acknowledges the political as enmeshed in the cultural and vice versa. In other words, social contextualisation becomes paramount in the sphere of decolonial analysis. A “decolonised style” of ethnographic practice and analysis privileges, as Lawrence and Raitio put it, a type of social inquiry that “[constructs] a...situated engagement through which contextualised analyses can be made,” rather than an analytical paradigm that “[seeks] to unveil an objective truth” about any given society (Lawrence & Raitio 2016, pg. 123). Correspondingly, decolonisation theory also asks for, as Smith puts it, engagement in “critical self-reflexivity,” which compels the ethnographer to consider his/her own cultural milieu as well (Fortier 2017, pg. 21). Accordingly, I hope it will become evident throughout this thesis that my aim is not to uncover some universal truth regarding Sámi culture and society; in fact, I wish to pointedly avoid essentialising Sámi culture in this way by highlighting the multiplicity of perspectives of my informants, which sometimes overlap and sometimes contradict each other. My objective is to analyse social perspectives in the Sámi world as expressed through the arts and film. In that respect, the idea of impartiality in research is not especially relevant to my work in the first place; instead, my research instead necessitates a capacity for empathy for the community I am studying. In this regard, decolonisation theory provides a series of practical, theoretical, and ethical considerations that are both relevant and prescriptive to my particular sphere of research.

Earlier in this section I referred to indigenous historicity as a critical component underlying my decision to use decolonisation theory as a guide and method of analysis in my thesis. Of course, this means that I cannot continue without a thorough review and analysis of the historic conditions that have necessitated discussions regarding decolonisation as it relates to contemporary indigenous sovereignty, expression, and art in the Sámi world. Accordingly, the following chapter will be devoted to an in-depth discussion

of the historic conditions that have perpetuated circumstances of inequality for the Sámi population in present-day Norway, and, perhaps more importantly, the historic efforts that various Sámi communities have put forth to combat discrimination and cultural devaluation.



## Chapter Two: The Sámi in Norway

In the previous chapter, I emphasised historicity as a central component underlying decolonisation theory, which frames my thesis in terms of research praxis and visual analysis. In this chapter I will specify this contextualisation and discuss the historical conditions that have made decolonisation a key topic of discussion regarding Sámi life and culture in the Nordic states. To reiterate what I stated in the introduction to this thesis, my fieldwork took place primarily in and surrounding the Tromsø area, so I will hone my focus specifically on Norway and the historical context that has framed contemporary Sámi-Norwegian relations in that nation. Further, Norway provides a particularly compelling example of domestic colonialism under the Norwegianisation paradigm that dominated their national politics roughly from the period of 1850 to, arguably, 1980 (I say arguably because the “official” end of Norwegianisation is somewhat subject to debate). In this chapter, I will delve into Norwegianisation in greater depth, address the political circumstances that facilitated its development, and analyse the ways in which the Sámi minority in Norway mobilised to combat colonial subjugation and reclaim indigenous sovereignty. Next, I will shine a spotlight on the ways in which the arts and visual media were utilised as a springboard for cultural advocacy and cohesiveness during the Sámi Cultural Revival, which gained particular momentum during the 1960s, 70s, and 80s and continues to evolve in the present day. As will become more evident in the second half of this chapter and in subsequent chapters, this contextualisation is integral and relevant to what is being done in the contemporary arts, film, and visual media arenas in present-day *Sápmi*. Also, in the second half of this chapter, I will offer a generalised discussion and chronicle of the history of Sámi film in Norway, focusing in part on how the politics of indigeneity in the Nordic states continue to impact and frame the activities of the Sámi film industry and its relationship with the larger Norwegian film industry. For now, I will focus my lens of analysis on briefly chronicling the sociopolitical history of the Sámi in Norway, from the pre-Norwegianisation era to the contemporary era.

## Pre-Norwegianisation

Though there are mentions of peoples who may be Sámi or the Sámis' ancestral predecessors along Norway's western coastline around 10,000 years ago, for the purposes of political specificity I will fast-forward to the turn of the second millennium, which is when the arrival of Christianity in the Nordic nations first began to impact Sámi ways of life (Broadbent 2014). As Cocq and DuBois point out, views of the Sámi people immediately "took on a pejorative tone" with the appearance of Christianity in the Nordic regions. Persen echoes these statements, offering in her Master's thesis that the roots of Norwegianisation (a political paradigm which will be explored in detail very shortly) lay partially within the missionary period of the 18<sup>th</sup> century (Persen 2008). These scholars' contentions can indeed be seen in reflection of the systematic conversion of Sámi people from the "old religion" (as much literature, as well as several of my informants, have referred to it) to Christianity. The "old religion" of the Sámi people can be best described as a confluence of three elements: animism, shamanism, and polytheism. In other words, the indigenous religion was characterised by a belief in several gods and spirits, as well as the belief that many natural objects possess some level of sentience, or put another way, a soul (Anderson 1987). However, Sámi religious practices were not static; they varied somewhat according to region in the northern areas of Fennoscandia (Fonneland 2012). According to Lehtola, "the old shamanism [is] a part of the whole worldview, rather than a religion or superstition" (Lehtola 2002, pg. 30). As such, it is understandable that the decline of the indigenous religion and its most prominent and influential figure, the *noaidi*, or shaman, began a process that would gradually degrade Sámi cultural autonomy. Indeed, historic documentation is quite telling of the condemning attitudes Christian missionaries held regarding Sámi religious practices and spiritual leaders.

For example, a *Historia Norwegie* account of Sámi from the early 13<sup>th</sup> century outright condemns their "pagan" ways and "magical" practices, including shamanic divinatory and healing rituals. Ecclesiastical disapprobation of Sámi religious traditions would mount and become widespread in the 13<sup>th</sup> century and beyond, with Nordic and European writers and clerics describing the Sámi people as mysterious, arcane, primitive, and untrustworthy (Cocq & DuBois 2021). In 1720, for example, Finnish missionary Henrik

Forbus penned a particularly impassioned tirade in denouncement of the Sámi ritual drum, or *goavddis*. Roughly translated, he wrote:

Oh you confounded Drum, tool and instrument of Satan, cursed are your depicted Gods: cursed your ring and '*baja*': cursed your hammer and drumstick: cursed anyone who serves you with beating, and anyone who avails himself of it and makes [someone] beat, yes all those who consent to such a beat and divination and have their inclination for it. Each beat that is made on you, is and will be a Satan's beat in hell for them, among the spirits of the damned who shall torment and torture them (as quoted in Rydving 1995, pg. 81).



Fig. 11: Unknown (ca. 1671). Noaidi in Two Stages with Daemon [Manuscript drawing]. Reproduced after Samuel Rheen, 1983. In S. Aamold et al (Eds.) (2017), *Sámi Art and Aesthetics*, pg. 32.

Indeed, according to Christian dogma, magical skills associated with the *noaidi* were thought to come from the devil himself (Bergesen 2017). Missionaries' paternalistic and condemning attitudes, fueled in part by suspicions of devil worship, manifested in widespread destructive action levied against the Sámi people. Christian officials desecrated, burned, and demolished indigenous sacred sites, often erecting churches in their place, and they collected and destroyed ritual drums systematically. For this reason, the missionary period is often referred to as the "end of drum time," or, as Rydving puts it, "the time when the Sámi had to hide their drums" (Rydving 1995, pg. 1).

In the following centuries, government pressures against the Sámi people would only escalate, informed partially by the widespread depreciatory attitudes of missionaries and clerics. More specifically, assimilationist policies began to intensify in the Nordic states and Russia simultaneously, with state officials seeking to either replace or integrate the Sámi people into majority cultures, religions, and livelihoods. Again, these actions were influenced and bolstered by widespread perceptions of the Sámi people as backward and inferior. For example, in Norway, the eventual establishment of farming communities in Sámi traditional areas was facilitated by a state view of the Sámi as lacking any real ownership over their ancestral territory (Cocq & DuBois 2021). In this way, it can be understood that these state authorities took advantage of the Sámi people's non-invasive modality of interface with the natural world. As quoted by Ingold in the introduction to this thesis, *Sápmi* "has shamans but no priesthood, elders but no dynasties, memories but no monuments. Indeed, the North is not so much a monument as an improvisation; its concern is...to keep life going...the North stands for revitalisation rather than resistance" (Ingold 2019, pg. 111). Gaski concurs; in Sámi culture, he explains, "the hand of nature erases all traces of Sámi migration and settlement, perhaps only leaving behind the ring of stones around a campfire or the folklore surrounding the meaning of a place name" (Gaski 2004, pg. 372). However, this does not indicate a lack of connection to the land in the Sámi world, but instead one that champions living along with nature as opposed to living upon it, seeking dominion over it [author note: I will explore more thoroughly land relations between the Sámi people and *Sápmi* in Chapter 6]. It can be said that Nordic authorities misconstrued the Sámi land relation to suit their objectives. Insisting upon a lack of land proprietorship among the Sámi people, Norwegian authorities sold tracts of Sámi lands as agricultural homesteads, creating a situation in which the Sámi would come to be seen as trespassers on their own indigenous territories (Cocq & DuBois 2021). In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, these processes became associated with assimilationist educational and social policies aimed at forcibly drawing the Sámi into the majority populations of the Nordic states by erasing and replacing their languages, cultures, and ways of life.

In Norway specifically, this process was part of a political paradigm called "Norwegianisation." Indeed, the present-day relationship between Norway and the Sámi people cannot be fully appreciated without considering the Norwegianisation doctrine that pervaded Norwegian national discourse from roughly 1850 to 1980, very roughly.

Norwegianisation refers to the official policy that would acculturate and “civilise” the Sámi and Kvæn indigenous minorities in Norway and enforce Norwegian language usage in all areas of the nation. The objective of this holistic policy was to transform Norway into an ethnically and culturally homogeneous country and, according to the Social Darwinist ideologies of the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, “perfect” and “modernise” the nation (Steinlien 1989).

### **The Early Years of Norwegianisation**

After four hundred years of Swedish domination, Norway began the endeavour for independence on May 17, 1814, with the signing of a new national constitution (Berg 2014). Though Norway was unable to secure full independence from its union with Sweden until 1905, dramatic cultural changes began taking place in the nearly sovereign nation several years beforehand. Preceding roughly 1850, the philosophy underlying most Norwegian governmental administrations could be best described as “culturally pluralistic,” as suggested by Steinlien (Steinlien 1989, pg. 5). According to the doctrine of cultural pluralism, individuals were “deemed to have both the right and the obligation to secure and develop their language and nationality...corresponding to such European concepts as ‘nation,’ ‘justice,’ and ‘liberty’” (Ibid 1989, pg. 2). However, given the new nationalistic imperative to create and safeguard a newly integrated, independent Norway, this kind of cultural policy was heavily contested by the Norwegian parliament, particularly in relationship to language use. Here, the first stages of Sámi forced assimilation come into play through language administration and new national protocol in schools (Jernsletten 2011).

In 1851, *Finnfondet* (or “The Lapp Fund”) was established and adopted as an honorarium to expand Norwegian language education in Sámi and Kvæn-speaking territories (Grenersen 2014). Though this new paradigm certainly signaled a shift from a celebration of cultural pluralism to forced cultural homogeneity, the period leading up until 1880 was still relatively permissive in terms of indigenous language use as an aide in boarding schools. Between 1880 and 1905, however, the hard Norwegianisation policies began to crystallise (Jernsletten 2011). By 1889, official legislation required that the language of instruction in all schools be Norwegian, with the rare exception of a few remote

territories in which the use of Sámi was permitted for very brief assistance purposes in the classroom only (Steinlien 1989). Notably, this period ushered in the development of several boarding school systems specifically for indigenous children, with the aim of isolating the students from their original environments (Minde 2005). Put concisely by Jensen, boarding school had “unfortunate consequences for the development of the self-image of many Sámi and Kvæn pupils. At school they were told more or less overtly that their native language and their cultural belonging were of little value altogether” (Jensen 1990, pg. 141).



Fig. 12: Unknown (1929) Sámi pupils dressed in traditional costumes outside their school in Kolvik, Finnmark, Norway [Vintage photograph]. Retrieved from: <https://teachik.com/norwegianization-of-the-sami/>

1898 heralded the development of *Wexelsenplakaten*, a directive that ultimately shaped the core of the Norwegianisation paradigm. Its first objective involved supplanting Sámi and Kvæn minority language use with Norwegian, a process that was already well underway in schools. The second involved restricting access to citizen land ownership based on language and, consequently, ethnicity. With restrictive linguistic policies well underway, 1902 ushered in the Land Act, under which Parliament stipulated that property was transferrable only to Norwegian citizens and, more specifically, to those who could read, speak, and write Norwegian (Steinlien 1989). The all-encompassing totality of Norwegianisation became overwhelmingly clear by 1905, when assimilative and homogenising cultural principles began to bleed into other aspects of Norwegian political

philosophy and policymaking. Notably, during this time the Norwegian parliament identified Kvæn immigration from Finland into northern Norway as a defense issue in an official capacity. The only combatant to this perceived defense issue, as argued by government authorities, was indeed Norwegianisation, or more specifically, the policies outlined in the *Wexelsenplakaten* directive (Gaski 1993). Furthermore, Steinlien points out that the Norwegian government did not find it worthwhile to differentiate between the two primary minority groups in the Nordic states, Sámi and Kvaen, which resulted in similarly antagonistic policies against both peoples (Steinlien 1989).

The ultimate results of Norwegianisation were devastating – Sámi people were treated as intruders on their own lands, deprived of livable wages, voting rights, and sustainable livelihoods, as well as decent educational opportunities (Cocq & DuBois 2021). Nergård refers to a pervasive cultural consequence of all these elements called “Sámi pain,” and suggests that it was (and is) widespread both among those who opposed Norwegianisation and those who attempted to capitulate and adapt to assimilative pressure (Nergård 1994, pg. 72). And indeed, some Sámi did assimilate in the face of public dialogue that painted the Norwegian language as a “symbol of the ‘good life,’ and the opportunity to...live like the Norwegians, forgetting the failure that being a Sámi represented...” (Huss 1999, pg. 96). By the time more liberal policies toward the Sámi people began to arise after World War II, much damage had already been done, and many Sámi suffered an overwhelmingly and pervasively negative view of their own language and culture and even refused to identify as Sámi.



Fig. 13: Unknown (n.d.) *Representation of households identifying as Norwegian, Sámi, or Kvæn in Kvænangen, 1930* [Photograph]. Image taken at the Arctic University Museum of Norway, Tromsø. Retrieved from: <https://teachik.com/sami-history-post-ww2/>



Fig. 14: Unknown (n.d.) *Representation of households identifying as Norwegian, Sámi, or Kvæn in Kvænangen, 1950* [Photograph]. Image taken at the Arctic University Museum of Norway, Tromsø. Retrieved from: <https://teachik.com/sami-history-post-ww2/>

As a matter of history, one can confidently surmise that the state's efforts to make Sámi individuals reject their own language, change the basic values of their culture, and augment their national identity, have been "extensive, long-lasting, and determined" (Minde 2005, pg. 133). We can also conjecture, based on available research, that "this form of powerlessness which the minorities experienced during Norwegianisation [had] social-psychological consequences" (Ibid 2005, pg. 133). Overwhelmingly persistent and insistent assimilative pressure has been observed to "mark one's self-image, undermine one's self-respect and self-esteem, and at worst cause self-contempt and a...critical attitude towards other members of one's own group" (Hvinden 2000, pg. 19). Some scholars and activists have referred to these complex issues as being part of a broader concept called internalised colonialism, which happens when the subjugated individual or group essentially begins to mimic the mentality of their oppressor, resulting in the consequences described by Hvinden above. In Chapters 4 and 5, I will discuss this particular concept in greater depth and address some of the ways in which Sámi creatives are combating and mitigating these deleterious consequences. For now, I will return to chronicling the tail-end of the Norwegianisation years, which heralded the revitalisation efforts that would arise in *Sápmi* during the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century.



## The Alta Conflict



Fig. 15: Unknown (1979) *Hunger strike outside Stortinget* [Photograph] Retrieved from: <https://vintagenorway.tumblr.com/post/182868058168/hunger-strike-outside-the-storting-1979-and-the>

It was not until the 1970s that Sámi issues truly began to enter political consciousness based on the self-advocacy work from the indigenous group. In the late 70s, one of the most decisive political events in Sámi history occurred when the community of Masi mobilised to protest the development of a massive hydroelectric dam on the Guovdageaidnu/Kautokeino-Alta River, which would effectively flood out their village. The Alta protests were particularly pivotal, and, for the purposes of this thesis, interesting to look into from an imagistic and media-centric perspective. As Cocq and DuBois have articulated in their 2021 book *Sámi Media and Indigenous Agency in the Arctic North*, art, creativity, media, and image-making came to the fore as pivotal tools that were utilised effectively by Sámi activists to advocate for their interests as a unified indigenous community during the era of the Alta Conflict (Cocq & DuBois 2021). I will address these concepts with more specificity after briefly chronicling the a few of the most pivotal moments of the Alta Affair.

Coursing through the reindeer herding grounds of northern Norway, the Alta River represented (and still represents) an integral natural resource for herding and fishing Sámi communities in the region (Broderstad 2011). In 1970, the Norwegian Water Resources and Electricity Board proposed the development of a hydroelectric dam on the river. The dam, which would have flooded out the village of Masi and disturbed both reindeer migration routes and salmon fishing activities, was a decisive affront amidst a long history of Norway's marginalisation of indigenous peoples and neglect towards their interests. In response to the proposed project, Sámi activists organised coalitions and engaged in mass public protests, which took many forms. For example, on October 8, 1979, a group of seven young Sámi men and women belonging to the Sámi Action Group (*Samisk Aksjonsgruppe*) erected their *lavvu* tents outside of the parliament building in Oslo, roughly 3,000 kilometers from Alta, demanding suspension of the dam's authorisation. The government refused their demands, resulting in further civil disobedience; the Sámi activists then organised a massive hunger strike amidst a flurry of media attention. This particular protest was decisive; within a day, several thousand Oslo residents had signed statements of support of the Sámi people (Andersen & Midttun 1985). The event was documented through photos and covered in newspaper and radio broadcasts throughout the world. Notably, three of the five male and two female strikers also happened to be visual artists, performers, and writers, including Mikkel Gaup, Synnøve Persen, and Niilas Aslaksen Somby (Cocq & DuBois 2021).

On October 10, police informed strikers that their occupation of the parliament lawn was illegal and stated that they would be allowed to continue their demonstration across the street for one day only. The strikers moved location but rejected the one-day stipulation. The following day, they held impromptu tutorials on Sámi history for gathering crowds and media and led communal songs. October 11, police arrested the strikers, in addition to a supporting member of Parliament. However, the following day, strikers returned to the lawn and erected their *lavvu* tents once more. On October 12, police arrested the strikers again, as well as 200 vocal supporters. However, the protestors were eventually able to negotiate with the police for the right to set up their lodgings and protest only until 21:00 each evening. Finally, on October 15, the government temporarily rescinded authorisation of the dam. Sámi activists then suspended their protests, vowing to return if the dam were re-authorised (Andersen & Midttun 1985). Norwegian filmmaker and activist

Bredo Greve immortalised the events of this remarkable week in his documentary *La elva leve!* (Let the river live!), released in 1980 (Cocq & DuBois 2021).



Fig. 16: Unknown (1979) *La Elva Lev (Let the River Live)* [Photograph] Retrieved from: <https://ejatlas.org/conflict/alta-river-hydro-power-plant-norway>

Though construction of the dam was re-authorised, Sámi activists were undeterred. Subsequent protests included Sámi advocates and environmental activist allies chaining themselves together and blocking the construction site in Alta, a second hunger strike in 1981, an occupation of the offices of Norwegian Prime Minister Gro Harlem Brundtland, and even an attempt to blow up a bridge near Alta. However, as Cocq and Dubois point out, it was the *lavvu* protest and associated hunger strike that particularly struck a chord in the public imagination. They suggest that the striking imagery of the *lavvu* placed in front of Stortinget heralded a turning point in the public perception of Norwegian-indigenous relations; no longer was the Norwegian state perceived as an “inclusive, communally achieved nation-state but instead a colonial regime, intent on maintaining control over the lives and resources of an indigenous people” (Cocq & DuBois 2021, pg. 52).

The Alta case was taken to the Supreme Court in Norway in 1982. Ultimately, a modified version of the dam was built. However, Sámi activists were able to successfully classify Masi as a crucial heritage area, leading to a scaling-down of the Alta dam and access road to provide more protection to the village (Bremmer 2013). The largest case to be tried by the Supreme Court in Norway to that day, the Alta Affair became a defining event in

terms of cultural cohesion and unity among Sámi people (Eidheim 1997). The case was resolved under the following premise:

The court found that questions of international law could be considered in a regulatory case only if that water regulation caused strong and very damaging encroachment upon Sámi interests with the consequence that Sámi culture was threatened (Svensson 1984, pg. 163).

The Alta protests led to numerous imperative concessions by the Norwegian government in favour of the Sámi people. Even before the case was concluded, the Alta events led to the development of two public commissions in 1980: the Sámi Rights Commission and the Sámi Cultural Commission. The former “[examined] questions concerning Sámi rights to land and water and some other juridical questions,” while the latter “[considered] principal sides of the Sámi cultural and educational policy, and [discussed] initiatives...[to] promote Sámi culture and strengthen the use of Sámi language” (Steinlien 1989, pg. 8). The reports on these commissions specified two provisions. One, “The Sámi Act,” required government authorities to “enable the Sámi population to safeguard and develop their language, their culture, and their societal life” (Blix et al 2013, pg. 76). The other, put forth by the Cultural Commission, demanded that Norwegian and Sámi languages “have equal status as official languages” (Corson 1995, pg. 494).

Indeed, the Alta Affair represented one of the first instances in recorded history that Norway was forced to recognise the Sámi people as a distinctive and united ethnic group. In other words, as the Sámi people began to forcefully vocalise cohesive cultural agendas, from the perpetuation of traditional activities to rights to water and land, the Norwegian government was finally compelled to recognise the Sámi population as a separate ethnic entity with its own unique goals and interests (Svensson 1984). More specifically, they now had rights specifically outlined in the Norwegian constitution as well as in the United Nations International Labour Organisation’s Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention 169. Further, in 1989, the Sámi in Norway acquired a representative administration, *Sámediggi*, the Sámi Parliament, and a year later Norway ratified ILO-C169. To date, however, neither Finland nor Sweden have ratified the Convention, which is a concern for many Sámi activists in the Nordic countries [author note: I will discuss ILO-169 and the circumstances

surrounding its ratification in Norway in greater detail in later writing] (Cocq & DuBois 2021).

The Alta Conflict was principally a dispute over land and water, but it was also heavily cultural, as the Sámi protestors strongly emphasised their rights to indigenous territory as inextricable from their heritage and identity. The Sámi protestors utilised many defining cultural imagistic symbols to convey their unification for the cause. For example, the reader will recall that, in Oslo, activists placed their *lavvu* tents in front of the Norwegian Parliamentary building to represent their cultural unity (Andersen & Midttun 1985). The demonstrations and hunger strikes in Masi and in Oslo also utilised traditional musical performance, more specifically the *joik*. *Joik* is a “traditional Sámi form of song, an almost non-verbal singing, related to Sámi shamanism” (Hautala-Hirvioja 2017, pg. 101). It is considered to be an important criterion of Sámi identity, and a “symbol of the Sámi national spirit” (Ibid 2017, pg. 101). During the Masi protests, the *joik* titled *Sámi Eatnan Duoddarat* became a “vital political weapon” and a “national emblem of ‘Sáminess’” (Hilder 2015, pg. 59).

### **The Role of Art and Media in the Sámi Cultural Revival**

Art, performance, television, music, and other forms of public media were instrumental in crafting a pan-Sámi indigenous empowerment movement on the heels of the Alta protest. In fact, one of the most significant and publicised arts initiatives in recent Sámi history was directly connected to the events that transpired during the Alta Conflict. During the late 1970s, a group of artists born in the *Sápmi* region in the mid-1940s and 50s returned to their homeland after graduating from art schools and academies in the Norwegian and Swedish southern territories. In 1978, they settled in the village of Masi, where the Alta Conflict would eventually take place. The Masi Group, or Sámi Group of Artists, as they would ultimately be called, spearheaded an artistic movement that took its point of departure from a sense of indigenous pride and anti-colonialism (Hansen 2016). Collectively, their aspiration was to “reclaim the human worth and pride belonging to indigenous peoples and to build a nation” through arts and political action (Heyn-Jones 2019, pg. 1). This group was comprised of Aage Gaup, Synnøve Persen, Josef Halse, Hans Ragnar Mathisen (also known as Keviselie), Trygve Lund Guttormsen, Ranveig Pensen, and

Berit Marrit Hætta. Britta Markatt-Labba joined the group in 1980, shortly after its official formation (Sámi Dáiddaguovddáš 2017).

The Sámi Artist Group located themselves strategically, in part because the region provided the artists with studios and accommodation, but also because demonstrations against plans for creating a hydroelectric dam in the Alta- Guovdageaidnu/Kautokeino River were starting to gain momentum during this time. This assemblage of artists gained significant publicity in terms of their role in the protests and in furthering an anti-colonial sentiment that was heavily felt by the Sámi populace during this period. These creatives used a wide variety of mediums and art styles to convey political messages, from embroidered and woven scenes to illustrated maps (Hansen 2016).

Cocq and DuBois point out that these artists' works were "central in the Alta era use of art to depict and criticise Nordic institutionalised racism" (Cocq & DuBois 2020, pg. 159). "During the period of the Masi group," Britta Markatt-Labba explained to *Berlin Art Link Magazine*, "we had lots of exhibitions together. It was much easier to have our voices heard and to get Sámi art out to the world when we were part of a larger group. It would have been very heavy if I was all alone" (as quoted in Hugill 2020, pg. 3). She continued: "We trusted in ourselves and we believed we could do something good for Sámi society" (as quoted in Ibid 2020, pg. 3).



Fig 17: Marakatt-Labba B. (1981) *Kråkorna* [Embroidery, 40 x 110 cm]. University of Tromsø.  
Retrieved from: <https://uit.no/Content/463048/Britta>

In 2018, I had the opportunity to sit down and speak with Hans Ragnar Mathisen, one of the formative members of the Masi Group. Hans is a prolific writer and artist; he has also recently been exploring digital media and film. He paints and draws with many styles



and subjects, but he is perhaps most well-known for his unique maps, which, rather than being simple tools for navigation, question conventionally held ideas about land use and ownership and provide unique, artistic insight into contemporary Sámi culture. In 1974, Hans embarked on an ambitious project to depict all Sámi place names throughout the *Sápmi* territories of Norway, Sweden, Finland, and Russia. The resulting map was published in 1975 in conjunction with the Oslo Sámi Association and the Sámi Institute. It was ultimately printed in the Oslo newspaper, as well as at *Adresseavisa* in Trondheim (the final piece is pictured as Figure 1, Introduction). As Hans puts it, his maps have “become a sort of ambassador of Sámi people and culture abroad” (Mathisen 2015, pg. 15). Indeed, his works have been presented at the United Nations Assembly, with the National Geographic Society, and to several dignitaries who have visited *Sápmi*. Hans’s work is notable not only for its use of Sámi-language place names, but for the imagery that populates his vivid works, which is inspired by elements of Sámi mythology, traditional crafts (*duodji*), and local wildlife (Ibid 2015). Many scholars have thus referred to his works as “decolonising documents” (Stephansen 2017, pg. 112).



Fig. 18: Mathisen H.R. (1990) *Davviálbmogat: Indigenous Peoples of the Arctic* [Map, coloured pencil on paper]. Retrieved from: <http://www.keviselie-hansragnarmathisen.net/33514843?i=34885704>

His piece ČSV (“Čajet Sámi Vuoiŋŋa,” or “Show Sámi Spirit”), pictured below, appeared at a Sámi political event in Masi, and has served as a Sámi slogan of sorts for decades to follow. Č, S, and V, Hans explained to me, are the most commonly used letters in the North Sámi alphabet. Stephansen argues that ČSV piece immortalised a consciousness about and a need to unite Sámi symbols and concepts to strengthen “Sáminess” in political spaces (Stephansen 2017). Mathisen emphasised to me that, during this period, he used his work to “make [the] Sámi come out of hiding” and that, indeed, more people “dared to be Sámi” during and after the events of the 70s and 80s. Cocq and DuBois affirm that, among the young Sámi of the Alta era and beyond, the anagram ČSV became something of a “watchword,” which “overall indicated the consciousness and engaged performance of Sámi identity in all aspects of life” (Cocq & DuBois 2021, pg. 72).



Fig. 19: Mathisen H.R. (1970) ČSV [Woodcut, pressed paper, 32 x 32 cm]. Exhibited at the Office for Contemporary Art Norway, April 12-June 3, 2018.

The arts and works of the Masi Group and numerous other Sámi artists and media makers have been pivotally and principally instrumental in spearheading what would come to be known as the Sámi Cultural Revival, or simply the Sámi Revival, in the 70s, 80s, and 90s particularly. It is also worth noting that, since the Alta event, the Nordic governments and Norwegian media-makers also demonstrated a greater affinity for portraying the Sámi



people and their cultural and political interests in a more constructive way. There are three film and television programs that come to mind in that respect. The first is the Norwegian television series called *Ante*, subtitled “*er år i en samegutts liv*” (or “a year in the life of a Sámi boy”), which premiered in 1975. The series, which was later adapted into a 1978 feature film, explored the experiences of a young Sámi boy trying to fit in while attending a Norwegian residential boarding school, located in Guovdageaidnu. Cocq and DuBois argue that *Ante* helped create a broader Norwegian public interest in Sámi issues, while at the same time offering some hope to Sámi viewers that Norwegians might be interested in and even supportive of Sámi activism and sociopolitical interests (Cocq & DuBois 2021).

Next, in 1977, Norway invited the American television program, *Mutual of Omaha’s Wild Kingdom*, to film and present the spring migration of Guovdageaidnu Sámi herders from their winter grounds near the village to their spring and summer pastures on the coastal island of Kågan. The film includes abundant images of Sámi traditional dress, shoe grass, dogs, reindeer, ear marking, lassoing, *goahhti* construction, and other elements of traditional Sámi life. However, it is worth noting that some liberties were taken in the portrayal of herding life; for example, snowmobiles were commonplace among Sámi herders by that time, and this fact was relatively underemphasised, perhaps in an effort to portray Sámi life as more ancient and perhaps exotic. With that being said, Cocq and DuBois argue that this programme “[accomplished] the end of highlighting Sámi issues and difficulties” (Cocq & DuBois 2021, pg. 77).

Also in 1977, illustrious Sámi artist, writer, musician, and poet (and member of the Mási Group) Nils-Aslak Valkeapää participated in a collaborative Soviet-Estonian-Finnish documentary, entitled *Linnutee tuuled (Winds of the Milky Way)*. The film was the product of Estonian director Lennart Meri, whose 1970 documentary *Veelinnurahvas (People of the Waterfall)* had documented the Finno-Ugric cultures of Russia and Finland. In *Linnutee tuuled*, Valkeapää explained why “small cultures” should be respected and should continue to exist as a distinct and valuable people (Cocq & DuBois 2021, pg. 78). The *joik* singing of Nils Piera Labba is featured in the film, which first premiered in the United States in 1979 (Kalogeras & Waegner 2020).

Indeed, during this time, Solbakk points to a “remarkable change in attitude and practice...among many Norwegian journalists [and other media professionals] with regard to their reporting in Sámi conditions” (Solbakk 1997, pg. 178). Cocq and DuBois hypothesise

that this shift in attitudes may have occurred in part because Sámi artists and activists were effectively collaborating with media makers and using art, photography, documentary, and media images to communicate Sámi interests themselves (Cocq & DuBois 2021). Indeed, in 1971, illustrious Finnish Sámi writer, musician, artist, poet, and activist Nils-Aslak Valkeapää wrote: “[a] successful culture battle can only be fought if we adopt the same weapons as those others already have [referring to radio, television], and at the same time take care to use them in our own way” (as quoted in Cocq & DuBois 2021, pg. 81).

And the Sámi would certainly take care to utilise film and other forms of arts and media in their own ways over the next several decades and into present day. In Chapter 3, I will focus heavily on indigenous peoples and their roles behind the camera, managing, writing, and directing film and television projects. However, before I delve into this particular topic and address some watershed moments in the history of Sámi film, I feel it is appropriate here to briefly chronicle the genesis of the Sámi visual media industry in Norway. As this chapter is dedicated to the relationship between the Sámi people and the majority state, I cannot overlook the relationship between the Sámi film industry and the broader, larger Norwegian film institutions that still influence the ways in which Sámi film has historically and presently been produced. I suggest that, though there have been tremendous strides made in terms of indigenous politics in the Nordic states, Norwegianisation still leaves a narrative colonial trace in the operations of numerous industries, including film and visual media.

### **A Brief History of the Sámi in Film in Norway**

In the previous section, I explored some collaborative efforts between Sámi individuals and majority Nordic media makers that contributed to a more constructive overall perception of the Sámi people during the 70s and 80s. However, if we go back in time a few decades, it is undeniable that depictions of Sámi characters and indigenous “themes” in media found their genesis in majority-produced film and television, in a manner that reflects the global corpus of media related to indigenous peoples. In Chapter 3, I will discuss in greater detail why this has been and can continue to be problematic. Here, I will briefly discuss a few notable media projects that touched on Sámi culture and Sámi interests from 1914 to 1989.

Cinematic representations of the Sámi people can be traced back to the early twentieth century, with notable examples being Swedish filmmaker Victor Sjöström's 1914 silent drama *Högfjällets dotter* (*Daughter of the Peaks*), which chronicles the journey of a young doctor who, having fallen unconscious in the mountains, is brought to a Sámi village, as well as the 1927 Finnish piece *Noidan kirot* (*The Curse of the Witch*), a silent folk horror film featuring a Sámi character as "the witch." Moffat points out that, much like Romani and Traveller and other indigenous populations, the "otherworldliness of the Sámi has long provided visual and thematic source material for Nordic filmmakers" (Moffat 2018, pg. 83). She continues to suggest that Nordic filmmakers have historically had a vested interest in portraying the "authenticity" of Sámi traditions and cultural practices, an interest that ironically has contributed heavily to the portrayal of Sámi characters in primitive or overly romanticised ways (Ibid 2018, pg. 116). Moffat asserts that this has often reduced Sámi characters to "symbolic or tokenesque figures of fascination" in majority-produced media (Ibid 2018, pg. 84).

The first Sámi character to appear on film in Norway was in Peter Lykke-Seest's 1917 feature *Young Hearts*. However, though this film is described in archival records, there is no visual record of the film itself, so we know very little about how the Sámi character was depicted. We do know, however, that the Sámi character was portrayed by Robert Sperati, a Norwegian actor with half-Italian ancestry. Indeed, the use of non-Sámi people to play Sámi characters in film and theater was a common practice until roughly the mid-1950s (Mecsei 2015). The next prominent film featuring Sámi characters was a Danish-Norwegian production that premiered in 1927, with Copenhagen-born George Schnéevoigt's *Lajla*. The film chronicles the life of a young Norwegian woman who is adopted by a Sámi family as child. According to Mecsei, *Lajla* is a somewhat "unusual example" of the time because it demonstrated "a significant willingness to promote Sámi culture in an authentic way" (Ibid 2015, pg. 4). However, it is worth noting that Sámi characters were still played primarily by Norwegian, Swedish, and Danish actors. With that being said, it is largely agreed upon that the film took a much more sympathetic approach to Sámi life and culture than most films being produced at the time. *Lajla* was immensely popular in Norway and internationally, to the degree that it spawned three remakes – a Swedish-Danish version in 1937 and a Swedish-German co-production in 1958 (Ibid 2018).



Fig. 20: Unknown (1929) *Lajla* [Vintage film poster], retrieved from [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Laila\\_\(1929\\_film\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Laila_(1929_film))

Wright asserts that the post-World War II era marked a period of intense interest in Sáminess in the Nordic nations (Wright 1998). I conjecture that this is likely the result of a confluence of factors; the first may be the more liberal approach to cultural diversity that began to emerge in politics after the horrors of the second world war, and the second factor likely relates to the Sámi peoples' gradually increasing political vocality and activism. In any case, the burgeoning public interest in Sámi culture and sociopolitical issues resulted in a larger and more diverse body of films thematising Sámi issues or utilising Sámi characters in storytelling (Mecsei 2015).

The next significant film addressing Sámi life and culture is largely considered to be the documentary *Same Jakki* (Per Høst, 1957). The film, which provides a portrait of Sámi life from the perspective of a social anthropologist, is generally considered to be the first feature to acquaint international audiences with Sámi life and culture. Of course, the film is still anchored in the tone of the era it was made in, and thus it has been criticised as rather romanticising to the point of being problematic. Though the film director clearly wanted to encourage “empathy and insight,” as linguist Anne-Kari Skarðhamar points out, “[his] voice

over-expresses a romantic admiration for Sámi culture, [while] his commentaries simultaneously indicate a picture of the happy savage, a primitive, but extremely clever marginal tribe in the wilderness” (Skarðhamar 2008, pg. 297).

Mecsei argues that the television series and subsequent feature film *Ante* heralded a new era in terms of the portrayal of Sámi characters and culture in film in the Nordic nations. As she points out, the use of Sámi actors to play Sámi characters became a more popular notion, and it was no longer considered unproblematic to disregard the input of Sámi creators in front of or behind the camera (Mecsei 2015). In *Ante*, the directors and producers collaborated extensively with Sámi consultants during and after film production. Furthermore, the actors were Sámi, the Sámi language was used in the film, and contemporary social issues impacting the Sámi people at this time were thematised (Mecsei 2015). Mecsei asserts that the series’ (and film’s) popularity “made an entire generation of children (and parents) in Norway aware of Sámi culture” (Ibid 2015, pg. 5). And, as was mentioned in previous writing, it is likely no coincidence that this film was made concurrent to the ongoing political conflict related to the Alta Affair.

With this all being said, I must reiterate here that all of the forementioned examples of media describe films and television productions created by cultural outsiders. Indeed, it was not until and subsequent to the Alta Conflict that indigenous-made film and television programming truly began to attain public attention and appreciation. For example, what is largely considered to be the most momentous film in the history of Sámi media premiered in 1987. Nils Gaup’s feature film *Ofelaš*, or *Pathfinder*, is widely considered to be a classic and, as Mecsei argues, “strongly contributed to strengthening Sámi culture...in the wake of strong community involvement in the 1970s and the outcome of the Alta case” [author note: I will discuss the plot of *Ofelaš* in depth in Chapter 3, where I spotlight some of the most momentous feature films in Sámi history] (Mecsei 2015, pg. 9).

Since the premiere of *Ofelaš*, there has been an impressive body of films produced by Sámi media-makers that continues to expand in present day. Throughout this thesis and in Chapter 3 more heavily, I will address several of these films with more specificity. Here I feel it may be appropriate to direct the reader to the institutional history of Sámi film itself, in conjunction with the Norwegian film policies that still influence indigenous media production. As I will explore in greater depth shortly, the institutional history of Norwegian film and its relationship to the Sámi film industry has not escaped the vestiges of domestic

colonialism, despite the motions forward in indigenous politics that have transpired over the past four decades or so.

### **A Brief History of the Sámi Film Industry in Norway**

It would not be until 2007 that the most preeminent film organisation in *Sápmi* would begin its life as the principal center of indigenous film production and artist training in an international pan-Sámi community (Mecsei 2014). The International Sámi Film Institute (ISFI) is a transnational organisation, but it maintains a strong regional stamp due to its culturally central location in Guovdageaidnu, in northern Norway. In order to understand its development, I must first dedicate some brief discussion to its relationship to the Norwegian film industry and its connection to – and complex attempts to obstruct and reverse – colonial political paradigms that have bled into media production in the Nordic nations.

Historically, the film industry in Norway has been prominently centralised, meaning the State has served as the primary financial source for private producers. Further, it has been directly involved in film production through the state-owned production company *Norsk Film A/S* (1948-2011). Norwegian film production is still heavily dependent upon state subsidies, which can be observed in the distribution of funds; in 2014, for example, 85% of film production funding channelled through the Norwegian Film Institute went to production companies based in Oslo (Bjerkeland 2015).

When the first national film policy was implemented in Norway post-World War II, its main concern seemed to be the promotion of a distinctive, unified national culture with a centralised base of operations. State Proposition No. 2 (1946-1947) constitutes the first public document in which film is referred to as an influential cultural entity. Notably, this Proposition also expressed concern regarding the import of foreign films into Norway (Bjerkeland 2015). As a result, active proponents of Norwegian cultural film were arguing heavily for the nation's cultural obligation to facilitate Norwegian-language films. As Solhjell points out, this nationalistic objective falls in line with the core values of Norwegian cultural policy going back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Solhjell 2004). In this way, I suggest that the development of Norwegian media runs concurrent to its sociopolitical context;

Norwegianisation influenced virtually every aspect of Norwegian society, including media, and its vestiges can still be perceived in ways I will elaborate upon further in later writing.

Much later in 2001, State Proposition No. 1 introduced the phrase “more culture for every krone we spend,” and emphasised the allocation of resources to Norwegian cinema (State Proposition No. 1 [2000-2001]). In 2003, the Ministry of Culture and Church presented White Paper No. 25, which described film as “probably the most important cultural expression of our time” (White Paper no. 25 [2003–2004] p. 7). It is clear from this documentation that Norwegian authorities possessed a keen understanding of the ways in which media both reflects and shapes culture and society. Clearly, in its early incarnations, media was utilised to reflect and perpetuate political paradigms such as Norwegianisation by putting a strong nationalistic stamp on Norwegian film production. However, in keeping with the ideals of democracy and welfare that were burgeoning following World War II, authorities across Europe began to acknowledge the importance of regional sovereignty and diversity related to film and other forms of media. In particular, the notion of decentralisation began to play a prominent role in film discourse from the 1970s onward in Norway. For example, in the Einarsson Committee report (2006) that preceded White Paper No. 22, it was stated that: “Regional ownership and local identity is an important incentive to invest in film, as long as the opportunities for real profit are relatively limited” (Einarsson 2006, pg. 65). For example, it was considered likely that a company based in Bergen would be more interested in investing into the production of a film based in Bergen than in one made in Oslo. According to Bjerkeland, there was a common perception that all films in Norway were made by “white men in their 30s and 40s from the Western part of Oslo,” and that there was a growing discontent with the lack of cultural, ethnic, and class diversity in Norwegian national cinema (Bjerkeland 2015, pg. 131).

As a result of growing discontent with the overwhelming preponderance of only a certain type of Nordic film, in the 1970s, a group of filmmakers in Northern Norway endeavoured to establish a regional film center to offer a bit more geographical/cultural variety in terms of Norwegian film. *Nordnorsk Filmsenter AS* was ultimately established in 1979, and, after a trial period, the center was formally instated by 1981. It is owned by the Nordland, Troms, and Finnmark counties, but has enjoyed additional external funding from the state since 1979. The second regional film center, *Vestnorsk Filmsenter AS* was established in 1994 in Bergen. In the 2000s and 2010s, 11 new regional film agencies were

established throughout Norway. As of 2021, there are a total of 13 regional film agencies in Norway. They provide funding for short films, documentaries, feature films, and television. They also run several courses in subjects like filmmaking and scriptwriting for children and youths as well as professional film workers. Local and regional authorities finance the centers' operational costs, while the state covers their production funds (Bjerkeland 2015). These endeavours represent some of the first efforts toward greater inclusiveness in Norwegian cinema, which will ultimately benefit and impact Sámi film production. I will attend to this most recent point shortly.

Indeed, as Ove Solum asserts, the 1980s “represented an increased awareness of global issues and themes within Norwegian cinema as well as concentrated attempt to draw in both domestic and international audiences” (Solum 1997, pg. 91). These efforts have only burgeoned and expanded in scope over time, coupled with an understanding that film is highly influential as a cultural determinant and that representation in film yields real-world impact on those represented. In the 2015 annual report published by The Nordic Council's subsidiary organisation *Nordisk Film and TV Fond* (NFTF), which provides financial support for a wide range of Nordic productions, board members and certified experts in the Nordic film industries reinforced the significance of films as a “source of cultural currency and investment for the Nordic Council” (Moffat 2020, pg. 89). Norden, which is a geo-cultural body that collaborates with The Nordic Council and the NFTF in terms of determining contemporary funding and support mechanisms for Nordic media, played a critical role in “outlining the region's collective identity through fighting social injustice and campaigning for inequality” (Ibid 2020, pg. 89). However, as Moffat argues, Norden has a “tendency to project a collective self-perception of the region as exceptional, especially regarding the approach to dealing with global themes like immigration on both local and regional levels” (Ibid 2020, pg. 235).

Norden is also responsible, alongside the NFTF, for providing the annual Nordic Council Film Prize, which amounts to DKK 350,000 and was first awarded in 2002 (Moffat 2018). Norden's website outlines the basic criteria for nominees and winners of the Prize on its website, stating that funds are “awarded to a full-length feature that has roots in Nordic culture and displays high standards of artistic quality and originality” (Ibid 2020, pg. 89). Moffat argues that the objectives of the Prize and its associated criteria are clear: “to invest in a film culture with strong production values and a sense of ‘Nordicness’” (Ibid 2020, pg.



89). This is not necessarily problematic in itself, though, taken in conjunction with the Norwegianisation policies that characterised the early years of Norway's independence, the delineations of 'Nordicness' can become controversial if they only allow for films which are, again, made chiefly by "men in their 30s and 40s from the Western part of Oslo" (Bjerkeland 2015, pg. 131).

With that being said, as I previously stated, efforts at "fighting social injustice and campaigning [against] inequality" are largely considered to be integral elements of Nordic cultural identity, and these elements bleed into their media industries as well (Moffat 2020, pg. 89). Indeed, Norway was one of the first early adopters of domestic policies in terms of the inclusion of diverse ethnic representation in film. This can be most easily observed in Norway's 2019 White Paper on diversity, which was unveiled alongside Norwegian Minister of Culture Tine Skei Grande's assertion that Nordic film should "enhance the general visibility and presence of women and ethnic minorities on film" (Ibid 2020, pg. 80). Grande stated: "2019 will be a big year for Norway. We want Norwegian talent to pop up everywhere. Our ambition is to push co-productions, co-financing, artistic knowledge, talent development and stimulate changes in Norwegian film and TV drama to have more diversity, representation as well as innovation" (Grande quoted in Ibid 2020, pg. 80). The White Paper resulted in a "Diversity Action Plan" (2019-2023), which highlighted the need to instigate systematic changes to industry operations – principally through educational workshops and diversity quotas – with the aim of enabling Norwegian films to better "reflect contemporary society in a way that will enable all social groups to experience relevance and representation" (Ibid 2020, pg. 81).

### **The International Sámi Film Institute**

As I previously stated, the 1970s saw the beginning of the development of several regional film centers in Norway, which would pop up in greater numbers throughout the nation in later years. One of these regional film centers was the *Internášunála Sámi Filmbmaguovddáš* (ISF), the establishment of which represents the growth of both regional and ethnic diversity in terms of Nordic film (Bjerkeland 2015). The ISF (known in its present incarnation as the *Internášunála Sámi Filbmainstituhta*, or the International Sámi Film Institute) is located in Guovdageaidnu and has a strong regional focus on Northern Norway

as the locus of all of its activities. However, today the ISFI functions as a resource center for *all* Sámi filmmakers and film workers regardless of where they are located. It is a relatively young entity, having its official establishment in its current form in 2007, and indeed, Sámi film production and associated policy did not begin in earnest until 1981 with the North Norwegian Film Center (NNFS). After a trial period of two years, the NNFS began its official operation as a competence center for filmmakers and film workers in Northern Norway and was established to have a “special responsibility” for Sámi film (Mecsei 2015, pg. 7). In other words, the NNFS was meant to produce at least one Sámi film per year, and it enjoyed this responsibility until 2009. During this time the ISF, which was a strictly regional film center at the time, took over responsibility for Sámi film production in the North. In 2014, the ISF went from being a regional center to a national *and* transnational hub of Sámi film production, leading to a name change to the International Sámi Film Institute (ISFI). After 2014, the ISFI took on responsibility to cover all Sámi films, regardless of the geographic location of their makers, including feature films and series (Ibid 2018).

Since its official establishment, the ISFI has contributed to an increasingly professionalised network of indigenous media creators, adding a distinctive yet diverse series of Sámi voices to the corpus of global indigenous media production. The organisation works to strengthen and diversify Sámi film production by placing distinctive local and regional stamps on the gradually expanding body of Sámi film works. ISFI emphasises several factors of critical importance in thematising Sámi films, including the use of the Sámi language in film, the placement of a Sámi perspective on historical and contemporary events in and related to *Sápmi*, and the perpetuation of traditional knowledges alongside contemporary narratives. In its first few years as the ISFI, officially, the organisation invested heavily in increasing and developing competencies in film production – such as screenwriting as well as technical skills – through collective and individual training modules for filmmakers. It continues to offer dramaturgical and technical production training through field exercises and lectures, and works tirelessly to provide creative, economic, and practical support and guidance for Sámi media artists. Indeed, it has positioned itself at the forefront of educating and financing contemporary and future generations of Sámi film producers (Mecsei 2015).

Even prior to ISFI’s official establishment, films written, directed, and produced by Sámi filmmakers, such as Nils Gaup of *Ofelaš* and *The Kautokeino Rebellion* fame, reached

international audiences and received critical acclaim for their seminal works. Gaup's *Ofelaš*, of course, is now considered a classic and his Academy Award nomination contributed heavily to the placement of global eyes on indigenous film more broadly and Sámi film more specifically. That being said, it is undeniable that the ISFI has enhanced the visibility of Sámi culture around the world and contributed markedly to a rapidly burgeoning film industry in *Sápmi* in more recent years. Filmmakers associated with the ISFI – including Gaup, award-winning director of *Sameblod* Amanda Kernell, politician, reindeer herder, musician, and filmmaker Tiina Sanila-Aikio, and many others – have created documentaries, animated films, short films, and feature-length productions and the ISFI currently collaborates with a very wide variety of regional and international film organisations, from Norway's Norsk Filminstitutt to Canada's premier indigenous film platform, ImagiNATIVE (ISFI n.d.).

The influential works of prolific Sámi media makers such as Gaup and Kernell and the numerous milestones achieved by the ISFI makes the organisation a critical asset to Norwegian cultural authorities as well. After all, as a non-profit, the ISFI does still operate under the authority of the Norwegian Ministry of Culture, in collaboration to the Norsk Filminstitutt. This is worth mentioning because it means that the activities and preferences of Norwegian film and culture institutions provide some contextual basis through which we must also consider Sámi film production, alongside the related history of Sámi filmmaking on its own. Indeed, while film developments heralded by the ISFI and creators associated with and financed by its activities mark a critically important shift in the position of Sámi artists as recognised, respected, and agentic creators (as well as consumers), there are some infrastructural elements embedded in the relationship of the Norwegian cultural “industry” and the Sámi film world that requires some critical attention. Some of these elements can be understood as complicated by and related to the colonial politics inherently related to indigeneity in the Nordic nations. Indeed, as Moffat argues, diplomatic and legislative processes that aim to safeguard and conserve indigenous rights to culture “frequently mask the subtle economic and political marginalisation of the Sámi” (Moffat 2018, pg. 71). I will argue that this can also be seen within the relationship between the Norwegian and Sámi film and cultural media industries.

Looping back to a discussion of regional and local diversity in Norwegian film, I wish to point out here that the Norwegian perception of the Sámi and associated financing of their cultural and artistic activities is complicated by the fact that the Sámi are a

transnational people. They are thus subject to differing laws in all four territories they are indigenous to. On the one hand, because there is no overriding legal consensus on their constitutional rights beyond the admittedly limited protection offered by international recognition as an indigenous people, film and art have helped to create a cohesive front for Sámi identity (Moffat 2018). We saw this during the Alta Affair, during which what might be called “Sámi aesthetics” (which were embedded in various processes such as placing the *lavvu* in front of Stortinget) were utilised in part to emphasise the unity of Sámi culture (Cocq & DuBois 2021). However, on the other hand, these “new identity paradigms,” which were embedded in a relatively new cultural codification process that began burgeoning shortly before, though, and after the Alta Conflict, create complications and limitations related to Sámi film production (Eidheim 1997, pg. 37). As Pålsson puts it:

Defining and delimiting what is a Sámi film is still not easy. Sámi culture and Sámi films, film workers and actors cross national borders to an extensive degree. Financing of Sámi films takes place from many countries and transnational cooperation agreements. Registration of Sámi film is neither systematic nor consistent... The theme of Sámi film is therefore both complex and transnational (Pålsson 2019, pg. 9).

Mecsei identifies two primary consequences of the Sámi people’s transnational identity in relationship to Sámi film funding and financing. These include: 1) a lack of coordinated overview of Sámi films (in other words, they are registered with numerous different bodies throughout Norway, Sweden, Finland, and Russia, such as the National Library, *NRK Sápmi*, *Nordnorsk Filmsenter*, the ISFI, etc., and some are registered as Norwegian, Swedish, or Finnish as opposed to Sámi), and 2) fragmented and convoluted financing (for example, the film *Bázo* (which I will discuss in greater depth in Chapter 3) is a Swedish-Norwegian-Danish collaboration registered in Sweden, Norway and Denmark; it is registered in the Danish film archive due to the financial contribution from the Danish production company *Zentropa*, but Denmark is outside of *Sápmi*) (Mecsei 2015).

These factors unveil a continuing lack of clarity, particularly from governments outside of Norway (which, again, is home to the largest Sámi population as well as the ISFI itself), regarding financial and cultural investment in Sámi film and the ISFI more specifically.

Moffat describes “patchy, conditional funding and...networks [which] are vulnerable to specific expectations and demands of wider cultural agendas” as inhibitors to consistency and transparency in relationship to liaison between majority cultural institutions and the Sámi film industry (Moffat 2020, pg. 194). These complications are masked, however, by “outwardly enthusiastic support for indigenous platforms by the dominant...states” (Ibid 2020, pg. 194). This enthusiasm emerges, in part, as Moffat maintains, because Sámi film constitutes a form of “cultural labour” in the eyes of the Norwegian state and the other Nordic countries, which factors into the nation-building “brand identity” of the state (Ibid 2020, pg. 191, 194). For example, the Sámi are arguably and loosely recognised as relatively “advantaged” in comparison to the condition of several other global indigenous peoples because of the Nordic region’s robust welfare programmes and outward support for Sámi cultural activities as vehicles for self-determination (Ibid 2020, pg. 194). I do not mean to imply that this enthusiasm for Sámi self-expression is entirely egocentric or fabricated by the Norwegian state. I only wish to point out that we cannot overlook how colonial attitudes have played a role in engineering the formation of the contemporary Nordic welfare states and have also complicated the relationship between Norway and the Sámi people in many ways, including film financing and support. I will explicate further upon this point by offering a brief analysis of domestic film funding politics in Norway, which I suggest will provide some insight into the vestigial colonial hierarchies that impact film policy and practical opportunities for Sámi media producers.

To reiterate a previous point, I will remind the reader that, as a result of its relatively small size, Norwegian cinema is heavily dependent on state funding. The Norwegian film industry receives financing from a variety of national sources, and it also operates locally through a series of regional film centers that receive support based on the ways in which they effectively reflect the diversity of Norway’s localised geographies. The ISFI began as one of these regional centers with a distinctive local stamp. Before 2017, the Norwegian Ministry of Culture, which receives practical and financial support principally from the Norwegian state, initially supported the production costs of films produced by ISFI-related creators but did not extend its support to operational expenses, which were previously covered by the Sámi Parliament. In 2020, the Norwegian government increased the ISFI’s budget by 40% with a boost of 2.5 million kroner. As a result of this support, however, the Norwegian Ministry of Culture figures prominently in internal decision-making processes at

the ISFI, meaning all activity reports must be sent to the Ministry annually, and any changes to institutional operations must be approved by the Ministry (Bjerkeland 2015). According to the Nordic Council of Ministers, support for the ISFI and a self-sustaining Sámi film industry should exist within a framework that prioritises national film politics (Karlsdóttir et al 2018, pg. 20). As Moffat observes, “It remains unclear precisely how far the Sámi themselves are to be consulted or involved in these processes” (Moffat 2020, pg. 197). This reflects a wider issue in Nordic politics; the perspectives and voices of the Sámi people are often disregarded, overlooked, or marginalised in issues related to indigenous politics or developmental concerns that affect Sámi lands and livelihoods.

I will return here to a point made in the previous paragraph regarding regionality in Sámi film. Because of the Sámi peoples’ transnational identity and consequent patchwork institutional funding from all four nations in which the Sámi reside, Sámi film is no longer considered to be part of Norway’s regional funding dynamic (as of 2018) (Norwegian Government 2018, pg. 13). This move away from the regional has some significant and obvious consequences in terms of Sámi media production and its ability to secure financial support from the Norwegian state. According to the Norwegian government, for example, Sámi institutions across the country, including the ISFI, have a “special responsibility” when it comes to securing overhead financing, as they do not, in the media industry’s case, “fit with the geographical criteria set for regional [film] centers...” (Moffat 2020, pg. 197).

Another consequence is political. Moffat argues that “de-emphasising the local and regional specificities of indigenous storytelling potentially compromises the relevance of the Sámi’s position as subjects of colonial oppression...” (Moffat 2020, pg. 198). To explicate further, I will point out here that territorial and developmental issues – which are overwhelmingly prevalent in Sámi politics – are often concentrated on particular areas with specific local interests. Further, Sámi identity and values are intimately related to their indigenous land. Thus, the specifics of local identities and the diversity of Sámi cultures, livelihoods, and interests are pivotal in terms of articulating political issues and agendas within Sámi communities. And film is and has been at the forefront of making these issues visible within Sámi communities and among majority peoples who may not be otherwise aware of Sámi issues.

The integration of the Sámi film industry into a more streamlined support network for indigenous media in Norway offers both strengths and weaknesses, so I am not

necessarily attempting to articulate whether this move is “correct” or “incorrect” on the part of the Norwegian Ministry of Culture. On the one hand, this integration seems to acknowledge the transnational nature of Sámi identity and also connects the Sámi film industry to the wider global network of indigenous film, perhaps increasing opportunities for international cooperation and cohesiveness. On the other hand, the streamlining of the Sámi film industry may contribute to a tendency to essentialise Sámi culture, which is regionally quite diverse. As Moffat puts it, the very idea of “Sámi marginality” is very complex and offers many advantages and drawbacks, politically and institutionally (Moffat 2020, pg. 201). Essentially, it should be understood that the ISFI has achieved a nationally recognised status in Norway and receives financing from many pan-Norwegian agencies, which is positive, but it also means that the ISFI does reflect, in part, an image of the Norwegian Ministry of Culture and thus Norway’s investment in indigenous culture. Thus, Sámi film reflects a complex political and institutional relationship with the Norwegian government. With this discussion, though, I do not mean to devalue or underestimate the pivotal watershed developments the ISFI has contributed to Sámi film culture on the whole. The ISFI has not only provided integral support to Sámi artists who have advanced ownership of indigenous narratives in film and storytelling; it has also facilitated an archive through which we can explore the chronicle of Sámi film throughout history, which demonstrates a gradual shift from an outsider-dominated perspective to an insider perspective in Sámi film. This shift in perspective is echoed in the cultural history of the Nordic states, as well as public awareness of the State’s responsibility for allowing indigenous peoples to safeguard their cultures, lands, and livelihoods, and the understanding of the Sámi people as a separate indigenous group with their own history, language, and culture.

### **Concluding Remarks**

I have covered a relatively broad swathe of time in this chapter, chronicling the pre-Norwegianisation era to the Alta Affair to the present-day circumstances of the Sámi film industry. Though not at all comprehensive, the history of the Sámi in Norway is necessary to understand, particularly in the context of decolonial theory, as the vestiges of Norway’s colonial history remains influential in many industries in which the Sámi participate, not

least of which being film. However, I certainly do not intend here to cast a negative shadow over the discourse regarding Sámi film. Instead, I aim to provide an historical context through which we can understand the necessity for present discussions occurring regarding decolonisation in *Sápmi* through film. Further, I suggest that it is Sámi film and its broader industry itself that is contributing heavily to this endeavour, in ways that will become more readily evident in the coming chapters.



## Chapter Three: Indigenous Peoples and the Camera

### Early Visual Ethnography: Colonialism and Racial Photography

In the previous two chapters, I provided an historical contextualisation to the discipline of cultural anthropology as it relates to contemporary discussions surrounding decolonisation and ethical engagement with indigenous research, and subsequently specified the historic conditions in Norway that have necessitated these conversations in relationship to social, cultural, and political sovereignty among Sámi people. In Chapter 2, I also touched upon the role of the arts and media in the Sámi Cultural Revival that began gaining momentum after the 1960s and continues to evolve in present-day *Sápmi*. Specifically, I discussed the ways in which the arts have been used to exemplify, manifest, and support a cultural recodification process in the Sámi world, a process that became particularly eminent during their cultural renaissance and provided a platform through which Sámi people could emphasise their cohesiveness and advocate for themselves politically, legally, and socially. In later chapters, it will become clearer how this discussion regarding the relevance of art in Sámi politics and, more broadly, Sámi cultural life leads into the importance and relevance of film and visual storytelling in contemporary Sámi society. In Chapters 4, 5, and 6, I will frame this importance in the context of decolonisation theory.

Though this thesis focuses on the Sámi people in Norway specifically, at this point it is necessary to briefly widen my cultural and historical lens and address a broader theoretical aspect framing my research; in other words, in this chapter I will return to decolonisation theory and explore its relevance in terms of the history of visual anthropology and indigenous peoples. Further, I must provide some critical explanation regarding the choices I have made in terms of honing my focal points of anthropological analysis. More specifically, I am referring to the fact that I have elected to focus on fictional film as an art form in the contemporary Sámi world. Throughout this chapter, I will make it clear why I have made this choice, and iterate why this decision is, in my opinion, relevant to and consistent with certain aspects of indigenous epistemologies and traditions. I will also suggest that the distinction between using ethnographic film and fictional film as sources of emic data is an important one, considering that the sub-field of visual

anthropology has historically been focused on and exemplified through documentary and ethnographic media (primarily, though not exclusively). Indeed, the history of ethnographic film is inextricably intertwined with the history of visual anthropology in a general sense, as well as with the history of indigenous peoples *in* visual anthropology (as subjects of study and as creators). These historic contextualisations are critical to understanding some of the contemporary work Sámi artists and filmmakers are producing as well as their political, personal, and social intentions. As such, I will begin this chapter by providing a brief chronicle of film, and more generally, visual anthropology as it relates to indigenous peoples.

Visual anthropology, a subfield of the broader discipline of social anthropology, utilises and analyses ethnographic film, documentary film, photography, mixed media, and, more recently, new media in the study of people and cultures (Banks & Morphy 1999). A basic philosophy underlying visual content analysis and production purports that there are “way[s] of being that [are] reflected in the visible world...created through behaviour in a lived environment...[and] aspects of that world can be sensed through photography [or film] in a way that [is] impossible to convey through written word alone” (Ibid 1999, pg. 10). Further, in the eyes of many a researcher, ethnographic media provides an effective tool for the reflexive qualitative analysis required for robust anthropological research in that it addresses the producer of the visual object, the visual system surrounding the culture in which the object was produced, the content of the visual object, the consumer of the visual product, and the anthropologist him/herself (who may or may not also be the creator of the filmic or photographic work). However, the philosophies underlying visual anthropology and ethnographic media as we understand them today are relatively contemporary. In other words, the sub-field of visual anthropology essentially followed the same trajectory as the overarching discipline of social anthropology, meaning that it effectively began as a colonial exercise (Guneratne 1998).

Colonial photography, which predates ethnographic film, found its origins in imperialism and is largely considered the stimulus for visual anthropology in a general sense (Banks & Morphy 1999). As a pertinent example of colonial powers influencing cultural photography, consider the situation of the Ainu, an indigenous people who occupy the northernmost territories of Japan’s archipelago. Visual media – in particular, photographic portraiture – was utilised to manipulate national perceptions of the Ainu during the mid-

19<sup>th</sup> century. In accordance with Meiji-era objectives towards rapid modernisation, portraitists of the period deliberately created and framed images conveying the inferiority of the Ainu by emphasizing their “primeval” lifestyles and dress in comparison to their Japanese commissioners and standing partners, who were typically dressed in formal Japanese or Western attire. “Backwardness” provided the basic criteria for the Ainus’ rejection in Meiji society, and it was deliberately and repeatedly reinforced in this highly specific tradition of political visual media. Cheung argues that these portrait photographs can tell us infinitely more about non-indigenous Japanese culture and Japanese nation-building in this particular era than they can about Ainu culture. He intimates that, if an anthropologist is to study the presence of the Ainu people in 19<sup>th</sup> century visual media, it is also necessary to address the sociopolitical context associated with the media producers in the place and time in which the portraits were created. It is by this investigative method that the researcher may begin to understand why the Ainu were being presented as they were, and why the Japanese commissioners were presented in such stark contrast (Cheung 1996).

A similar situation can be observed in 19<sup>th</sup> century Sub-Saharan Africa. During this period, European photographers were prevalently utilising light and dark iconography to “portray [white Europeans’] apparent supremacy over the people whom they believed to be uncivilised” (Mabry 2014, pg. 2). This was a particularly widespread trend among Christian missionaries, who were often sent to the African continent on “civilising missions” and wished to visually document their successes. Hirono maintains that the purposes of the civilising missions were two-fold; first, they arose out of a perceived “‘duty’ to natives, the requirement in Africa and elsewhere to establish colonies of the ‘benefit’ of the natives,” and second, “for the ‘prestige’ of the mother country” (Hirono 2008, pg. 212). In the associated photographs, the colonial figures, dressed in all white and often standing over or in front of black Africans in tribal attires, were represented as entities of light flooding the darkness that was Sub-Saharan Africa. However, at the time, these photographs were not perceived to be manipulated products. Instead, colonial and missionary photography was utilized as legitimising evidence towards the notion of Africans as an “inferior ‘breed’ [to white Europeans], and possibly the missing evolutionary link between ape and man” (Mabry 2014, pg. 4). As was the situation between the Ainu and the Japanese during the Meiji Dynasty, from the ethnographic photography of the time we can glean much more about

outsider perceptions of Sub-Saharan Africans during this period, and very little about African cultures themselves.

Returning to the focal culture of this thesis, the Sámi people, we can observe a very similar instance of early ethnographic visual documentation, perhaps more aptly described as “racial photography,” as an iconographic mechanism in the determination of race and identity (Nielsen 2018, pg. 1). In the main hall of *Árran Julevsáme guovdás*, the Lule Sámi Centre in Tysfjord, there is a wall montage of thirty-five black and white photographic portraits depicting members of the local Sámi community. The images originate from a racial research expedition transpiring from the period between 1914 and 1921, which was spearheaded by the head of the Department of Anatomy and professor in physical anthropology, University of Oslo, Kristian Emil Schreiner, his wife Alette Schreiner, and their colleague Dr. Johan Brun (Ibid 2018). The expedition was motivated by a “quest to determine the racial constitution of the Norwegian population” post-Swedish independence (Kyllingstad 2012, pg. 46). The scholars hypothesised that the Norwegian populace could be broken down into a “short-sculled alpine type, and a long-sculled blond type, the supposed original Nordic master race” (Nielsen 2018, pg. 3). Alette Schreiner also postulated that the Lule Sámi of Tysfjord in northern Norway were representative of the most “primitive” category of Nordic peoples and published a monography in 1932 (*Anthropologische Lokaluntersuchungen in Norge: Hellemo [Tysfjordlappen]*, or *Anthropological Studies in Norway: Hellemo [Tysfjordlappen]*) as evidence for her theory. Though the Schreiner couple had, throughout the course of their research, become increasingly skeptical towards the idea of a Nordic master race, their visual research was indeed based on an assumption of “racial purity as the highest biological and aesthetic attribute...[and on] notions of Nordic superiority and Sámi racial inferiority” (Ibid 2018, pg. 2). Consequently, their monography was utilised to highlight physical and cultural characteristics that would substitute aesthetic evidence for Norwegian racial superiority over the Sámi where no scientific evidence could otherwise be found (Ibid 2018).

Nielsen argues that racial photography as it was utilised in the Schreiner project can be best understood “as a strategy to overcome the failure of the scientific community to isolate race as a biological fact” (Nielsen 2018, pg. 5). Though scientific communities at this time professed value judgments associated with race to be “indisputable,” they found that race itself “it could only become evident through expressions of cultural particularities”

easily and often exclusively depicted through visual mediums, such as lifestyle and clothing (ibid 2018, pg. 5). This thought process is described by Morris-Reich and Rupnow:

What happens when identification based on inherent, genetically transferred, foolproof racial principles proves defective? To those committed to racial principles, these 'inconvenient realities' do not alter the fixation of their principles but rather give rise to attempts to fine tune their distinctions and definitions and to overcome the obstacles in reality. Particularly important is the gradual replacement of physiognomy by internal, often latent, indicators not easily applied to identification and representation (Morris-Reich & Rupnow 2017, pg. 24).

It is important to note here that, during the epoch of colonial photography, visual media was generally believed to represent "a marriage between art and science," one which was "evidentiary, truthful, and objective throughout the world" (Mabry 2014, pg. 1). In other words, photography was believed to be an unbiased tool of observation rather than one emerging out of particular social climates and processes. However, by reflecting upon the historical contexts in which colonial and racial photography is enmeshed, and by analysing the strategies utilised by photographers and portraitists within those contexts, we can easily debunk the idea of pure objectivity in this type of visual content. The Schreiner project, for example, transpired during a period in which there were several cultural and territorial disputes connected to the Sámi population, such as conflicts about reindeer pastures following the official dissolution of the union between Sweden and Norway in 1905. Additionally, the growth of the European eugenic movement contributed to the placement of Sámi peoples' ethnic biology or constitution on the discursive agenda (Nielssen 2018). To summarise, the exploration of Norway's various racial identities was intertwined with the young nation's ongoing academic, political, and cultural debates regarding national identity. As was the case with the Ainu in Japan and the indigenous peoples of Sub-Saharan African nations, early ethnographic photography of the Sámi people in Norway tells us significantly more about the contexts that defined political interplay between Norwegian and Sámi identities than Sámi culture itself.

## Evolutions in Visual Anthropology: The Moving Picture

In 1891, the Kinetograph Camera was invented by Scottish inventor William Kennedy Laurie Dickson (Dominiczak 2016). Powered by an electric motor, the camera was the first of its kind to be capable of shooting and recording moving images. Almost as soon as the movie camera was invented, anthropologists, ethnographers, sociologists, and ethnologists began to make use of the new technology and perceived much scholarly constructiveness from its ability to provide a moving, living experience of a particular cultural situation, event, tradition, or encounter. In fact, some of the first films ever recorded depicted indigenous peoples (Rony 1996). With this in mind, early ethnographic film was not exempt from the foibles that characterised colonial photography in terms of indigenous representation. However, the development of the moving picture did coincide with a broadening of scope in terms of the purposes and uses of visual ethnography.

According to the Anthropological Film Research Institute, Félix-Louis Regnault created what is “officially” acknowledged to be the very first series of ethnographic films (de Brigard 1971). In the spring of 1895, Regnault visited the *Exposition Ethnographique de l’Afrique Occidentale* in Paris and shot four documentary sequences. The first depicted a Wolof woman from Senegal as she crafted a clay pot; the second, another Wolof woman thrashing millet; the third, three Muslims performing a salaam; and the fourth, four Madagascans carrying the photographer on a palanquin (MacDougall 1978). A French physician by training, Regnault was also interested in documenting a cross-cultural study of physical movement and later published a series of ethnographic research footages to that effect (Grinshaw & Ravetz 2009). Regnault perceived much scholarly usefulness from camera documentation, describing it as an “instrument that could efficiently freeze the subject’s motion to allow for considered scientific analysis at a later date” (Marks 1995, pg. 339). However, the fact that his subjects were humans whose activities were shaped by culture was not of particular interest to him. As Marks puts it, at the time of Regnault’s work, “flora, fauna, articles of material culture, and indeed Wolof potters were treated in the same way, to be analysed in the comfort of the museum rather than *in situ*” (Ibid 1995, pg. 339). It is important to remember that, during this period, anthropology was still a 19<sup>th</sup> century positivist discipline oriented around the principles that organised the natural sciences, and correspondingly the ethnographic camera was still esteemed to cast an

“evidentiary, truthful, and objective” eye on the world (Mabry 2014, pg. 1). However, even in the brevity of Regnault’s works we can perceive some of his ideological orientations:

The image of the servile native bearers carrying the dominant European photographer is a visual icon of assumptions about authority, probably conferred by Regnault’s nationality as well as his profession. Regnault, the conquering hero, is science, knowledge, and the possibility of progress incarnate. His subjects serve him as the willing and uncomprehending ‘mules’ of scientific exploration and Western enterprise for which he stands (Marks 1995, pg. 340).

Throughout the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, many more ethnographers ventured into the realm of visual anthropology. British anthropologist Sir Baldwin Spencer (1860-1929), for example, produced “a staggering 7,000 feet of footage” during his fieldwork in Northern Australia between 1901 and 1912 (Stern 2011, pg. 236). Later, in 1930, German-born American anthropologist and renowned “father of American anthropology” Franz Boas would utilise film to chronicle his extensive work with the Kwakiutl Native people of the American Northwest Coast (El Guindi 2015, pg. 124). In fact, up until roughly the 1930s, film and photography had become prominent and typical materials complementing anthropologists’ ethnographies (Kharel 2015).

In the early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the identity of anthropology itself underwent tremendous change. Whereas social anthropology had previously been a positivistic domain of scholarship founded primarily on the interests and biases of colonial administrative centers, it began the process of transforming “into a humanistic practice that attempted to understand unfamiliar societies by discovering and representing the principles upon which they were organised” (Marks 1995, pg. 340). In 1913, Rivers vocalised these changing attitudes by advocating that, through the application of ethnographic principles, the “irreducible chasm between the Western ‘us’ and the Native ‘them’ might be bridged – and that the effort might be worthwhile” (Ibid 1995, pg. 340). This quotation can still be seen as problematic in terms of anthropologists’ contemporary sensibilities as it frames anthropology as an exclusively Western domain of scholarship, disregarding any interest indigenous peoples might have in exploring their own forms of social science research. However, it does reflect a growing interest in expanding the scope and purpose of

anthropological research during a time in which the discipline was otherwise exceedingly limited.

Some early films dealing with indigenous subjects reflect evolving attitudes characteristic of this period. For example, in 1914, American ethnologist Edward S. Curtis released *Land of the Headhunters*, which depicted a fictional story of love and war among the Kwakiutl Native people of the Pacific Northwest. As the storyline was fabricated, this was not presented as an ethnographic film and the events staged took place in a reconstructed Kwakiutl village that was only marginally relevant to the way the contemporary indigenous peoples lived their lives (Marks 1995). However, the film represents one of the first instances in which the indigenous peoples in the film were appraised and depicted with some degree of empathy in Western media. In the words of Marks, “Curtis’s film...accorded to the Kwakiutl emotions and reactions recognisably similar to the audience’s own. It implicitly asserted an emotional commonality between the audience and the unfamiliar Other” (Ibid 1995, pg. 340).

The work of Robert Flaherty, a prospector-turned-filmmaker, is also considered to be highly emblematic of the evolving perspectives of anthropologists and scholars of culture during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Some of his best-known documentary works include *Nanook of the North* (1922), *Moana* (1926), and *Man of Aran* (1934). Here I will focus briefly on the film *Nanook of the North*, which follows an Inuk man and his family as they endure the environmental rigors of the Canadian Arctic (MacDougall 1978). During the filming of the project, Flaherty engaged with more collaborative approaches to filmmaking than had been previously common in early anthropological films. As Heider points out, his work was innovative in that it represented an opportunity for making ethnographic film “more truly reflective of the natives’ insight into their own culture” (Heider 2006, pg. 23). With this all being said, the actualities of what went on behind the scenes indicate significant remaining issues with indigenous representation in film and visual anthropology during this time. *Nanook of the North* was arguably well-intentioned, as Flaherty’s cited objective was to capture the way the Inuit lived before European influence and at the same time depict the “optimism, humanity, and fearlessness” of his subjects (Rothman 1997, pg. 2). However, the film was presented as a documentary or ethnographic when, in fact, most of the events presented were staged. To begin with, Nanook’s real name was Allakariallak. While Flaherty requested that Allakariallak hunt with spears for the film, the Inuk man typically hunted



with firearms in his day-to-day life. In one scene, Allakariallak comes into contact with a white man at a trading post, who plays music on a gramophone for him. Allakariallak gazes inquisitively at the record for a moment, then places it in his mouth and bites it in a comical demonstration of naïveté. In truth, Allakariallak knew very well what a gramophone was; the scene was entirely staged for comic levity (Ibid 1997). Ultimately, what audiences perceived to be the “native perspective” was something else entirely, owing to the film’s hindsight controversy. With this all being said, *Nanook of the North* was met with positive reception at the time and represented a growing interest in terms of empathising with the indigenous perspective in ethnographic film and cultural media. We can observe some similarities here to what was discussed in the previous chapter; specifically, the evolving attitudes of Nordic media producers in relationship to portrayals of Sámi characters in film and television.

### **Early Efforts at Decolonising Visual Anthropology**

Though visual ethnography commenced its existence as a principally colonial enterprise, its practitioners gradually made strides to evolve the discipline out of this framework alongside the overarching discipline of cultural anthropology. As was discussed in Chapter 1, roughly after World War II anthropology was undergoing a disciplinary “crisis,” during which researchers were critically re-evaluating the ethical and scholarly validities associated with their practice. At the same time, visual anthropologists who were interested in recording “‘vanishing worlds’ of people from...small-scale, kinship-based societies...began to question the purpose of their knowledge and its relevance to those they were studying” (Ginsburg 1995, pg. 67). These new considerations would eventually herald what was described in Chapter 1 as the “reflexive turn,” which would dramatically impact the methodologies associated with ethnography in a general sense and visual ethnography specifically (Lewis 1973).

The most dramatic changes associated with the “reflexive turn” in ethnography occurred largely between the 1960s and 1970s. However, even prior to this period, debates that challenged positivistic notions of pure objectivity in social science began to arise, ultimately leading to reevaluations of the primacy of the Western anthropologist’s singular authority in assessing and depicting aspects of other cultures. These conversations, which

can be considered precursors to discussions about reflexive ethnography as we understand it today, also heralded changes and experimentation in terms of visual anthropology. New considerations in filmic ethnography allowed for the possibility that the perspective of the anthropologist should be considered *alongside* the film subject and audience, as opposed to *above* them. As MacDougall puts it, “film lies in conceptual space somewhere within a triangle formed by the subject, filmmaker, and audience and represents an encounter of all three” (MacDougall 1978, pg. 193). Some notable anthropologists of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century were making strides in this respect, correlating their film methodologies with new, more reflexive considerations in visual ethnography.

Stern credits the work of Gregory Bateson and Margaret Mead as setting the “early standard...for reflexive evaluation of the anthropologist-filmmaker” and the “widening of critical analysis upon the filmmaker’s interactions in the creation of ethnographic film” (Stern 2011, pg. 4). Both Bateson and Mead were trained as cultural anthropologists, though their analytical styles differed quite significantly. As Mead explained, “Our minds are quite different; I do not mind masses of concrete detail which bore Gregory and he introduces order and me into my rather amorphous thinking” (as quoted in Jacknis 1988, pg. 161). Their methodological preferences manifested in their visual ethnographic styles as well; Mead was more oriented toward observational film, whereas Bateson demonstrated interest in the subjective artistic qualities that could be integrated into ethnographic media. However, the pair were able to navigate these differences by introducing the reflexive evaluation of their own interpretation styles in ethnographic film and writing. In other words, they each cast a critical eye on themselves as well as the research method of visual ethnography itself (Ibid 1988).

Shortly after their marriage in 1936, Bateson and Mead arrived in Bali to embark on a fieldwork journey that would ultimately generate about 25,000 photographic stills and 22,000 feet of ethnographic film in support of their research. Their work resulted in six ten-to-twenty-minute films, forming a series called *Character Formation in Different Cultures*. The series included the following sequences: *Bathing Babies in Three Cultures*, *Karba's First Years*, *First Days in the Life of a New Guinea Baby*, *Trance and Dance in Bali*, *A Balinese Family*, and *Childhood Rivalry in Bali and New Guinea*. Many of these films were groundbreaking in terms of the reflexive and collaborative methods Bateson and Mead engaged with during filming. Specifically, the scholars attempted to integrate the indigenous

perspective into their work by showing their ethnographic stills and film sequences to their subjects and documenting their input. For *Trance and Dance in Bali*, for example, Bateson and Mead allowed their Balinese informants to re-watch recorded dances and comment on whether or not they believed the dancer was in a trance state. Additionally, they filmed several Balinese viewers watching themselves on film (Jacknis 1988).

I reference these anthropologists because the work of Bateson and Mead set an essential standard for both reflexive and collaborative approaches to ethnographic filmmaking and visual analysis, with the end goal being more intellectually robust and ethically sound outcomes in visual anthropological research. Their Balinese work premiered in the 1950s, the period just before what Marks describes as the second “watershed period” in the history of visual ethnography (Marks 1995, pg. 130). The first took place between 1913 and 1922, during a period in which anthropology was taking its first steps to evolve from a “branch of 19<sup>th</sup> century natural science into a 20<sup>th</sup> century humanistic science” (Ibid 1995, pg. 130). Films like *Nanook of the North* rose in popularity during this period and reflected Western anthropologists’ burgeoning consideration of the human complexity of indigenous subjects. The second period occurred between the 1960s and 1970s, during the early years of the reflexive turn. During this time, new ethical considerations in anthropology challenged previously held notions of positivistic objectivity in the social sciences and demanded increasingly reflexive and dialogical methods in ethnographic practice. Concurrently, visual anthropologists began to recognise the limitations of a strictly observational style of ethnographic film scholarship and consider more collaborative and reflexive methodologies in filmmaking as Bateson and Mead had done (Jacknis 1988). Further, ethnographic filmmakers began to advocate that the anthropologist should not be the “active” party while the subjects of the film are rendered either passive or worse, manipulated in the style of *Nanook of the North* (MacDougall 1978).

The ethnographic project entitled *Through Navajo Eyes*, published in 1972, represents one of the first truly collaborative ethnographic film projects created by anthropologists alongside members of the culture being studied. Sol Worth, an artist and scholar of visual communication, and John Adair, an American anthropologist, aimed to determine whether or not the Navajo people had “a recognisable visual grammar, and, if so, intended to discover it through the analysis of their films” (Lempert 2012, pg. 23). In the published account of their ethnography, they document how they taught young Navajo

students how to utilise film equipment in order to visually record aspects of their culture. Subsequently, the scholars used the Navajo films as “windows” into the indigenous perspective (Ibid 2012, pg. 23). In other words, film was treated as emic data used to supplement Worth and Adair’s anthropological discourse. Most notably, the indigenous peoples being studied were offered the opportunity to actively participate in the ethnographic narrative. This project operated under the following premise: indigenous filmmakers, unlike outsider ethnographers, are most aptly positioned to “engage in a critical indigenous identity discourse,” based on “personal experiences and complex relationships to home communities” (Ibid 2012, pg. 23).

With this all being said, as Margaret Mead pointed out in her written review of *Through Navajo Eyes*:

...the filming process was presented to the Navajo didactically, so it is not surprising that all of the Navajos but one...made didactic films, to tell other people about the Navajo and the way they weave or do silver work... We have no way of knowing whether a different kind of presentation might have evoked a different kind of filming (Mead 1975, pg. 122).

In other words, Mead suggests that the use of film as emic data may have been somewhat hindered or biased towards non-indigenous Western traditions of filmmaking, given Worth and Adair’s tutelage (Mead 1975). Further to this, the films made by the indigenous creators were largely centered on the activities generally believed to be most appropriately observable in classical Western ethnographic film, including ritual behaviours and expressive and aesthetic forms of culture, such as arts and material crafts (Sharman 1997). With that all being said, in keeping with new anthropological philosophies related to reflexivity, Worth and Adair do not understate their own influence and presence during this project.

Though *Through Navajo Eyes* received some methodological criticism, it was groundbreaking for its time for several reasons. First, the project was perceived by some scholars and critics to directly challenge commonly held notions of indigenous “simplicity,” or worse, intellectual inferiority (Stern 2011). For example, Collier observes that, by Worth and Adair’s accounts, the Navajo students were able to “master the optical system of the

movie camera and the use of the electronic light meter in three days,” indicating “a level of creative independence...[that] challenges White supremacy myths” (Collier 1973, pg. 91). Further, the project was, according to Stern, one of the first to “investigate an [indigenous] way of seeing – by eschewing the predilection for the dominant Western cinema format of previous ethnographic films” (Stern 2011, pg. 6).

I reference *Through Navajo Eyes* because it prompted something of trend among ethnographic filmmakers; for example, in their later careers, noted anthropologists and ethnographic filmmakers Tim Asch and Terence Turner “encouraged and trained their previously filmed subjects to produce their own films” (Lempert 2012, pg. 24). Vincent Carelli is another anthropologist-filmmaker who was inspired by the work of Worth and Adair. In 1987, Carelli’s *Video in the Villages* project involved a series of workshops that allowed Amazonian indigenous peoples to produce their own short films. An objective of the project was to enable the Amazonian people to “engage government and private agencies that...historically marginalised them” by documenting and preserving indigenous traditions, utilising media to advocate for themselves politically, and representing themselves to the rest of Brazil on their own terms (Stern 2011, pg. 7). In 1995, the project evolved into an entire television channel called the “Indigenous Program,” a media space in which indigenous peoples were able to combat misunderstandings related to their culture for the first time in public broadcasting. Carelli’s project is particularly notable in this regard, but it is also highly innovative anthropologically in the sense that the project was able to satisfy his ethnographic inquiry while at the same time “serving the distinct needs of the filmmakers and their communities” (Ibid 2011, pg. 7).

### **Taking Back the Narrative: Indigenous-Made Media**

The history of ethnographic film is intertwined with the history of indigenous media in a broad sense. This is because the visual documentation of indigenous peoples was initially the domain of Western anthropologists, who, in the earliest years of the discipline, asserted “primary authority regarding authentic filmic representations of indigenous peoples” (Lempert 2012, pg. 23). As the history of ethnographic film progressed, anthropologists began to question whether or not this singular authority was appropriate, leading to a broadening of visual ethnography in scope and practice. Further, and perhaps

more importantly, indigenous peoples began vocalising their discontent with various depictions of their lives and identities in film. However, it would not be until the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century that indigenous peoples would seize and create opportunities to engage with film and media production themselves, and on a large scale.

The progression of indigenous film, media, and broadcasting has been rapid and uneven, making it somewhat difficult to follow across the globe. However, in general the 1970s, 80s, and 90s mark a pivotal span of time in terms of the development indigenous-produced media. This is partly because the new availability of inexpensive video equipment during this period made indigenous film projects more feasible without the guidance or involvement of anthropologists. Further, this era is connected to a series of global movements related to indigenous advocacy that emphasized the importance of self-determination and self-representation for indigenous peoples. Conversations challenging inappropriate, inaccurate, and stereotypical media representations of indigenous peoples were gaining considerable discursive traction during this time, opening up space for indigenous creatives to assert greater control over their own image in media (Lempert 2012).

In 1981, the Inuit Broadcasting Corporation was created as the first indigenous-language television network founded in North America (Jennifer 1998). 1988 saw the first Aboriginal-run commercial television station, *Imparja*, launched in Australia (Meadows 2009). And in 1999, the world's first national television network run and produced by indigenous peoples, the Aboriginal People's Television Network, was established in Canada (Roth 2005). These regional efforts have gradually led to an increase in global collaborative endeavours related to indigenous media. For example, in 2008, Māori Television hosted the conference that created the World Indigenous Television Broadcasters Network, which "aims to unify television broadcasters worldwide to retain and grow indigenous languages and cultures" (Aboriginal Peoples Television Network 2014). In more recent years, the Internet has also played a significant role in terms of distribution, dissemination, and networking in indigenous media development (Stewart 2008).

Additionally, an increase in terms of quantity and production value of indigenous films has led to a rise in indigenous film festivals, which have been integral in the process of disseminating and promoting native films. Indigenous arts and film festivals such as *imagiNATIVE* Film and Media Arts Festival (based in Toronto, Canada), *Riddu Ridđu* (based in

Olmáivággi, Gáivuotna in the Kåfjord Municipality of Norway), Māoriland Film Festival (based in Melbourne, Australia), and the American Indian Film Festival (based in San Francisco, California, USA), among many others, have exploded in terms of scope and attendance in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Lempert 2012). Indigenous films have also garnered attention and acclaim at mainstream media events such as the Cannes Film Festival in Cannes, France and the Sundance Film Festival in Salt Lake City, Utah, USA (Mayer 2018). Many indigenous films have gained worldwide acclamation, including *Atanarjuat: The Fast Runner* (Inuktitut, 2001), which premiered at the 54<sup>th</sup> Cannes Film Festival in 2001 and won six Genie Awards, including Best Motion Picture; *Samson and Delilah* (Aboriginal Australian, 2009), which won the Gold Camera Award for Best First Feature Film at the 2009 Cannes Film Festival and the Asia Pacific Screen Award for Best Film in 2009; *Rabbit-Proof Fence* (Australian Aboriginal, 2002), which won three awards for Best Film, Best Original Music Score, and Best Sound with the Australian Film Institute in 2002, among other national awards; and *Smoke Signals* (Coeur D'Alene Native American, 1998), which won numerous awards including Best Film at the American Indian Film Festival in 1998 (Knabe & Pearson 2015). Cousineau argues that 2002 was a key year for indigenous film particularly; he states: "After *Atanarjuat* it became obvious to the system that people wanted to make those films, that they needed to make them, and that the outside world was interested in receiving them" (as quoted in Mayer 2018, pg. 3).

As has been discussed, the history of the indigenous presence in film has been rife with inaccuracies, which is largely owed to the fact that narratives regarding native people in film and television were initially controlled by outsiders. Though non-indigenous ethnographic filmmakers have through time attempted to rectify misrepresentations that disadvantage indigenous peoples by engaging in ethical research practices and involving their informants more in the process of media production, it is the work of indigenous creatives themselves that have been principally instrumental in disrupting and correcting narratives. In that sense, indigenous filmmaking can be thought of as a form of "storytelling emancipation" (Picq 2012, pg. 2). Media can be a tool for self-determination in many ways. First, film and entertainment can be a form of transmission and revival for indigenous languages that are endangered or stigmatised. Second, media can be effective in emphasising indigenous perspectives on past and present events, therefore serving as a means of education and collective memory. Finally, storytelling through film implies the

transmission of culturally determined structures of knowledge. All these factors collude to support the survival and cultural flourishing of indigenous communities.

Another important aspect to note is that indigenous cinema has the capacity to spotlight diversity and hybridity in indigenous cultures, thus serving as alternative narratives to essentialising and stereotyping portrayals that often populate mainstream films. “When you look at indigenous cinema, oftentimes people think of it as a genre,” says Artistic and Managing Director of *imagiNATIVE* Jason Ryle. “But it’s actually a really diverse body of work. The same way you talk about French cinema or German cinema, and all the diverse works within that, the same can be applied to indigenous cinema. We’re getting to a point now where we can look back and talk about Cree cinema, or Mohawk cinema. It completely changes how we talk about the works indigenous artists are making” (as quoted in Allaire 2018, pg. 1).

Ryle’s statement leads me to hone my focus back on Sámi cinema specifically. I have thus far discussed indigenous film in a broad, generalised sense and briefly chronicled the historic trajectory from the anthropologist’s primacy in indigenous-centric media to that of the indigenous creator him/herself. With that being said, part of honouring this relatively new preeminence of indigenous perspectives in native films involves the acknowledgement of the diversity inherent in these bodies of work. Indeed, a multiplicity of viewpoints, opinions, commentary styles, and storytelling styles populate the relatively small catalogue of Sámi-produced films alone, and I will argue in forthcoming sections that an evaluation of these works can tell us much about what connects Sámi people and their stories together, as well as the differences and complexities inherent to Sámi culture.



## Landmarks in the Sámi Film Industry



Fig. 21: Gaup N. (1987) *Aigin, Ofelaš (Pathfinder)* [Film still]. Retrieved from: [https://www.parkcircus.com/film/111965-Pathfinder-\(Ofelas\)](https://www.parkcircus.com/film/111965-Pathfinder-(Ofelas))

In September 1987, what is generally acknowledged to be the first Sámi feature film premiered in Norway, titled *Ofelaš*, or *Pathfinder*. Directed by renowned storyteller Nils Gaup, the film is based on a traditional legend chronicling a prehistoric conflict between a young Sámi boy and a group of folkloric marauders. The antagonists, called the *tsjudes*, require a “pathfinder” who will lead them to ambush a peaceful Sámi community. Aigin, the young protagonist, acts as this figure but uses his wits to slyly direct the *tsjudes* away from the village and eventually off of a steep cliff (Gaup 1987). The film represents a momentous landmark for the Sámi film community in several ways. First, *Ofelaš* gained national and international recognition and ultimately earned Gaup an Academy Award nomination. With its resounding box-office success, *Ofelaš* became the first Sámi film to achieve global appreciation and distribution, breaking into territory previously believed to be unreachable for indigenous films (Christensen 2015). Also notable is that *Ofelaš* uses North Sámi as its primary language, which is the most widely used Sámi dialect but is nevertheless a language that has been deeply threatened by prejudice and long-term assimilative language policies in the Nordic states. In fact, many of the actors in the film were part of the ensemble at *Beaivvás Sámi Nasunálateáhter* in Guovdageaidnu/Kautokeino, which was co-founded by Nils Gaup and Aage Gaup in 1981. Presently, it remains the only theatre in Norway that utilises North Sámi as its primary language onstage (DuBois 1995). The success of *Ofelaš* points to a newfound celebration of an indigenous culture and language that had endured

years of suppression, which was ultimately embraced by international audiences (Christensen 2015).



Fig 22. Gaup N. (2008) *The Kautokeino Rebellion* [Film still]. Retrieved from: [https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0479937/mediaindex/?ref=tt\\_mv\\_close](https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0479937/mediaindex/?ref=tt_mv_close)

*The Kautokeino Rebellion*, Nils Gaup's 2008 film, represents a similarly momentous film in the history of Sámi media. The film is a depiction of the historic event of 1852, wherein a group of Sámi reindeer herders rebelled against local authorities in Guovdageaidnu/Kautokeino, resulting in several deaths on both sides. This incident is regarded as one of the most traumatic in the history of the Sámi people in Norway, with dominant interpretations being largely condemning of the Sámi individuals involved. The event is rarely discussed by Norwegian authorities and in some ways has been suppressed by the Sámi people as well (Christensen 2012). Gaup's *The Kautokeino Rebellion* repurposes existing narratives surrounding the rebellion and presents the tragic incident from a Sámi perspective, providing an alternative outlook on the events that led to the executions of Mons Somby, Aslak Hætta, Lars Hætta, Elen Skum, and Henrik Skum. For example, many representations of the 1852 event interpret religious fanaticism as being responsible for the violence, specifically citing the ecstatic pseudo-Lutheran revival movement led by Lars Levi Læstadius in the Sámi community. Gaup characterises the religious movement differently in *The Kautokeino Rebellion*, demonstrating how Læstadianism reduced alcoholism and contributed to increased literacy in the Sámi community. Further, Gaup casts a critical eye

on the systemic oppression of the Sámi people that ultimately stimulated the rebellion (Dancus 2014).

The film was nominated for six Amanda awards, four of which it one, including the award for Best Leading Actress (Anni-Kristiina Juuso) and Best Score (Mari Boine) (Cocq & DuBois 2021). *The Kautokeino Rebellion* generated heated discussions regarding historical accuracy in Norway, with many accusing Gaup of downplaying the violence of the Sámi involved in the event in favour of villainising the Norwegians. On the opposing side, many argued that the event is rarely, if ever, presented from a Sámi perspective, and that the film provided a substantive and legitimate critique of the politics of subjugation in Norway and their consequences (Christensen 2012). Further, the film has been described as a powerful “call to audiences’ post-colonial consciousness and conscience” by critics (Ibid 2012, pg. 62). Cocq and DuBois characterise the film as a “shocking... exposé of nineteenth century Norwegian state hypocrisy and colonialism,” revealing “tangible evidence of Norwegian participation in the colonial wrongdoings of the past” (Cocq & DuBois 2021, pg. 137). They further contend that the film became an “event” in Norwegian society, provoking discussions on all sides of the political spectrum regarding the rectification of past wrongs against the Sámi people (Ibid 2021, pg. 137). I suggest that, perhaps even more than *Ofelaš*, *The Kautokeino Rebellion* has truly served as a form of storytelling emancipation for the Sámi community by addressing a taboo historical event from a rare Sámi point of view.

With that being said, *both* of these films – in addition to many other of Gaup’s films – are often described by cultural and film scholars as evoking self-representational Sáminess (Christensen 2012). This is particularly true for *Ofelaš*, which was made and distributed during a pivotal decade of the Sámi Cultural Revival movement. Gaup achieves this kind of representational Sáminess through the use of several elements, including a Sámi setting and shooting location that denotes the geographical distinctiveness of *Sápmi*’s fjords, coastal, and mountain areas, as well as the use of Sámi actors and language. Gaup is also known for utilising a unique blend of Sámi lore and character archetypes with adventure film idioms commonly seen in blockbuster adventure stories in Western media (Iversen 2020). For example, several of the tensest scenes in *Ofelaš* deftly blend orchestral thriller music with the sounds of a traditional Sámi *joik* (Gaup 1987). In terms of narrative structure, *Ofelaš* is heavily suspense-driven in a way that is familiar to frequent viewers of North American or European thrillers, and yet Gaup navigates this storyline within a “presentation of complex

esoteric lore crucial to an understanding of the Sámi world as recreated in the narrative” (DuBois 1995, pg. 64).

Similarly, *The Kautokeino Rebellion* uses well-known genre elements of the historical melodrama, such as binary oppositions between good and evil and victimisation and idealisation, an action-driven plot, and goal-oriented protagonists, and negotiates these elements with Sámi-specific cultural themes and motifs (Iversen 2020). By way of example, the film uses reindeer as a visual motif to indicate the well-being of Aslak Hætta’s *siida*. When there is peace, the reindeer are calm and at ease. When Aslak and his comrades are imprisoned or attacked, the reindeer are cantankerous and anxious. In many of Gaup’s films, we often see images of reindeer, mountain highlands, *lávvos*, *gákti* or *beaska* (traditional dress), and other traditional aspects of the reindeer herding Sámi culture emphasised to evoke self-representational Sáminess. His focus on traditional iconography represents the idea of indigenous culture as continuous, time-honoured in its resilience against external threats (Christensen 2012).

Gaup’s use of traditional iconography and motifs mirrors the tactics utilised during the Sámi Revival era, during which several unifying factors of Sáminess were emphasised and “officialised” when there had previously been a largely intuitive understanding of indigenous identity in *Sápmi*. However, as discussed in the previous chapter, some have argued that the homogenisation and “traditionalisation” of the image of Sámi culture has contributed to the exclusion of some Sámi individuals who do not participate in traditional livelihoods or were not raised speaking their indigenous language. This is where film has entered as a way to spotlight other aspects of contemporary Sámi life. For example, the films *Minister of State* and *Bázo*, two well-known pieces of Sámi filmmaking, explicitly subvert and re-appropriate traditional Sámi imagery in favour of emphasising alternative images of Sámi life and culture (Dancus 2014).



Fig 23. Simma P.A. (1997) *Minister of State* [Film still]. Retrieved from: <https://mubi.com/films/the-minister-of-state>

The comedy *Minister of State* was directed by Paul-Anders Simma and premiered in 1997. The film takes place during the last few months of World War II in the village of Sagojokk, a multicultural community in *Sápmi* which at the time was comprised of Kvæns, Sámis, Finns, Swedes, and Norwegians. One day, a deserting German soldier enters the village and is mistaken for a Finnish minister (Simma 1997). As “minister,” the man “promises [the citizens of Sagojokk] a road straight to the capital and a landowner reform act that will give them their own piece of land” (Dancus 2014, pg. 128). The film follows the deceptive antics of the “minister” and his interactions with the Kvæn village merchant, Antti Neia, who is suspicious of him. One of the most notable aspects of the film is how ethnic identities are presented and negotiated, especially during encounters with outsiders and political regulators. For example, when German troops descend upon the village, Antti Neia commands: “You know what to do!” to the villagers, who promptly switch all traces of Finnish identity for Swedish identity markers. For example, they replace the Finnish flag with the Swedish flag and switch a photo of the Finnish president for the Swedish king. Neia then emphasises to the German soldiers that they are all Swedish and therefore neutral (Simma 1997). The film points to the absurdity of nation-state borders in *Sápmi* and shuns the idea of traditional identity markers as fixed or essentialised. Instead, these identity markers are seen as susceptible to change and negotiation in the face of a chaotic war situation. This is not to say that the film challenges the idea of Sámi culture as unified in any way; instead it



highlights the complexities of it and the ways in which it has been forced to negotiate with neighbouring influences and political circumstances (Dancus 2014).



Fig 24. Petterson L.G. (2003) *Bázo* [Film still]. Retrieved from: <https://mubi.com/cast/lars-goran-pettersson>

Similarly, the film *Bázo* (2003), directed by Lars-Göran Pettersson, applies a contemporary realistic context to present-day *Sápmi* and subverts typical romanticised images of Sámi identity. The film follows the main character, Emil, who lives with his father on a farm in the forests of northern Sweden. He is called *Bázo*, a Sámi expression for an idiot or a fool (Hjort & Lindqvist 2016). When he receives a message that his brother has died, Emil embarks on a journey through the border areas of Sweden, Norway, and Finland to search for the belongings of his deceased sibling. Though the film follows Emil through a series of vast and beautiful panoramic landscapes in the northern territories, it does not particularly romanticise these images or present Emil as a character who is especially adept at navigating through the wilderness. Rather than being a hunter, skier, or tracker, Emil is simply a traveler who utilises modern means to get around, including cars, buses, a tractor, and a rubbish truck. Further, though reindeer and nature are presented as part of the film's environmental milieu, no ecological or religious motifs are emphasised. Instead, reindeer and nature are generally presented as part of an economic production society in *Sápmi*. To sum, the film *Bázo* offers an unglamorous alternative view of contemporary Sámi life (Pettersson 2003).

Simma and Pettersson's films present nuanced and authentic images of Sámi life, directly subverting stereotypical and colonial images of Sámi culture. By contrast, Gaup's films recontextualise cultural stereotypes from a negative understanding of Sáminess and utilise traditional Sámi iconography in a way that encourages a sense of pride and self-worth (Christensen 2015). Regardless of differences in presentation and intention, all the stories described above can be regarded as manifestations of insider perspectives. Each film was directed by an individual with an ethnic background as a Sámi person. They all employ the use of Sámi actors and language to some extent, and use locations where real Sámi people live and work. These films provide some insight into the diversity and hybridity of Sámi film, and in this way, they collectively construct a humanising and nuanced view of Sámi people. Thus, it can be said that Sámi film is an opportunity for renegotiation, reconstruction, or complete deconstruction of colonial or mainstream imagery, which is often outright negative or highly stereotyped.

There is a breadth of exceptional short films in the repertoire of Sámi filmmaking, and few feature-length films. However, those feature length films that have come out of the Sámi film community have seen consistent international success. Following the Academy Award-nominated feature film *Ofelaš* and the success of *Minister of State* and *Bazo*, in 2016 Amanda Kernell premiered her now internationally acclaimed coming-of-age film *Sameblod (Sámi Blood)*, for which she won Best Debut Director at the Venice Film Festival as well as second prize at the Tokyo International Film Festival. It also won the Dragon Award for Best Nordic film at the 2017 Göteborg Film Festival (Göteborg, Sweden) and the Valhalla Award for Best Nordic film at the Santa Barbara International Film Festival (Santa Barbara, California, USA) (Pålsson 2019). In later chapters, I will explore this film and its impact in greater depth, as it provides a poignant and unique narrative depicting the consequences of colonial assimilation on two young Sámi sisters in 1930s Sweden.

In terms of short films, contemporary Sámi cinematography has undergone rapid progression. In recent years, several Sámi filmmakers have garnered international acclaim and awards for their work. In 2012, Marja Bål Nango's short film *Før hunk om, etter han dro (Before She Came, After He Left)* won Best Film by a Young Director at imagiNATIVE Media Arts Festival in Toronto (MacKenzie & Stenport 2014). In 2018, Marja Helander's short film *Birds in the Earth* won the Finnish Short Film Award and the Risto Jarva Prize at the Tampere Film Festival. It also qualified for the 2019 short film competition at the Sundance Film

Festival (We Are Moving Stories 2019). That same year, Sara Margrethe Oskal's short film *Beavivi Nieida (Daughter of the Sun)* won Best Short Film at the B3 *Biennale des bewegten Bildes* and premiered at numerous film festivals from Native Cinema Showcase New York to imagiNATIVE to *Dellie Maa – Sápmi* Indigenous Film and Art Festival in Dearnna/Tärnaby, Sweden (Nordisk filminstitut 2018). Katja Gauriloff's *Kaisa's Enchanted Forest* was the first Sámi film to win Best Documentary at the Finnish Jussi Awards in 2019 (The Barents Observer 2017).

As was discussed in Chapter 2, most Sámi films receive support from the International Sámi Film Institute (ISFI), an organisation dedicated to providing Sámi artists with opportunities to develop, produce, and distribute films in the Sámi dialects. Founded in 2007 in Guovdageaidnu/Kautokeino, the ISFI works nationally and transnationally. Since its genesis, the organisation has drawn support and funding from various diverse sources, including the North Norwegian Film Centre, the National Film Institutes, and the Sámi parliaments in Norway (Crawley 2013). Recently, the ISFI and its Managing Director Anna Lájla Utsi helped advise the team behind Disney's *Frozen II* in the depiction of a fictional indigenous community based on the Sámi people. In order to make sure that they were honouring Sámi culture appropriately in the development of the film, the Walt Disney Company 1) signed a confidential, formal agreement with the Sámi parliaments of Norway, Sweden, and Finland, as well as the Sámi Council, 2) consulted an advisory group made of Sámi artists, historians, elders, and political leaders, 3) released a Sámi-language version of *Frozen II*, and 4) provided opportunities for Sámi filmmakers and animators to participate in internships at their organisation. The ISFI played a key role in making sure that Disney reflected indigenous culture conscientiously and correctly (Schilling 2019). In the words of Anna Lájla:

It's somehow groundbreaking in the indigenous film world...because you have agreement. It's not just someone coming from the outside who is taking our story and doing whatever they want with it, but it's a collaboration, which is benefiting not just one part but also our people (as quoted in Radio New Zealand 2019).





Fig 25. International Sámi Film Institute (2003) Anna Lajla Utsi (centre) among a gathering of Sámi leaders and the Verddet group during the signing of the agreement between Walt Disney Animation Studios and the Sámi people in Oslo [Photograph]. Retrieved from: <https://nowtoronto.com/movies/news-features/disney-frozen-2-indigenous-culture-sami>

President of the Norwegian Sámi Council Christina Henriksen echoed Anna Laijla's sentiments in an interview with the Arctic Council. When asked what was "Sámi about *Frozen 2*," Christina replied:

For me, the Sámi way of thinking comes forward in parts of the movie. Some of the dresses are inspired by our traditional clothing, and the Northuldra people have similarities to Sámi reindeer herders. There are many other elements that you might recognise if you are familiar with the Sámi culture. Hopefully, watching *Frozen 2* will make viewers curious about Sámi and Indigenous peoples' culture, and further seek knowledge (Henriksen as quoted in *Arctic Council* 2020, pg. 1).

The activities of the ISFI in confluence with the depth and breadth of depictions of indigenous lives and culture in the Sámi film repertoire indicate that Sámi cinema is intimately related to global efforts at indigenous cultural revitalisation and self-determination. Further to this, I suggest that the policies and activities of the ISFI can be explained by this necessity for self-representational Sáminess. For example, in their five-

year plan (2015 to 2020), the ISFI cites an objective to “develop, support, and co-produce on a yearly basis” the following targets: 1) create one television series/fictional feature film, as well as 2) four documentaries, 3) four short fictions, and 4) a minimum of two children/youth films. Along with these objectives, they cite the “documentation of traditional knowledge” as an integral aspect of their work as well (International Sámi Film Institute 2018, pg. 1). While the link between the sustenance of traditional knowledge and filmmaking may not be initially apparent, the ties between cultural conservation, storytelling, and film become more evident when we analyse them in an indigenous context. My suggestion here is that Sámi film is not simply a form of entertainment; the films themselves, as well as institutional support for these films, are intimately related to what Christensen describes as “an ethno-political awakening among active artists” in the Sámi world (Christensen 2015, pg. 177). Sámi films represent important contributions to efforts at increasing cultural pride and awareness in within Sámi communities. Indeed, Christensen further suggests that these films “have shaped the discourse of a collective Sámi identity,” much in the same way that the artworks of the Sámi Cultural Revival complemented, guided, and emblematised the activities of 20<sup>th</sup> century Sámi activists (Ibid 2015, pg. 177). For this reason, the leadership of institutions like the ISFI are imperative in supporting regional films and guiding outsiders who wish to work with Sámi cultural subjects in their filmic projects, such as the Walt Disney Company.

### **Why Fictional Film?**

The reader will note that the trajectory of this chapter has progressed from an analysis of the indigenous presence in ethnographic film to a discussion of films created and produced by indigenous creatives. I will point out here that the latter conversation has concerned itself with fictional projects produced by indigenous artists as opposed to ethnographic or documentary films. This is not because there is a dearth of ethnographic or documentary content created by indigenous filmmakers, though indeed the fictional films have garnered the most international acclaim and attention toward these artists. With that being said, indigenous peoples have in fact utilised fictional, documentary, *and* ethnographic narrative structures in film in order to exemplify their own creative interests and provide an insider lens into their cultures and stories. However, I have chosen to focus

primarily on fictional indigenous films for purposes specific to this thesis. I will illuminate the reasons for this very shortly, but first I wish to establish a few crucial differences between ethnographic film and fictional film to establish context.

First, I will define ethnographic film as, in the words of Durington, “the visual manifestation of anthropological practice organized into a lineal and moving media” (Durington & Ruby 2011, pg. 190). In her discussion of film as emic data, Hughes-Freeland similarly purports that ethnographic film “enacts...and reveals the anthropological research relationship with the subjects” (Freeland 2015, pg. 5). I will also suggest that what separates contemporary ethnographic film from the broader and perhaps more familiar body of documentary film is the extent to which it is connected to a series of ethical preconditions typically affixed to anthropological practice. Hughes-Freeland expands upon this when she notes that ethnographic film is “inextricably linked with practice-based research...[and] calls into question the same moral quandaries – such as personal accountability, ethical relationships, and commitment to a broader context of increased understanding...arguably best...dealt with...through practicable and theoretical reflexivity” (Ibid 2015, pg. 4). The upshot of all this is that contemporary ethnographic film comes with a set of praxis-based preconditions readily attached to it, and thus emphasises the perspective of the researcher (whether he/she is indigenous or otherwise) alongside the film’s subjects. In terms of conducting reflexive and robust anthropological praxis as a filmmaker, this is a good thing. However, it does impose some creative limitations when we consider film *as* ethnographic data, rather than film as a *record* of ethnographic data. My intimation here is that the process of creating fictional film, and indeed the resulting product, is somewhat more liberating in the sense that it does not necessitate a series of academic or ethical preconditions. I don’t mean to suggest that fictional film is entirely exempt from restrictive parameters; for example, funders and other film organisations may reject a film project or withhold stipends for various media endeavours based on their own subjective opinions or institutional objectives (as was heavily discussed in the context of Sámi film in Chapter 2). However, I have selected fictional film as a focal point for this thesis because I believe it allows for more breadth in terms of the creative expression of the filmmakers. With that being said, I must explain why I have deemed creative expression to be an important element in my ethnographic analysis.

The reason lies in part in relationship to my own objectives and lines of inquiry related to this project. While, as I explained in Chapter 1, I am under no illusion that it is possible, reasonable, or favourable to exclude myself from the narrative of this thesis, I am chiefly concerned with illuminating the perspectives of indigenous filmmakers on social and cultural issues in their own words. This effort manifests in a manner that is two-fold; first, I am interested in centralising these filmmakers' narratives *about* their work and culture through ethnographic interviews, and second, I am interested in utilising their films as emic data to examine *how* these narratives are expressed artistically. While ethnographic film certainly allows for indigenous perspectives to manifest through its content, particularly when the anthropologist him/herself is an indigenous insider, I believe that fictional storytelling allows for an even more personalised, subjective, creative lens, which is critical to understanding past and current discourses surrounding indigenous identity.

I also am interested in using fictional film as a source of emic data because it remains a dramatically under-utilised analytical technique in cultural anthropology. This lack of scholarly attention to fictional narrative in visual media possibly stems from a "belief in the objective quality of photographed [or filmed] data" coupled with a "perceived conflict between filmmaking's aesthetic conventions and positivism's scholarly requirements for researchable data" (Ruby 2000, pg. 52). This investment in "objective" data likely stems from an effort to re-characterise anthropology as a post-colonial, and perhaps anti-colonial, practice by pointedly avoiding the evolutionary eye. However, it can also be argued that the assumption that any sort of qualitative data is strictly objective goes against the very reflexivity cultural anthropology champions. Fictional film is inexorably inclined towards narrative subjectivity, for the dramatic requirements of fictional cinema inevitably serve as driving factors for its production. But it is this very subjective foundation that makes fictional narrative an appropriate vehicle by which filmmakers can convey indigenous perspectives and anxieties in a manner that facilitates empathy and understanding.

Put more simply, while outsiders' ethnographic documentation emphasises social scientific, objective observational data in an attempt to minimise bias on behalf of the filmmaker, it inevitably faces difficulty in conveying indigenous interests, anxieties, and perspectives on historical and present events and activities from a truly intimate perspective. It is important to note here that my intimation is not that ethnographic filmmaking lacks credibility or is ill equipped to address the interests of indigenous people

compassionately. Instead I suggest that indigenous-produced fictional film merits greater complementary consideration as a pertinent vehicle for doing so, and also deserves anthropological consideration as a form of artistic discourse.

### **Indigenous Storytelling and Film**

Another reason for my interest in fictional narrative in Sámi film is associated with the heavy importance placed on the practice of storytelling in indigenous traditions. Previously, I referred to film as a form of “storytelling emancipation” for indigenous creators and their audiences (Picq 2012, pg. 2). I make note of this again because storytelling and the oral tradition are and always have been critically important to self-determination and cultural vitality in all indigenous cultures. As Iseke puts it, storytellers and orators in the indigenous tradition are typically the elders, and they are considered to be the teachers, the “language keepers and healers of communities” (Iseke 2013, pg. 36). For cultures under threat from imperialist insurgence or which are suffering from the lingering deleterious impacts of colonial oppression and forced assimilation, storytelling is used as a tool for cultural survival and a mechanism through which indigenous peoples can resist erasure. For indigenous peoples, a story is “a living thing, an organic process, a way of life,” which “[binds] communities together spiritually and rationally” (Graveline 1998, pg. 66). Hanna and Henry explicate this importance further:

The most important qualities of our culture are our language and our stories. In oral traditions such as ours, telling stories is how we pass on the history and the teachings of our ancestors. Without these stories, we would have to rely on other people for guidance and information about our past. Teachings in the form of stories are an integral part of our identity as a people and as a nation. If we lose these stories, we will do a disservice to our ancestors—those who gave us the responsibility to keep our culture alive (Hanna & Henry 1995, p. 201).

Note that, in Hanna and Henry’s passage, the authors make a specific reference to the concept of cultural ownership of ancestral stories. This indicates the salience of stories as agents of preservation, self-determination, and agency in a way that is specifically

relevant to post-colonial indigenous cultures. Put more simply, stories allow indigenous peoples to, again, resist erasure, but also to articulate and negotiate their cultural identities and resist outsiders' efforts to determine and essentialise them. I suggest that indigenous media enjoys the same capabilities, for fictional indigenous film can be, in part, a contemporary continuation of the oral tradition with an added visual dimension.

Related to this, I will point out here that many anthropologists have argued for the notion of stories as viable ethnographic data. For example, Hymes's assertion that "stories are good to hear, but also good to think" indicates that the storytelling tradition has potential to provide keen insight into ways of thinking on an individual and cultural level, often simultaneously (Hymes 1992, pg. 113). Cocq's approach to the analysis of Sámi storytelling and folklore stems from a similar philosophy, as she emphasises that "a given discourse represents a relation to reality. Thus, the discourse or discourses expressed in narratives are the storyteller's expression of reality as perceived" (Cocq 2008, pg. 16). Put another way, indigenous stories are expressions of discourses that emerge from specific communities, offering insight into the "social norms and values expressed by their narrators" (Ibid 2008, pg. 14). By engaging with the tale-telling tradition, the ethnographer can gain a greater understanding of both the narrator as an individual and cultural context in which his or her stories have emerged. This relates to my assertion made previously, which is that fictional film deserves greater complementary consideration as a source of viable ethnographic data. I reiterate that this holds particularly true if we consider the fictional narrative in film to be an extension of the oral tradition made visual.

In her ethnography of Sámi folklore, Cocq laments that "most collections of Sámi folklore have dispossessed the narratives of their authors" (Cocq 2008, pg. 14). She notes that, though the role of storyteller as an individual is a critical aspect of indigenous cultural vitality, historic collections of Sami folklore focus almost exclusively on stories' content and symbolism, generally excluding the "creativity and subjectivity" of the stories' narrators based on a dearth of information to that end (Ibid 2008, pg. 14). I agree with Cocq's assertion that the "creativity and subjectivity" of the individual narrator is vitally important to understanding indigenous stories in their wholeness, and from an ethnographic perspective (Ibid 2008, pg. 14). As discussed in Chapter 1, social scholarship compatible with indigenous epistemologies typically "begin with the self" and acknowledge subjectivity in perspective as a viable element of social investigative methodology (Ritskes & Sium 2013,

pg. 5). Storytelling is well-positioned for this type of social scientific analysis in that it centralises the creative decisions and subjective experiences of its orators. As an extension of the storytelling tradition, I suggest that indigenous fictional film has the same capacity. Further, to my benefit in the study of contemporary film and filmmaking, I was able to access and interview filmmakers presently working and can thus address both story and story maker, allowing for greater insight into the process from both broadly cultural and individual perspectives.

### **Concluding Remarks**

In the event brochure distributed at the *Skábmagovat* Film Festival in Inari, Finland, which I attended in January 2019 for my second annual visit, film was described as “the closest thing to the Sámi way of teaching” (*Skábmagovat* 2019, pg. 53). This quotation speaks to the cultural power of indigenous film, and, from a more personal perspective, it also concisely indicates why I believe Sámi fictional stories are crucial to exemplifying my own ethnographic interests. To reiterate what I have expressed in this chapter, I am principally interested in exploring an ethnographic modality that centralises indigenous narrators and exemplifies insider Sámi perspectives over my own when possible. I believe Sámi film satisfies these objectives in several ways. Sámi film is a teacher; it can be utilised to provide outsiders like myself with more empathetic insight into the Sámi cultural world, but more importantly, it can be used to reflect Sámi viewers’ own lives and experiences. As *Skábmagovat* Film Festival Director, producer, and filmmaker Sunna Nousuniemi iterated at the *From the Arctic with Decolonial Love* panel, in using film, “we [Sámis] are reintroducing us to us.” This is made possible in part because Sámi film is closely allied with the indigenous tradition of storytelling, a practice that allows indigenous people to heal, educate, and resist erasure. Further, as I iterated throughout this chapter, indigenous films provide access to diversity and heterogeneity in Sámi stories, which exemplify multiple ways of being Sámi and, again, emphasise the salience of insider perspectives in indigenous media. This is beneficial for me as a researcher interested in gaining an understanding of the aspects of Sámi culture that are accessible to me through film and is, more importantly, useful for Sámi audiences who are seeking empathy and manifestations of selfhood through Sámi stories. Finally, the decisions being made by Sámi filmmakers (and their funding institutional bodies)

are intimately related to the notion of cultural self-determination. In other words, indigenous films allow Sámi artists to exemplify the aspects of their culture they wish to manifest through expressive media, often in direct opposition to stereotypical portrayals of indigenous peoples in mainstream cinema and as complementary insider perspectives to outsiders' ethnographic portrayals.

I will reiterate here that indigenous film can be a form of “storytelling emancipation” through imagery, sound, and narrative (Picq 2012, pg. 2). This is perhaps the most important theme to be explored in my thesis, as my objectives for research emphasise the significance of creativity in the sustenance, creation, and re-appropriation of indigenous stories and imagery, most relevantly through film. I will also reiterate that the work being done by these indigenous filmmakers is extremely necessary and inextricably related to cultural revitalisation and self-determination efforts in the Sámi world. And of course, we cannot discuss these efforts without acknowledging the reason for their significance; namely, a legacy of colonial subjugation that has contributed to the circulation and proliferation of negative or reductive images, narratives, and stereotypes related to Sámi people in mainstream media and in regular discourse. I alluded briefly to some of the common stereotypes that populate mainstream films depicting indigenous cultures in the introduction to this thesis and in Chapter 2, but in Chapter 4, I will discuss this concept more specifically in terms of Nordic media portrayals of the Sámi people. I will also solidify my stance regarding the circumstances that have allowed these reductive narratives and images to dominate; again, colonial history in the Nordic states. Subsequent to this, I will explore the ways in which Sámi creatives are utilising their filmic arts to combat misrepresentations and cultural devaluation by spotlighting the words and works of my informants.



## Chapter Four: Storytelling Emancipation and Restorative Representation

### Decolonising the Mind: The Cultural Bomb

For the purposes of this thesis - and in keeping with the principles of reflexivity and transparency in research – I will solidify my stance regarding the conditions that perpetuated inequalities between the Sámi minority and the Norwegian state between 1850 and 1980. Put simply, I believe the Sámi were, in fact, a colonised people and continue to encounter and negotiate with colonisation’s lingering influence. I suggest that imperialist activity was particularly strong, salient, and strategic under the political and social model of Norwegianisation, given that it allowed the newly independent Nordic state to devalue indigenous language, culture, and religion and usurp and exploit Sámi territories and resources in an official capacity. With this being established, I will now explore in greater depth the insidious consequences of colonial activity in the Sámi world and, correspondingly, the social ills that decolonisation seeks to remedy. I have discussed the concept of decolonisation in ethnographic research and, more generally, in the sphere of academia in previous chapters, but I have not yet addressed what decolonisation means in a way that deals more directly with indigenous peoples in a relevant contemporary psychosocial context. Here I will present the following inquiry to guide the discussion: what does it mean to decolonise in the contemporary Sámi world, and what are the constituents of the term “decolonisation” in that regard? Further to this, how exactly can film contribute to the decolonial endeavour?

Colonisation and its consequent ills extend much further than territorial exploitation or invasive political activity. It probes very deeply into the lives and cultures of contemporary indigenous peoples, in ways that are at once practical, developmental, cultural, institutional, and psychosocial. In Chapter 2, I primarily discussed the practical, developmental, and institutional structures (i.e. those laws, paradigms, and institutional policies that impact land allocation, occupational management, education, etc.) implemented to disadvantage the Sámi people during the Norwegianisation era. Here I will more thoroughly address the cultural and psychosocial aspects of colonial activity and introduce the paradigm Sámi historian Veli-Pekka Lehtola refers to as the “colonisation of the mind” (Lehtola 2015, pg. 26).

As was discussed in Chapter 2, the history of Norwegianisation is inextricably associated with the strategic devaluing of Sámi lives, languages, religious beliefs, ontologies, and culture. This devaluation entails a significant and arguably under-discussed aspect of colonialism: the manipulation of indigenous minds. Rautio-Helander (2008) describes this phenomenon when she states that Norwegianisation necessitated a tactical “remodeling [of] the mental landscape of Northern Norway,” which effectively expunged Sámi culture from the national narrative and framed it in terms of lesser overall value (as quoted in Lehtola 2015, pg. 27). This type of conceptual maneuvering holds true to colonialism in a more generalised sense and is not necessarily unique to the Norwegianisation model. As discussed in the previous chapter, we can observe that the indigenous Ainu people of Northern Japan, aboriginal African peoples, Native American peoples, etc. all experienced the same strategic devaluation for the purposes of non-indigenous majority political expansion through various avenues, not least of which being political media (Cheung 1996; Mabry 2014). As such, Lehtola refers to the colonisation of cognition as a pertinent ideological and discursive concept through which we can understand how colonial structures have replaced “indigenous ways of land use, social order, and knowledge systems, and how the indigenous peoples are taught to approve this development as something natural...” (Lehtola 2015, pg. 26). Kenyan author Ngugi wa Thiong’o explicates further upon this concept and its consequences in *Decolonising the Mind*, referring to the “cultural bomb” as one of the most potent and destructive forces unleashed by colonialism:

The effect of the cultural bomb is to annihilate a people’s belief in their names, in their languages, in their environment, in their heritage of struggle, in their unity, in their capacities and ultimately in themselves. It makes them see their past as one wasteland of non-achievement and it makes them want to distance themselves from that wasteland. It makes them want to identify with that which is furthest removed from themselves; for instance, with other peoples’ languages rather than their own... It even plants serious doubts about the moral righteousness of struggle. Possibilities of triumph or victory are seen as remote, ridiculous dreams. The intended results are despair, despondency, and a collective death wish (Thiong’o 1986, pg. 39).

As Thiong'o implies, this type of cultural degradation in indigenous societies has been demonstrated to yield profound deleterious consequences. "With few exceptions," suggest Axelsson, Kukutai, and Kippen, "indigenous people suffer higher suicide rates, higher mortality rates for infants, children, and mothers and carry a heavier infectious disease burden...[these] health inequalities need to be seen in a broader sociopolitical context that [includes] ongoing colonialism, land appropriation, and displacement" (Axelsson et al 2016, pg. 1). Similarly, Yellow Bird and Waziyatawin describe colonisation as an "all-encompassing presence," one which correlates directly to incidences of "poverty, family violence...suicide, [and] health deterioration" in indigenous communities (Yellow Bird & Waziyatawin 2007, pg. 3). Yellow Bird and Waziyatawin are the editors and authors of the innovative text *For Indigenous Minds Only: A Decolonisation Handbook*, which compiles the works of indigenous scholars who discuss the ways in which decolonial thought empowers Indigenous, Native, and First Nations peoples. I found this text to be highly influential in terms of conceptualising how coloniality impacts the mind. I also suggest here that the psychosocial and institutional aspects of colonialism circulate in a feedback loop; when indigenous peoples' cultures, religious epistemologies, and languages are framed in terms of lesser value, it becomes justifiable for colonial bodies to usurp and manipulate their lands and livelihoods. Conversely, when indigenous peoples' agency over their lands, occupations, and educational opportunities are stripped, their sense of self-worth and dignity is destabilised and damaged. This injurious cycle results in the social and health-related ills described by Axelsson, Kukutai, and Kippen and Yellow Bird and Waziyatawin above.

If colonisation and its lingering vestiges contribute to these social maladies, it follows that decolonisation can be a remedy. It is important to bear in mind here that decolonisation is a multifaceted concept. Practically speaking, decolonisation entails the removal of imperialist agents and institutions from indigenous territories. However, because colonisation infiltrates social, institutional, psychological, cultural, and developmental spheres of a given community, decolonisation must be similarly profound and manifold. As such, successful decolonisation necessitates a pervasive conceptual shift that covers a range of topics, including indigenous governance, language revitalisation, repatriation of cultural artifacts and remains, and, perhaps most relevantly to this thesis, agency over one's cultural identity and, by extension, one's self-image. Indeed, many clinical studies have indicated "a sense of cultural identity, a positive identity, and strong self-esteem" as essential to health

and wellness outcomes in indigenous communities (Auger 2016, pg. 10). This kind of agency can be understood as analogous to the idea of self-determination, a concept that is inextricable from the decolonial discourse.

The paradigm of self-determination maintains that indigenous peoples must be able to frame and conceptualise their identities on their own terms. In part, this means that they must enjoy the ability to exist *outside* of the colonial narrative. Alfred and Corntassel remind us that “there is a danger in allowing colonisation to be the only story of indigenous lives. It must be recognised that colonialism is a narrative in which the Settler’s power is the fundamental reference and assumption, inherently limiting indigenous freedom and imposing a view of the world that is but an outcome or perspective on that power” (Alfred & Corntassel 2005, pg. 601). Indeed, characterising Sámi people as simply existing as an eternally victimised colonial subjugates is antithetical to the philosophy of self-determination, which suggests that indigenous peoples must enjoy the ability to live in a way that “reflects [their] own identity, language, and cultural norms; and perhaps most importantly of all...[they must be able to] make decisions that best reflect the values and priorities of the members of [their] community in the absence of external...domination” (Murphy 2014, pg. 320). I reiterate here that the notion of self-determination is a key constituent of the decolonisation process. Further, it is a component that corresponds intimately to the mental and conceptual aspects underlying decolonisation theory and praxis. More specifically, the re-orientation of the cognitive parameters of indigenous identity allow space for indigenous peoples to influence their cultural lives outside of the conceptual and practical confines of colonial supremacy.

When discussing mental decolonisation, I may run the risk of implying that the process of decolonisation is primarily theory-laden as opposed to praxis-laden. I must note here that the decolonisation of the mind is at once philosophical, cognitive, agentic, and participatory. Indeed, self-determination posits that indigenous peoples must enjoy the inalienable right to “*participate* in the...process of governance and...*influence* [their] future – politically, socially, and culturally” (International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs 2011, pg. 1). The emphasis here is both on the conceptual and on the actionable, which feed into one another. In order to successfully decolonise, indigenous peoples must be able to reorient themselves around their identities outside of colonially enforced paradigms, which correspondingly allows for greater agency over their own institutions, ontologies, and

cultural occupations. As Yellow Bird and Waziyatawin maintain, the reframing of psychological aspects surrounding indigenous identities in a way that does not devalue and degrade but instead celebrates and humanises them is an essential aspect of and stimulus for successful decolonial action. “First and foremost,” they assert, “decolonisation must occur in our own minds” (Yellow Bird & Waziyatawin 2007, pg. 2). This is because, Biko (1987) adds, “the most potent weapon in the hands of the oppressor is the mind of the oppressed” (as quoted in Yellow Bird & Waziyatawin 2007, pg. 1).

We can explore the complex contemporary discussion surrounding colonisation, decolonisation, and identity formation by evaluating the discourse surrounding Sámi history in the Nordic states. Sámi historian Veli-Pekka Lehtola describes historical dialogue surrounding colonialism as a sort of epistemological tug-of-war for narrative agency in the Nordic states, one which asserts a storied history of unequal power relations between indigenous and non-indigenous peoples but endeavours to challenge the idea of Sámi people as a powerless and unendingly subjugated culture (Lehtola 2015). Unsurprisingly, this narrative debate has its roots in the 1960s and 70s, a period that yielded disciplinary changes in history, anthropology, and cultural studies, as well as changes in the social status of indigenous peoples. This time also saw an increase in research activity among Sámi scholars, allowing the view of Sámi history to become richer and more nuanced. This epoch essentially laid the groundwork for a new and more complex understanding of indigenous identity, allowing space for a narrative that neither denies colonialistic oppression nor reduces Sámi individuals to caricatures of “oppressed Lapps” and Finns, Swedes, or Norwegians to nothing more than “tyrannical imperialists” (Lehtola 2015, pg. 15). As Lehtola asserts, these generalising definitions are insufficient to describe majority-indigenous encounters in a nuanced and detailed manner and only contribute to perceptions of Sámi identity as monolithic. Perhaps most importantly, these new conversations about colonialism placed the Sámi of the past as subjects of their own history, rather than mere passive victims of “cruel colonialistic machinery” (Ibid 2015, pg. 23). With this all being said, it is unsurprising that significant progress in terms of indigenous rights and self-governance was made during this period of greater consideration for the complexity and humanity of Sámi peoples and their identities.

The upshot of this discussion is that psychosocial decolonisation necessarily involves more nuanced conceptual and narrative agency on the part of indigenous peoples. Related

to this, I suggest here that the decolonisation of the mind is a very necessary and imperative facet of the broader anti-colonial discussion. I will argue throughout this chapter that film, art, and storytelling are aptly positioned to engage with more complex narratives of indigenous identity in a manner that contributes to the decolonial endeavour while neither excluding nor necessarily privileging conversations exclusively pertaining to colonialism. This is because film and, correspondingly, storytelling both have the capacity to emphasise multiplicity and heterogeneity of indigenous lives and perspectives while still acknowledging their “connections to culture, history, and tradition,” which have been demonstrated to yield “a positive impact on the health [and well-being] of indigenous populations” (Apen et al 2016, pg. 3).

I will also address filmic storytelling as a conduit for a re-articulation of the “truth” for indigenous creatives. In this context, this “truth” refers not to a generalised claim of fact or veracity, but to the colonial “truth,” a reality that has been constructed by imperial modernity that renders indigenous societies irrevocably changed and “unable to craft a...‘pre-colonial reality’” (Ritskes & Sium 2013, pg. 11). Indigenous agency depends upon these cultural groups’ ability to reclaim and negotiate epistemologies, to sustain and carry indigenous knowledge production regarding their own identities and roles in their respective contemporary societies. Put more simply, indigenous agency necessitates the ability to exert authority over their post-colonial lives and realities, *not* a return to a pre-colonial ideal of indigenous “purity,” which is ultimately reductive. With all that being said, what exactly is the colonial “truth” and how does it continue to impact contemporary narratives surrounding indigenous peoples? More specifically, and for the purposes of this thesis, how do Nordic media narratives perpetuate certain ideas surrounding Sámi identities, and are they connected to this colonial truth? Before launching into a discussion regarding the ways in which Sámi artists are countering these narratives with their own, I must first perform a brief analysis/overview of the Sámi presence in non-indigenous-produced Nordic media.

### **The Image of Sáminess in Nordic Media**

In the previous chapter, I discussed a brief history of indigenous peoples in film and why, in recent years, there has been a vocal pushback against contentious and stereotyping

portrayals of indigenous peoples in media. To revisit this topic, I will widen my lens very briefly to address world cinema. In many contemporary portrayals of indigenous peoples, we often see them as stereotypes or “generic, faceless ‘others’” placed in the narrative simply “to gaze at...[or] fear” (Hicks et al 2014, pg. 12). We see this phenomenon particularly often in American Western/frontier cinema and in cinematic war dramas. Notable examples include AMC’s *Hell on Wheels* (2011), an American Civil War period action series chronicling the development of the railroad (and its Native detractors). In the series, we see the unspecific indigenous “‘others’ get gunned down as a part of a narrative of a fight for freedom and as an illustration of the technological advantage of U.S. [forces]” (Ibid 2014, pg. 12). In these types of filmic representations, the motives for Native opposition to development projects are largely neglected in favour of championing the expansionist prowess of the U.S. frontiersmen.

With respect to Nordic media, depictions of indigenous peoples tend to involve less outright violence and conflict between ethnic groups, but portrayals of Sámi individuals have been nonetheless contentious throughout the medium’s history, as was touched upon briefly in Chapter 2. The primary issue in majority culture-produced Nordic cinema involves the pervasive over-exoticisation of Sámi characters, who are often depicted as primitive, childlike, and wild, or alternatively arcane, mystical, and frightening. Some examples of this include the Finnish film *Valkoinen peura* (*The White Reindeer*), which generalises the Sámi people as “dangerous shamans,” whereas in reality the *noaidi* occupies a very specific and singular role in Sámi spirituality (Moffat 2017, pg. 3). Similarly, the Swedish documentaries *I fjällfolkets land* (*In the Land of the Mountain People*) and *The Reindeer Herders* both emphasise the otherness of the Sámi people. For example, in *The Reindeer Herders*, the producers overlay scenes of a young Sámi man using his Tinder dating app with stereotypical country music as he clarifies that he wants to date a girl who “he can like as much as he likes his reindeers” (Pålsson 2019, pg. 5). The effect is that he appears somewhat like a hackneyed “country bumpkin” type. Further, the creators of the show outright stated, “we tried to make them look like us Swedes, but they are just way too different from us” (Ibid 2019, pg. 5).

With all this in mind, Pålsson reminds us that there is very limited research regarding the presence of Sámi people in film, as well as Sámi film itself. Further, there have been few studies regarding Sámi peoples’ representations in Nordic media, and most of the studies

that do exist are generally framed in relationship to tourism and news media as opposed to film or television entertainment (Pålsson 2019). I believe these studies regarding tourism and news media are nonetheless relevant to my research insofar as they address media broadcasting and its capacity to “influence how...reality is described” as well as “people’s formation of opinions and attitudes” (Hyvönen 2015, pg. 6). To that end, I will briefly describe some of these studies of common Sámi representations in Nordic media, complemented by some of my own observations in the field.

In Ann-Lill Hedman’s dissertation *To Represent and Be Represented*, the scholar evaluates and contrasts the portrayals of the Sámi woman as depicted in Swedish and Sámi newspapers between 1966 and 2006. Hedman (2012, pg. 201) observes that, in Swedish newspapers, Sámi women are often portrayed through a “stereotypical...ethnic perspective that was characterised by a defined ‘Sáminess’” (as quoted in Hyvönen 2015, pg. 7). According to the scholar, “identities falling outside of this authenticity...[are] at risk for exclusion from media coverage” (as quoted in Ibid 2015, pg. 7). In her analysis of Hedman’s research, Hyvönen validates that, according to the scholar’s collected data, “descriptions of traditional Sámi ethnicity that still remain influential in...press material are closely connected with stereotypical perceptions of ‘Sáminess’ originally constituted in Swedish public policy” (Hyvönen 2015, pg. 8). Put another way, according to these researchers, the historic colonial narratives that usurped notions of indigenous identity – for example, those that framed reindeer Sámi as the only “true,” authentic Sámi – continue to influence Sámi peoples’ portrayal in Swedish media. Adam Öhman’s thesis *The Domestic Others* yields similar findings. The scholar evaluates differences in discourses regarding the framing of Swedish and Sámi ethnic identities in Swedish news media between 1970 and 2010. Öhman’s research concludes that “Sámis [are] described as [subordinate] to Swedes and...framed as ‘the others’ when...‘Swedishness’ [is] seen as the norm” (Ibid 2015, pg. 8). He also notes that “conflicts [are] the main theme when Sámi issues [are] brought up in media” (Ibid 2015, pg. 8). Though, again, Nordic media tends to depict less avoid outright violence between minority and majority groups, these archetypes of the Sámi people as inconvenient detractors to non-indigenous objectives apparently holds true for portrayals of indigenous peoples in global media in a more general sense.

The University of Jyväskylä’s Sari Pietikäinen has spent several years engaged in similar research, studying Sámi representations in newspaper texts, tourism, and visual



media. In a notable study, the researcher evaluates Sámi and Finnish representations in a school assignment book for children. As an experimental venture, she reverses the tone and language of Sámi depictions and descriptions with the Finnish counterparts and vice versa. According to Pietikäinen, the switch “strongly [emphasises] the otherness of the Sámis...highlighting the ascendancy of the Finns” (Lindholm 2014, pg. 27). Leppänen and Pietikäinen (2007) also note that characteristics of “wildness, freedom...animalism...and childlike ignorance” are often emphasised with regard to Sámi characters (as quoted in Lindholm 2014, pg. 27). In her Master’s dissertation, Lindholm suggests that these “colonial stereotypes” are not as prevalent as they once were and are largely considered “inappropriate for marketing” (particularly in tourism media), but asserts that “it is important to realise that they still exist” in both Nordic visual media and literature (Ibid 2014, pg. 5). This remains a problematic issue, agrees Puuronen, as the exoticism of the Sámi creates a “one-sided, incorrect, romanticising, and exoticising image, behind and under which the real lives and problems of the Sámi are hidden” (Puuronen 2011, pg. 148).

Another issue also arises when we consider that Sámi representation in Nordic media is generally quite limited in the first place (in television entertainment, news media, or otherwise). Several Norwegian scholars have demonstrated interest in the question of Sámi visibility – or perhaps more accurately, invisibility – in mainstream media. For example, in *The Indigenous Identity of the South Sámi*, Kolberg examines how the sociopolitical affairs of the South Sámi people have been represented in Norwegian-language regional newspapers between 1880 and 1990 (Kolberg 2019). By his own account, his interest in Sámi representation in Nordic media emerges from his observation that there was “no mention of the Sámi people in the official documents or the official events” of the 2011 millennium celebration in his home market town of Levanger, despite the fact that there is a significant South Sámi presence in the region, and that “the Sámi [are] significant participants in the market” (Ibid 2019, pg. 121). He states that he realised that his “majority mindset was not calibrated to perceive [the] Sámi presence. Even if I saw the reindeer and the reindeer fences, I did not realise the significance of Sámi culture and history in my county” (Ibid 2019, pg. 121). He also recounts that his “idea of Sámi culture was based on...films like *Same Jakki* (1957) and *Laila* (1958)” and that he could recall very few contemporary Sámi representations in the regional media to which he had access (Ibid 2019, pg. 121). In his broad survey of Sámi representation in regional and national

Norwegian newspapers, he notes several contextual commonalities in the limited array of Sámi-related stories, including, in descending order of frequency: reindeer herding (grazing conditions, predators, land disputes, etc.), politics, education and language, history and culture, “curiosities,” “othering/exoticising” stories, and criminal cases with Sámi individuals involved as victims, suspects, or criminal perpetrators (Ibid 2019, pg. 126).

Ijäs studied the coverage of Sámi-related stories in the Northern Norwegian regional newspaper *Nordlys* (Tromsø) and the national TV daily news broadcast *Dagsrevyen* (Norwegian Broadcasting Corporation) between 1970-2000. In his published research, he observed that there was virtually no Sámi representation in *Nordlys* particularly up until the end of the 70s, but that, as public interest in Sámi political affairs began to increase during the Alta Conflict, Sámi stories became more prevalent. However, after this event, according to the author, Sámi news items became infrequent once again (Ijäs 2015). Similarly, Josefsen and Skogerbø evaluated media coverage of the Norwegian *Sámediggi* election campaign in 2009. They observed that, “while Norwegian Parliamentary election campaigns [were] covered extensively by national newspapers and television...the *Sámediggi* election in 2009 [did not receive] anywhere near the same amount of attention” (Josefsen & Skogerbø 2013, pg. 67). They also cited significant geographical differences in terms of Sámi news coverage within Norway. For example, they observed that Norwegian local and regional newspapers in the northern territories covered the Sámi election campaign more extensively than southern regional newspapers:

Voters south of Gaisi had less chance for findings news and debate about the political alternatives in the newspapers, and if so, they would most likely be in Norwegian. *Ávvir* [author note: *Ávvir* is a Sámi-language newspaper] published a few items from these constituencies in Northern Sami, but none in Julev or Åarjel Sami. The public spaces open to Sami voters were, in other words, quite abundant in the north and nearly absent in the south... In conclusion, conditions for public Sami political communication were not equal for Sámi politicians and voters (Josefsen & Skogerbø 2013, pg. 84).

Earlier in 2003, Skogerbø analysed the coverage of Sámi political affairs in national and regional news media during 1999. She concluded that Norwegian media tended to

“represent Sámi affairs in a stereotypical or conflict-oriented way,” echoing the sentiments Odman and Kolberg (Skogerbø 2003, pg. 395). Clearly, according to these scholars, there exist two broad, prevalent issues associated with the Sámi presence in Nordic media: first, there remains a predominant tendency to stereotype or romanticise the Sámi people, and second, there is very limited representation of Sámi lives and stories in the Nordic media sphere in the first place. These two factors collude to create a very restricted and monocular lens through which the Sámi people are understood and portrayed.



Fig. 26: Kitti S. (2016) Artist Sunna Kittí’s artworks for the Sami Parliament in Finland’s Culturally Responsible Sami Tourism project. An example of destructive Sámi stereotyping is depicted on the left, while a positive depiction of Sámi culture is displayed on the right [Art courtesy of the Sámi Parliament in Finland]. Retrieved from: <https://www.rcinet.ca/eye-on-the-arctic-special-reports/how-not-to-promote-arctic-tourism-why-finlands-indigenous-sami-say-marketing-their-region-needs-to-change/>

I observed these issues regarding the depiction of Sámi people in contemporary Nordic media firsthand during my fieldwork. For example, the television series *Midnattsol* (in English: *Midnight Sun*) a blockbuster Swedish crime series, created debate and concern regarding contentious portrayals of Sámi individuals in the public imagination. The first season follows French and Swedish police officers investigating the murder of a Frenchman in Kiruna. Due to the series’ location in a cultural core area, Sámi characters were heavily featured throughout the narrative, from ordinary town residents to the sacred *noaidi*. On the one hand, some Sámi individuals were pleased that *Midnattsol* offered a “real-world

authenticity” to Sámi life, excluding the typical “folkloric aura” ascribed to Sámi people (Branchereau 2016, pg. 2). “There is a real pride in the Sámi who for the first time find themselves at the centre of a super-production,” asserted radio journalist Lars-Ola Marakatt (as quoted in Ibid 2016, pg. 1). However, because of this, “expectations were immense, and overall, they were disappointed,” he continued. Many criticised *Midnattsol* for “misrepresenting the nature of local disputes and drawing a broad and blunt portrait of the Sámi spirit and traditions” (Ibid 2016, pg. 2). Marakatt polled Sámi viewers on his Sámi language radio show and many described issues with depictions of their people. “It looks like they wanted to create a stereotype,” observed Kiruna high school teacher Peter Paajarvi, who felt that the Sámi characters were portrayed as excessively “brutal and quiet” (as quoted in Ibid 2016, pg. 2).



Fig. 27: Malm U. (2016) *Sámi artist, singer, songwriter, and radio host Sofia Jannok in her acting debut in Midnattsol* [Television still]. Retrieved from:

[https://www.yourlivingcity.com/stockholm/featured/on-tv-spectacular-crimes-in-the-midnight-sun/](https://www.yourlivingcity.com/stockholm/featured/on-tv-spectacular-crimes-in-the-land-of-the-midnight-sun/)

As McCreanor observes, negative and reductive stereotypes of indigenous peoples in modern media can be seen as both deliberate and subconscious continuations of a “colonial project, enhancing the legitimation and naturalisation of the...priorities of the colonising state” (McCreanor 2012, pg. 6). In particular, Hedman and Hyvönen validate this statement when they observe that “descriptions of traditional Sámi ethnicity” in Nordic media remain “closely connected with stereotypical perceptions of ‘Sáminess’ originally constituted in Swedish [author note: and Norwegian, for that matter] public policy,” even in present day

(Hyvönen 2015, pg. 8). Olsen also points out that motives for perpetuating particular media stereotypes of indigenous people can often be marketing-related. To sate visitor appetites for “authenticity,” tourism and related media will often accentuate the “traditional versus modern dichotomy...[keeping] alive an image where features assumed to be modern have no place [for indigenous peoples]” (Olsen 2006, pg. 37). Admittedly, Olsen continues, indigenous peoples sometimes feel the need to feed into this image themselves for marketing and tourism purposes. The commonality here is that these depictions are created and perpetuated at the expense of nuanced and humanising narratives of indigenous identity. These stereotyping narratives also confine indigenous peoples to existing as living relics of the past, as opposed to complex individuals belonging to cultures that are at once dynamic and contemporary and rich in venerable tradition.

An important element of narrative – in the framework of this thesis, fictional narrative – is that it can be both transformational and interpretive, reflecting particular perceptions of cultural aspects, events, and epistemologies. As such, indigenous films represent an alternative narrative option to the conventional media gaze that paints such individuals as simply spectacles or as fodder for conflict. Disrupting stereotypical media narratives that paint native peoples in a reductive manner, indigenous films allow their native viewers to internalise alternative messages and portrayals about themselves. This is because these are films by indigenous peoples themselves. As such, they can provide more thoughtful insights into indigenous peoples’ cultures, views, and perceptions, and represent types of indigenous ways of knowing and being that are often excluded from the majority media canon.

### **The Opportunity for Representation**

As I intimated in the previous section, indigenous films are able to create more complex, nuanced, and accurate representations of indigenous characters because they are made *by* indigenous artists themselves. This information exists in a broader theoretical arena that must also include and consider the intention of the filmmaker, which is particularly relevant for the purposes of this thesis. An objective of my research is to evaluate the ways in which filmmakers are engaging with the decolonial endeavour through their art in ways both intentional and incidental. As such, during my fieldwork, I was

particularly interested in those artists' opinions regarding artistic intent and representation. With that being said, I asked all my informants the following question: "who is your audience?" I left this question fairly broad and open-ended to avoid leading my informants to any particular conclusion, but I hypothesised that many of them would describe their films as principally for Sámi audiences. From the following discussions, I have ascertained that this is partially true, but also that the answer to this question is far more complex for these filmmakers than I initially anticipated.

Overwhelmingly and perhaps unsurprisingly, filmmakers cited a desire for authentic self-expression as a key motivator in their filmmaking. Ann Holmgren, a published author and award-winning filmmaker of half Swedish and half Sámi heritage, for example, provided the following insights:

**ANN HOLMGREN:** *My producers would love it if I could give you a good answer on that one, but I never actually think about the audience. This does not mean that I don't want to have an audience! But I just think I want to make something that I would love to see. That makes it sound like I want to make films for people who are just like me, and that sounds really egoistic in a sense...but I just want the films...when I get the ideas, they just come to me in a way, and it's something that interests me. I just strive to make it as good as possible. And what is good? Well, I can only judge my own taste and values in a way. I just strive to do the best I can.*

Filmmaker, animator, and visual artist from Swedish *Sápmi* Anders Sunna speaks of a similar creative mindset:

**ANDERS SUNNA:** *Well, it's not like I think, 'this I will make for these people.' It's more like, 'I am doing this for me, but I have to get it out.' And I don't care what other people think of me or my art, because then I am not free anymore. Because then I am like a puppet, I have to do what is 'in' in the art scene or...[do what] many people do, like special trends or whatever. Yeah, but if they react – if they feel that this is something uplifting for them – it's good, but I have to work from my inside and out.*

I believe these answers speak to art and film as powerful avenues for centralising unique individual perspectives, without necessarily placing the filmmaker at the focus of the story narrative. Filmmaker Marja Bål Nango explicates further on this concept:

**MARJA BÅL NANGO:** *I think you reveal a lot about yourself. I experience this a lot, when I make a film, everyone thinks I'm making a film about myself. People say, 'Oh, that's about you. Hilbes Biigá is about you, Julletrollet is about you...' It's not about me personally, but it [reflects] a worldview I have. It goes through the filter of me, and what I think and feel, and what is in my thoughts and my heart.*

On the other hand, Marja states:

**MARJA BÅL NANGO:** *I make films for my people. I'm always very determined that I want the Sámi audience to think it's made specifically for them. And I want the non-Sámi audience to think it's specifically made for everyone.*

Filmmaker, producer, comedienne, and writer Sara Margrethe Oskal said precisely the same thing: "I make films for my people." Similarly, filmmaker and comedian Per Josef (P.J.) Idivuoma stated, "My films and videos are pretty much made for one audience. They like that I'm not making movies for the Swedes. I'm making movies for the Sámi."

Based on these conversations as well as my own observations in the field and in written research, I believe that the artistic intent of these filmmakers lies in a somewhat complex epistemological arena that traverses the political and the personal. From the candid input of these creators we can ascertain that there is a certain type of artistic catharsis associated with making and producing these films; as Anders puts it: "I have to get it out." For some of these filmmakers, this type of catharsis exists in a sphere of intent that is principally or consciously individual. For others, it is both personal and public; in other words, the films are presented through, as Marja puts it, "a filter of [the filmmaker]," but are also considered as being made for audiences with a particular cultural frame of reference. However, I suggest that, even for those filmmakers who wish to avoid overtly dwelling on audience reception, their work nevertheless has the potential to yield a powerful social impact. For the purposes of this thesis, my intimation here is that these

filmmakers' works can and do contribute to the process of decolonising media by providing access to heterogeneity and individuality in indigenous perspectives. And indeed, hybridity in filmic presentation can be seen as directly antithetical to the colonial agenda. Relevantly, Kahnawake scholar Gerald Taiaiake Alfred states that "imperialism is inherently a process of homogenisation, culturally and politically" (Alfred 2005, p. 248). The theory of decolonisation works in direct opposition to this idea of cultural homogeneity by acknowledging "specific and multiple histories...[which] cannot be collapsed into some pure monolithic and homogenised oppositional essence" (Kapoor 2009, pg. 6). It is here I will suggest that filmmakers do not necessarily need to make deliberately films that are pointedly political or "decolonial" to contribute to more nuanced and humanising narratives regarding indigenous lives and identities. Per-Josef Idivuoma, a Sámi filmmaker from Sweden who heavily employs comedy and satire in his films, made the following statement in that regard:

**PER-JOSEF IDIVUOMA:** *I met a filmmaker once who said something that really stuck with me. He said, 'If you want to send a message, use Western Union.' That really stuck with me. A lot of classical messages are still there in Sámi media: 'we have suffered, we are still suffering'... I think it's good that indigenous filmmakers are doing that, but sometimes you don't always have to send a message. We don't always have to defend our culture. Sometimes we can tear it apart and make fun of it.*

By way of example, P.J.'s film *Ellos Sápmi*, or *Long Live Sápmi*, is one such film that portrays an important historical period in Sámi history through a lens of the filmmaker's characteristic bawdy, comedic style. *Ellos Sápmi* is the story of Klemet, a charismatic womaniser who is deprived of his leadership and betrayed by his own people (Idivuoma 2015). The film aims to relay the truth about what happened when the first Sámi Parliament was formed from a Sámi perspective, as well as through P.J.'s darkly humorous interpretation. In this sense, the film could be perceived as similar in nature and intent to *The Kautokeino Rebellion* in that it offers a rare and distinct indigenous perspective on historical events, which are so often expressed from the perspective of the majority. To that end, the co-writer of *Ellos Sápmi* is Niilas A. Somby, a political rights activist, journalist, and photographer who lost his arm during a sabotage bombing action at one of seven hunger



strikes during the Alta Affair, meaning the audience has access to a story that truly reflects the perspective of those who lived through the historical events being chronicled (Idivuoma 2015). However, while *The Kautokeino Rebellion* is quite grave and sentimental, *Ellos Sápmi* is full of raunchy jokes and self-deprecating humour that is particularly effective and relatable to Sámi audiences. I first saw *Ellos Sápmi* at the Arctic Film Festival in Leeds, UK back in 2015, and while I thoroughly enjoyed it (as I have enjoyed all of P.J.'s films, including the short *Boom Boom* [2018], which follows two Sámi as they aid a sabotage mission in Nazi-occupied Norway, and *Curte-Niillas* [2010], a very humorous short film that depicts the misadventures of a bumbling Sámi superhero), some of the jokes flew over my head at the time. However, many moments were met with much raucous laughter from the Sámi members of the crowd, even though the film depicts a rather serious and pivotal time in Sámi history. This discussion leads me to the following question: though the themes of *Ellos Sápmi* involve efforts to decolonise indigenous territories, does it truly contribute to the decolonial endeavour with its lighthearted and self-effacing approach to historical events? I would say yes, it can and it does. Again, like *The Kautokeino Rebellion*, the film depicts the events that led to the establishment of the Sámi Parliament from a Sámi perspective, regardless of what tone that perspective takes on. In my view, it is still a Sámi film and tells a story from a Sámi view, as opposed to a colonial or an outsider's view.

Sámi filmmaker from Norway Egil Pedersen echoed similar sentiments to P.J. during our interview, citing an interest in seeing and creating a greater breadth of storytelling styles and techniques in the Sámi film repertoire.

**EGIL PEDERSEN:** *The Sámi Film Institute is very supportive – because my feature film [author note: he is referring to his current work-in-progress] is not about these kinds of Sámi issues like colonization. They say it's good that you have some films that are not about these things. Of course, it's important to tell about these things like colonisation and indigenous identity, but these stories are told many times...I'd like to see a Sámi action film, or a horror film. And I think that would be important for the Sámi community.*

Egil Pedersen's 2015 film, *The Afflicted Animal*, serves as a portrait of a dysfunctional family and wouldn't necessarily be identifiable as a "Sámi film" if it weren't for the setting, which displays reindeer herding corrals and a familiar tundra landscape. Leif, the father,

tries to deny the mental illness of his wife Agnes, who remains unresponsive in bed, whilst their youngest daughter Ida is very much aware that her father wants a way out. When one of their dogs falls ill, Ida phones Eva, the vet, who was Leif's girlfriend before he met Agnes. Leif wants to rendezvous with Eva the following evening and attempts to conceal this from Ida, but she is a sensitive and perceptive child who knows who Leif is going to spend his evening with. Ida is conflicted; on the one hand, she wants Leif to stay and be a responsible partner and father, but on the other hand, she wants him to be happy with Eva. This is a dark, complex relationship-oriented story, centered on a young girl who has her desires split in two (Idivuoma 2015). It could be argued that *The Afflicted Animal* is a rather universal story, relatable to almost anyone who has experienced or observed familial strife or upset. Thus, *The Afflicted Animal* could easily establish emotional connectivity among a broad swathe of audiences and demographics, and by doing so reinforce the fundamental humanity and relatability of the Sámi people as just that – as people. *The Afflicted Animal* does not make any explicit commentary regarding colonialism or decolonisation at all; it is instead an emotionally complex family parable about a family that happens to be Sámi. However, I suggest that it could be perceived as a story that contributes to the decolonial endeavour simply by, again, establishing Sámi characters as complex, emotional individuals to be empathised with, rather than arcane, shamanic figures or impoverished slum-dwellers, stereotypes that overwhelmingly populate majority media regarding indigenous peoples.

As has been previously discussed, it is important to remember the danger that lies in constructing indigenous reality as a strictly anti-colonial enterprise, which can be similarly reductive. This is where film enters to articulate difference in a manner that is inherently decolonial without framing indigenous identities strictly within the framework of anti-imperialist insurgence. Each film is an articulation and fortification of individual creative thought, while still rooted in that individual's cultural identity. Elle Sofe Sara Henriksen speaks further to this concept:

**ELLE SOFE SARA HENRIKSEN:** *It's not something I think about, but you know, every artist probably...I work very much from my own perspective. That's kind of what gives me a reason to do things, to come from where I come from – in every identity I have as a female, my age*

*group, or as a Sámi, or as an indigenous, so it comes naturally. If I initiate projects myself, it will be from that perspective.*

Elle Sofe Sara suggests here that, while her identity as an indigenous woman is an intrinsic part of her creative process, it is perhaps more intuitive than deliberate. In other words, her art is chiefly a statement of personal intent rather than of her politics, though the political is enmeshed with her indigenous identity. Indeed, it is clear through the corpus of Elle Sofe Sara's works that many of her short art films, which lie at the intersection of dance, movement, music, and storytelling, draw explicit inspiration from her heritage. Examples include *Gittu gittu (Thank you Lord)*, which interprets a time in which many Sámi churchgoers would participate in Læstadian trance dances, and *Sámi Boja (Sámi Boy)*, which addresses mental health and suicidal ideation in Sámi youth through the lens of reindeer herding (Henriksen 2019, 2015).

With support from these interviews, I have emphasised here the intricate relationship between personal and public intent in indigenous filmmaking. An inquiry that follows naturally from this discussion deals with a paradigm often referenced in literature regarding indigenous media: the burden of representation. I intentionally presented the question regarding the filmmakers' perceived audiences (i.e. "who are these films for?") in a fairly open-ended manner before presenting an inquiry dealing directly with the burden of representation. I did not want to insinuate that they necessarily *should* feel a burden before asking them about their individual intent when creating their films. Interestingly, the answers to the questions regarding representation were complex in a way that was similar to their answers to the inquiry regarding their audience and intent. Before explicating on this further, I will briefly address the concept of the "burden of representation" and what it means for filmmakers in a theoretical sense.

Film scholars Shohatt and Stam suggest that, when considering films by or about historically marginalised cultures, a "burden of representation" is inherent upon the makers of such works. This burden reflects an expectation in public viewership of indigenous filmmakers to either outright refute or validate pervasive stereotypes in cultural and social production. In the former circumstance, the burden of representation asks that indigenous filmmakers "[develop] complex characters and rich personal stories that challenge traditional historical and film narratives, which have generally focused on Eurocentric

history and appealed to [non-indigenous] audiences” (Hicks et al 2014, pg. 13). In this chapter, I have explored a couple of my informant’s films briefly (*Ellos Sápmi* and *The Afflicted Animal*), which I believe achieve these ends. In a media context, the burden of representation emerges from a pervasive history of non-representation or inaccurate representation in film. When presented as characters, indigenous peoples in film are “too often...viewed as existing only in the past; [reflecting] a virtual extinction of groups such as American Indians at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century” (Ibid 2014, pg. 9). Consequently, there is a greater connotative weight on films about marginalised groups, such as Native Americans, Sámi peoples, and other indigenous groups, in terms of the stereotypes they pervade or challenge in the portrayal of such communities. This paradigm exists in stark contrast to films portraying primarily non-indigenous or non-minority characters and cultures, in which representation becomes a virtual afterthought because of the great breadth and diversity of portrayals that already exist in the cinema sphere. In keeping with this theory, at the commencement of the Indigenous Media Symposium in New York City in 2014, Native American activist Jarrett Martineau made the following declaration:

Everything that [indigenous people] do is political, everything that we do is already informed by the fact that there is a background of being colonised people, of being dispossessed of our lands, territories, life ways, and forms of creativity. So indigenous media is always working in some capacity to address the reality of the need that we have to decolonise, [and] to represent ourselves in our own terms, not as vanishing but as present, continuing and strong people (as quoted in Sonza 2018, pg. 1).

I quote Martineau here because he has been quoted overwhelmingly in literature regarding indigenous media, both in news media and in literary analysis, indicating to me that many indigenous individuals relate to his statement. Martineau’s assertion indicates that, for many indigenous creatives, there exists a pervasive social pressure to advocate for and represent themselves culturally through the arts and media. In the context of Sámi history, and based on everything I have researched in relationship to decolonisation, I had initially anticipated that my informants might strongly echo these sentiments. Instead, the majority of my informants described this “burden of representation” as ascribed to

indigenous creators as present, but not overwhelmingly influential in their personal artistic processes. At least, according to their personal accounts, they did not wish to pointedly dwell on the politics of representation, in a similar way that they did not generally wish to concern themselves excessively about audience reactions.

**ELLE SOFE SARA HENRIKSEN:** *I don't know if I feel that so much...the pressure [or burden]. For example, with Sámi Boja [author note: referring to Elle Sofe Sara's short film] and the suicide issue, I have to be aware of how I talk about that. I was a lot interviewed by radio and things like that. So I don't go out saying, 'Yeah, it's all like that, there's so much suicide, I know everything.' I don't come with accusations or the answers. I can say that, yeah, I chose to make this film because I think it's important and it's very relevant for our society and I have looked into this perspective of that. So it's more how you talk about it. If I were to say to a national newspaper that Sámi people have so much suicide, that would be the topic, like the headline or something. I think it's important to be aware of how you speak about it, so it's not like every Sámi person has this opinion. But you try to put the nuances in every time you speak about things that can potentially be twisted.*

I found Elle Sofe Sara's answer particularly interesting in that she opens her statement by asserting that she doesn't feel pressures related to representation that powerfully. However, she also acknowledges and demonstrates clear awareness of the ways in which contentious issues, specifically related to topics like suicide in Sámi communities, might be consumed or interpreted from media sources. I believe her answer speaks to the complexity and somewhat paradoxical nature of the representation issue; on the one hand, the Sámi filmmakers I spoke to demonstrate an astute consciousness of the ways in which their work might be interpreted as depictive of certain cultural aspects in the Sámi world. On the other hand, most of them refute the idea that these representational pressures influence their artistic processes, at least on a conscious level.

**ANDERS SUNNA:** *I don't think about it. I don't care... People can think what they want, I don't really care. I don't feel the pressure. But it's different with me because it's like, if you've lost everything, you don't have anything more to lose. And you don't have any more pressure. So it's both good and bad. I hope you understand my meaning.*

It is worth noting here that Anders's reference to having "lost everything" emerges from a very particular context related to an ongoing situation between the Swedish state and his family. In Chapter 5, he will explicate upon these circumstances in his own words. For now, I will turn to Egil Pedersen, who offers an interesting perspective on the matter of the burden of representation, contextualised in the history of Sámi film and indigenous advocacy.

**EGIL PEDERSEN:** *In the early stage, when a nation or a group of people doesn't have a developed culture [or industry] – like, for Sámi, there are only like five feature films since 1985 – when you have a small culture, each film becomes more important. Because it's like, 'oh finally, a Sámi feature film! It's been five years since last time!' You can feel this responsibility, like, we have to address these big Sámi issues. But now there have been so many films, so I don't feel any pressure about it. But I also think, in the early stage of a culture, you have to 'show the flag,' like, 'here we are.' You make films about colonisation and identity, and it's very important to show who you are. But then you want to tell other kinds of stories. We are normal people with the same problems, like the rest of the universe. But then we have a different language and different cultural parameters that make things just a little bit different. But I don't feel that pressure.*

Sámi filmmaker, visual artist, and animator Inga-Wiktoria Påve speaks in regard to the burden of representation in a more generalised sense:

**INGA-WIKTORIA PÅVE:** *I sort of do and I sort of don't [feel the burden]. A lot of people talk about [it] – like, in the Sámi community, there are some people who say we should always wear gákti whenever the occasion is. And some people say you shouldn't do that, because we don't want to exoticise ourselves to other people. We want to show we're just like everyone else. So whenever I am in these sort of places where you have to represent the Sámi people somehow, then I kind of chose to wear the gákti, because even though it may feel like a burden, it's still a way to showing yourself, that you're proud of being the way that you are. You have to take some questioning from people who don't understand, but there are a lot of things I don't understand about the world, so... My way of viewing it is that, like*

*if you have the argument that you are not going to put the gákti on, because you want to show that you're just like everyone else...I think if you do that, and really try to get this point through that you are just like everyone else, in the end that just means that the Swedish governments and the Norwegian governments succeeded. They made us feel like we are Swedes and Norwegians. In fact, we are not that. We are a whole other culture and language. So why not just be proud of it?*

Though Inga-Wiktoria speaks about the burden of representation in a context outside of film and media, I believe her statement – alongside the insights of other filmmakers – offers significant discernment into how Sámi peoples are negotiating with social pressures to exemplify and convey their indigenous identities. I note that Inga-Wiktoria characterises the pressure of indigenous representation as present and sometimes burdensome, but in general she recategorises the concept into something that is more positive than I initially expected. I observed a similar attitude coming from several Sámi filmmakers. For example, at the *Skábmagovat* Film Festival Panel entitled *From the Arctic, with Decolonial Love*, artist, composer, director, producer, and filmmaker Elle Márja Eira optimistically described film as laden with opportunity for hybrid representations of Sámi lives, stories, and interests.

**ELLE MÁRJA EIRA:** *In Sápmi, there are so many stories that have never been told. I feel we are in a gold mine! We need to have our own perspectives – not HBO, not YouTube – more connected to our own reality.*

Related to all this, I noticed that many of these filmmakers explicate on a desire to pointedly address concepts that might be considered “taboo” in personal and professional company *despite* described social pressures to remain silent on these issues. In other words, many filmmakers seemed to seek out and celebrate opportunities to exemplify aspects of their culture that were not ordinarily represented in media for the purposes of creating whole and humanising perspectives on Sámi people. “I try to dig at hard issues,” explained Sara Margrethe Oskal. “My goal is to make films that...touch people.” Elle Márja Eira cited similar motivations at the *From the Arctic with Decolonial Love* panel at the *Skábmagovat* Sámi Film Festival in Inari, Finland: “My approach is digging into people.” She also described

the topics she finds most interesting in films as those pertaining to the inner life of the individual and relationships, “things you would write in a diary.” With that being said, these interests certainly do not preclude Elle Márjá from addressing in depth the political dimensions of life as a Sámi person through her films. At *Skábmagovat*, the audience enjoyed the brash and dynamic short trilogy *The Sámi Have Rights*, which addresses “Norway’s shame” in its historical treatment of Sámi people (Eira n.d, pg. 1). In it, four Sámi women explore past, present, and future activist movements in *Sápmi*, and sing an anthem about the strength and resilience of their people. *The Sámi Have Rights* started as an art exhibition in 2018 and has expanded to three short films and music videos. Elle Márjá is working on this project with her sister, Mai-Lis Eira, also a director and artist. Both Elle Márjá and Mai-Lis belong to the reindeer herding district 26 Lákkonjára in Northern Norway (The Sámi Have Rights n.d.).

Elle Márjá is also well-known for the dark, poetic film *Burning Sun*, which chronicles a frightening encounter between a Sámi woman and two priests. In *Burning Sun*, the young woman Májjen wears a special hat, a traditional Sámi piece, like all the women in her village. However, Christian missionaries decry the garment as being evil because it reminds them of the horns of the devil. After attempting to flee the missionaries, Májjen is eventually captured by boat. After a struggle, she chooses to drown rather than give up her hat and thus rejecting her cultural identity (Eira 2015). Indeed, while the trilogy *The Sámi Have Rights* and *Burning Sun* all deal with issues related to the vestiges of colonial supremacy in Norway, they do so in a deeply personal sense, centralising the views of the Sámi individuals in a profoundly emotional way rather than simply chronicling events and stories from an observational perspective.

In any case, rather than acting on public pressure to address complex and perhaps controversial issues, it appears that many of these filmmakers are doing so as a personal desideratum. Marja Bål Nango explicated on this idea when discussing her upcoming short film.

**MARJA BÅL NANGO:** *For example, my newest film Tongues – it is about a rape – it is not only about a rape – but a rape happens in the film. I don’t think this has been made in Sámi film yet, because they are afraid how their families will react. How will their community or village react? That’s a choice I have. I could also say, ‘I cannot do it.’*



She continues:

**MARJA BÅL NANGO:** *I am very curious about the reception of the next one [author note: referring to *Tongues*]. It's very different from all the other films. It's more layered and more behind-the-view to interpret what you see.*

Elle Sofe Sara Henriksen made remarkably similar comments to Marja when discussing a current project of hers:

**ELLE SOFE SARA HENRIKSEN:** *Now I am working with Sápmi to study the statistics of women who have experienced violence in the Sámi community. I think it's very important to bring those topics up, because it is difficult to talk about that. I think film and art can be a way of looking at that in a new perspective or just be reminded – 'oh yes' – so that we can get a little more aware. I think it's kind of like...you can't change a society like that, but you can start to become more aware of, for example, suicide or rape culture, heavy topics like that. And also, last year, I have really gone through this... 'Am I going to continue to do this with art?' And it was kind of a big thing for me personally. And I kind of landed in, 'okay, yes, but then I shall do only what is the most important.'*

Through these observations, I do not mean to imply that Jared Martineau's statement regarding the burden of representation for indigenous creators is incorrect. Indeed, it is clear from the statements of many of these artists that, though many of them wish to avoid dwelling on the idea of public reception for the benefit of artistic freedom, they do in fact perceive social pressures to visually and conceptually exemplify their indigenous identities and, alternatively, stay quiet or speak out on certain relevant social issues. Further, according to filmmaker, producer, and *Skábmagovat* Film Festival Director Sunna Nousuniemi, there does exist some anxiety in the Sámi media sphere, that “the non-indigenous public [will] create new stereotypes” based on information gleaned or misinterpreted from new public representations. However, many of these filmmakers appear to be engaging in a theoretical reconceptualisation of these social “burdens” for the purposes of their art. Based on my discussions, I have ascertained that the burden of

representation and its relationship to film lies in a somewhat paradoxical epistemic sphere. On the one hand, the filmic product being made becomes inextricable from political and social identity. On the other hand, the process of making and distributing the film is involved with a cathartic, individualistic *release* from social pressures without disengaging with them. “Perhaps,” ponders Leuthold, “the transformation that takes place in Native art...is a *response* to negative social pressures. Does entering the state of mind of a dancer or painter (author note: or here, a filmmaker) *release* a person from social pain and responsibility?” (Leuthold 1998, pg. 190).

Leuthold’s characterisation of art as a release from negative social pressures followed me throughout my time in Norway and framed much of my cognitive orientation surrounding the topic of representation. However, based on discussions with my informants, it became clear to me that I might be characterising this quotation incorrectly. Initially, I believed that a release from social pressures meant a total rejection of or rebellion against social mores for the purposes of individual artistic catharsis. In other words, I hypothesised that some filmmakers might wish to reject the social pressure to represent or exemplify aspects of their culture entirely. Instead, it seems that many of these artists are eager to negotiate their individuality alongside cultural representation in honest, new, and constructive ways. In that context, the “release” from social pressures Leuthold describes may instead be more aptly characterized as a “response,” or liberation from social pressures through narrative innovation and active engagement rather than dismissal. Related to this, I often heard and sensed a prevailing desire for many filmmakers to tell a broader array of truths about their own lives and culture. Marja Bål Nango, for example, emphasises the importance of showing a variety of facets of Sámi culture:

**MARJA BÅL NANGO:** *To understand our view of the world, you have to show both good and bad. You cannot just say, ‘Sámi culture is great because of this and this.’ You have to say how it’s also good because of the bad stuff; that makes up our culture as well. Just like any other culture...like how you talked earlier about how Americans eat too much sugar. If you only said, ‘America is the best!’ I would think you’re really wrapped up in your own head. But you just saying that little commentary about your own country shows me that you have perspective, you see both good and bad. If you only tell me good stuff, it is not believable. You cannot only show what you want people to see. That’s what I think is the most*

*challenging part of Sámi film. Why don't we choose to show anything else outside of certain things?*

Marja emphasises the importance of candor and perspective in terms of addressing both positive and negative cultural aspects in film in order to create whole and human narratives of Sámi lives. From my perspective, Marja did not appear to characterise this as a burden, but instead as a necessity, and again, an opportunity for more holistic and empathetic representations of Sámi peoples in media. Instead of describing the ways in which she feels pressured to address and convey social issues and concepts relevant to her cultural (and individual) frames of reference, like many of the filmmakers I spoke to, Marja asserts a *desire* to make films relevant to and representative of Sámi audiences.

At the *Skábmagovat* Film Festival, Sunna Nousuniemi described the ability of film to counter self-doubt and loss of indigenous identity as “the power of cinema. Filmmaking is a process of self-identification. We are reintroducing us to us.” In keeping with Leuthold’s paradigm of artistic catharsis, I believe this statement keenly indicates an important aspect of the relationship between Sámi film and social burdens or pressures of representation. For decades, Sámi culture, livelihoods, and language were systematically repressed and categorised as inferior and/or extraneous. The colonial agenda in the Nordic states (and more specifically for the context of my thesis, in Norway) disadvantaged the Sámi population by suppressing their epistemologies and histories, ultimately creating an atmosphere in which Sámi people were influenced to conceive of themselves as less valuable than their majority counterparts. These injurious colonial paradigms have infiltrated and been perpetuated within mainstream media. It can be hypothesised that the political nature of indigenous media emerges in a highly multifaceted context; first, indigenous film can facilitate or catalyse a re-education of sorts on the part of non-indigenous viewers regarding indigenous contemporary identities. Put another way, indigenous realities and perspectives have been categorically excluded from historical records and media, creating an exceedingly narrow lens through which outsiders can understand events and engagements between indigenous and non-indigenous peoples. Indigenous film can serve to broaden this lens. However, based on my observations and discussions, the education of the majority Nordic cultures (or other majority cultures) regarding Sámi life and culture is not necessarily a primary motivator for these filmmakers,

though it is a perceived benefit. Instead, the primary motivator behind indigenous filmmaking in the contemporary cinematic community appears to be related more closely to how indigenous communities are able to create and consume narratives more aligned with their own realities.

Indeed, in recent years, film has offered one of many avenues through which Sámi people have been able to reconceptualise their identities, their lives, and their values through broader, humanistic representation. According to Sunna Nousuniemi and several of the other filmmakers, cinema provides an opportunity for Sámi creators *and* viewers to free themselves from the conceptual parameters of colonialism and represent themselves on their own terms. This happens in a two-fold manner; on the one hand, art provides filmmakers with a medium to express themselves freely, without necessarily or directly addressing the decolonial discourse. On the other hand, Sámi filmmakers may choose to engage with their colonial history and directly counter the negative messages imperialism has embedded with regard to indigenous identity. Either way, the emphasis here is on agency in narrative, which allows Sámi filmmakers to, as Sunna puts it, “[reintroduce] us to us.” Another emphasis is on hybridity and multiplicity of individual perspectives, which inherently challenges the colonial idea of indigenous peoples as simplistic, homogenous, and monolithic. All these aspects contribute to a film and arts culture in *Sápmi* that is laden with potential for Sámi peoples to negotiate with and liberate themselves from the various social pressures that have trickled down throughout history, specifically those that are related to a pervasive imperialist history.

### **Silence in *Sápmi***

With this all being said, it is important to note that colonial forces and their vestiges do not exclusively create the only social burdens Sámi filmmakers must negotiate. As Marja described earlier, there exist some pervasive social pressures within Sámi society to stay silent on certain social issues. At the *Skábmagovat* Film Festival, Sunna Nousuniemi described a desire to vocalise and express indigenous identity through media as emerging in part in response to a “culture of silence” in *Sápmi*. This is a complex issue, one which necessitates a discussion regarding where the social pressures related to silence stem from.

**MARJA BÅL NANGO:** *The Sámi way of speaking – I don't know if you have experienced it – but a lot of Sámis don't talk so directly, for example, they have a way of talking around subjects. And there is a historical reason for that – you know, when we gave straight answers to the government, we lost things. They ask how many reindeers you have, and you have to pay taxes to two or three different countries or kings, so we learned that it's not a good thing to give straight answers.*

As Marja validates, silence is a “natural and integrative part of...daily communication” in many indigenous cultures, including Sámi culture (Heinäsmäki et al 2017, pg. 116). The utilisation and maintenance of secrecy in Sámi society is predicated on the fact that certain knowledge has spiritual, ecological, identity-related, economic, and other substantive aspects that must be protected in some form. This is particularly true in terms of traditional knowledge, which is often highly personalised, learned through observations, practices, experiences, and activities, and usually familial, as in passed down from one's elder relatives (Guttorm 2011). Further, this knowledge is often based on tacit understandings that would be difficult to explain or make visible to outsiders. “There are things that are codes in our culture that are not spoken out loud,” explains Marja. Inga-Wiktoria Påve agrees:

**INGA-WIKTORIA PÅVE:** *[In Sámi culture] some things do have a code; they mean this or that. And you kind of just have to be humble to the fact that you won't know everything.*

While I will be discussing the injurious impact of silence in Sámi culture, it is important to note that the reason for the pervasiveness of this silence is complex, and not entirely negative. In fact, in the Sámi world, there exists an idea called *jávohisvuohta*, referring to “a specific form of [silent] opposition, which has been part of the Sámi tradition for several generations” (Lehtola 2019, pg. 33). It speaks to the notion that, in Sámi culture, silence is indicative of withholding consent, rather than placid acceptance of any given circumstance. Further to this, silence is perceived as an act of wisdom in a situation in which, as Sarre (1929) puts it, “the voice of a mosquito does not carry up to heaven,” referring specifically to instances in which Sámi people have had to deal with State policymakers (as quoted in Ibid 2019, pg. 33). The Sámi culture of silence also indicates a

very specific strategy or attitude of endurance, called *birgen* in North Sámi, which means “to get along” or “to cope with” (Ibid 2019, pg. 33). As opposed to indicating victimhood, this concept emphasises active survival, and speaks to the values of “independence, coping with difficulties without complaint, and taking responsibility for one’s actions” (Ibid 2019, pg. 33).

The evasive and clandestine strategies that have been characteristic of Sámi dealings with majority cultures for several generations indicate that Sámi people have influenced the policies and administrations of majority cultures more than has been previously believed or reported upon. Some historical documents allude to this. In a statement written by E.N. Manninen, an Utsjoki county constable in the late 1920s, the newly nominated official suggested that “[the Sámi] of Utsjoki hold their ground with persistence and...remarkable cunning – They outwit Finns and Norwegians whenever they can – that’s the unwritten law of a [Sámi], an instinct” (as quoted in Lehtola 2019, pg. 33). He also noted that, when he moved from the neighbourhood and gave away some of his items, “nothing was more in demand than my old law books,” indicating the Utsjoki Sami as “enlightened politically and socially” (as quoted in in Lehtola 2019, pg. 33). Lehtola suggests that this form of wisdom constitutes a “a double agency, which was reflected in the ostensible compliance and consent of the Sámi toward official demands – but when the eyes of the opposing party were turned away, the Sámi carried out their own will at once as planned” (Lehtola 2019, pg. 32). Anders Sunna described an example of this to me. He and his family simply “did not accept that [the State] had forbidden our reindeer. So we just kept going, because we know we have rights” (to reiterate, the specifics of Anders’s familial and political situation will be outlined specifically in his own words in Chapter 5).

To compensate for a lack of administrative power, Sámi people have historically engaged with more subtle forms of resistance, which have been described as “stubborn endurance to ensure collective survival in the midst of severe oppression, within a limited public space for independent political activities” (Bartkowski 2013, pg. 15). As such, much resistance has been ideological, containing “hidden transcripts, e.g. rituals of aggression, tales of revenge, or subcultures and myths...means that seem to fit with the Sámi context” (Lehtola 2019, pg. 30). Of course, these types of resistances are not as easily recognisable to the everyday observer, particularly the outsider, and that is indeed part of the survival strategy. This perspective of subtle resistance sheds light on a new perspective of the Sámi-majority culture relationship paradigm. The fact that Sámi people have had hardly any wider

conflicts with majority populations (aside from a few very notable examples, including the Kautokeino Rebellion and the Alta Conflict), does not mean that Sámi people have been “submissive children of nature, easy to keep in law and order,” as some majority government organisations would have historically preferred to believe. Their “means of influence,” asserts Lehtola, “was just different” (Ibid 2019, pg. 35).

On the other hand, an old proverb from Inari (Finland) dictates that “a silent one is not offered even water” (Lehtola 2019, pg. 32). While both *jávohisvuotta* and the social norm of *birgen* have historically been utilised as both evasive and conservative strategies of defiance in Sámi culture, they can, as Rasmus puts it, “create unresolved traumas when leading people to ignore or deny oppressive and painful experiences in exaggerated ways” (Rasmus 2008, pg. 94). This phenomenon has a specific word in Northern Sámi, called *birgenbágg*, which refers to a certain type of social behaviour in which Sámi individuals may feel a “compulsory need to get along without any help from anywhere,” leading to feelings of being overwhelmed and isolated (Lehtola 2019, pg. 33).

While silence has served its purpose (and continues to do so) as an effective coping strategy in the context of Sámi-majority culture relationships particularly, throughout my fieldwork conversations it became clear that it is the deliberate and/or implicit silencing of indigenous cultural narratives by way of assimilation and acculturation that contributes heavily to internalised colonisation. According to my informants, silence can indeed be a route of transmission for the injurious effects of colonial oppression, specifically when there exists an overwhelmingly anti-indigenous social structure or epistemology and minimal vocal opposition.

“That’s something you will never hear Sámi people talk about or question, because it’s all about, ‘we are in solidarity with each other...’ But I have never experienced that,” explains Anders Sunna, referring to the challenges his family has encountered in receiving community support in the midst of legal encounters with the Swedish Parliament. “But it’s having a lot to do with the colonial structure.” For Sunna, art has provided a powerful avenue for speaking out and making his family’s voices heard. “I made [my art] political because...nobody was listening to us. We had been demonstrating, we had been meeting up with politicians and writing to all kinds of different news channels and journalists, we tried everything except art. So that was the best way to get out with the problems...to show they exist, and to try to get our voice heard better.”

Anders's experience speaks to a broader desire, particularly in the artistic communities in the Sámi world, to challenge a type of social silence that allows forms of internalised oppression to pervade in indigenous communities. "Successful colonisation," Sunna Nousuniemi explained at the *Skábmagovat* Film Festival, "occurs when you don't have to actively participate in a community perpetuating self-hate anymore." An integral element of the remedy for these social ills, she continued, involves voicing and reclaiming narratives, allowing indigenous peoples to define themselves and address their societal concerns on their own terms, thereby challenging that "culture of silence." In her Master's thesis addressing interpersonal violence and health in Northern Norway, Eriksen describes the relief and liberation associated with speaking out as a Sámi woman.

In the following public discussion about violence within the Sami community, a comment made by the director of the Árran Lulesami Centre in Tysfjord, stood forth: 'As a musician and as a listener I have heard the most beautiful sound of all, the sound of silence that bursts.' As a Sámi woman, I find that his words capture the essence of the past and present situation, and describe my sentiments exactly (Eriksen 2017, pg. 16).

The "bursting" of the type of silence that does not serve the Sámi people can be understood as a form of catharsis, which can be achieved in many ways, not least of which is artistic expression. My suggestion is that film has the potential to manifest a marriage of two concepts that both serve to: first, challenge the silence through visual and vocal narrative and, secondly, heal the consequences of that silence and other aspects perpetuating internalised colonisation through artistic catharsis.

Here I will briefly address a short film that profoundly affected me when I saw it and which is part of an ongoing film project by Liselotte Wajstedt titled *The Silence in Sápmi*. Like Elle Sofe Sara Henriksen and Marja Bål Nango, Liselotte cites a profound desire to address what is often overlooked in Sámi society; namely, issues related to violence, suicide, sexual abuse, and mental illness among young people, and what can be done to go about bringing change (Vaja Productions n.d.). *Jorinda's Resa* (2014) is a tender coming-of-age art film chronicling the journey of a young girl on the cusp of womanhood, taking place in a lush mountainous landscape. At the beginning of the film, Jorinda encounters a snowstorm,



which is personified by a group of women standing in the snow with their hair, skin, and gowns all painted white, in stark contrast to their gaping, pitch-black open mouths which make them appear as if they are silently howling. A tangle of red thread flashes before the camera as Jorinda collapses in the road. The screen suddenly displays the words “one day earlier.” Jorinda explains to the listener that she is seventeen, from Guovdageaidnu, and lives in a white house by the river. She is roaming, hitchhiking outside of her village, and she stops in a nearby café to pick up some coffee. She picks up a newspaper that states: “Tripling of sex opportunities: the social services in Kautokeino have known for years that men buy sex from young girls...” Fittingly, an older man harasses a woman working at the café in the background; Jorinda ignores them. Next, a man eating lunch leers at Jorinda from behind. She meets him outside of the café and gets into his van with him as ominous music plays, indicating that she has been propositioned. Next, we see a woman in a black dress, her skin painted stark white, howling silently amidst the trees and clawing fruitlessly at her heart. Then we see Jorinda standing at the shore, mascara running tracks on her face as she places money in her jacket pocket (Wajstedt 2014).

A tan car pulls up to Jorinda as she continues to hitchhike. The driver is a woman. Jorinda explains that she is going back to Guovdageaidnu, to which the woman replies, “That village used to be almost magic. Everyone wanted to go there. But now an evil seems to come from there...” Jorinda agrees. Neither party elaborates on what the woman means. Next, we see Jorinda walking through the streets of what appears to be Guovdageaidnu, tearing her scarf off as a tangle of red thread displays in front of the screen once more. Suddenly, Jorinda encounters the howling white women, the snowstorm the audience saw at the beginning of the film. She collapses. A voice tells her, “Wake up, you can’t fall asleep now, Jorinda.” Jorinda replies, “Granny, I don’t know where I am. I can’t feel anything.” A car stops to retrieve Jorinda off of the road. Suddenly, we are presented with a scene of a woman who appears to be Jorinda’s grandmother washing the young girl’s feet as she sways in a rocking chair. “Long ago, my angel, long ago the earth was created from a lingonberry, and God decided that women can manage on their own and also live with men. We breed children and become holy.” The red thread appears again, but now it is untangled and arranged in a tidy circle (Wajstedt 2014).

Liselotte took inspiration from two cultural traditions for this film: Japanese *butoh* dance and Sámi *joik* (Vaja Productions n.d). *Butoh* first appeared post-World War II in Japan

and is characterized by a physical vocabulary of “crude physical gestures and uncouth habits...a direct assault on the refinement (*miyabi*) and understatement (*shibui*) so valued in Japanese aesthetics” (Sanders 1988, pg. 148). *Butoh* is also known as *ankoku butō*, which means “dance of darkness.” Similar to the howling women in Liselotte’s film, *butoh* dancers are often painted white and hang their mouths open in silent but haunting screams. Marja argues that *butoh* and *joik* have much in common: “You don’t dance a dance about something nor do you *joik* about something. Both in *butoh* and the *joik* you step closer to the theme, allowing it to fill you, just dancing it, emptying your ego and allowing whatever you want to express to fill you. You dance something, e.g., a tree, or a form or an emotion” (as quoted in Vaja Productions n.d).

In *Jorinda’s Resa*, Liselotte addresses taboo topics in *Sápmi* in a resonant, haunting way, drawing aesthetic inspiration from her own culture and from Japanese performance art. Ironically, this film is nearly silent with very limited dialogue, and yet I believe it can be perceived as an artwork that “bursts” the silence around social issues that are at once quite universal and very specific to *Sápmi*, including teenage prostitution and mental health concerns. At the end of the film, it seems that Jorinda achieves a sort of catharsis by drawing comfort from the wisdom of her elder, her grandmother, who washes her feet and relays a brief Sámi parable related to the sanctity of the feminine. Through the disentanglement of the thread of her scarf, we come to understand that, at least for a moment, Jorinda has detangled the strands of her confused, cluttered mind. Perhaps the message here is to respect oneself, one’s culture, and one’s ancestors, and all this will yield clarity. Quite remarkable is that the film conveys this message with very little dialogue, and instead relies on a visual language repertoire that is particularly accessible to a Sámi audience. Interestingly, she relates this back to *butoh*. “*Butoh* are the screams never screamed,” Liselotte describes. “The untrodden paths” (as quoted in Vaja Productions n.d).

## Chapter Five: Decolonial Love

In the previous chapter, I discussed visual media in the context of decolonial theory insofar as it relates to the intentionality, individuality, and cultural/personal expression of my Sámi filmmaker informants. I evaluated the ways in which these creators traverse and negotiate the personal and the political in their arts as indigenous peoples. I have also expounded upon the impetus for these negotiations; namely, a social history of colonisation that has produced monolithic and essentialising narratives respective to indigenous identity. Further to this, I have touched on the post-colonial social ills that continue to plague indigenous communities and described the ways in which contemporary visual artists are utilising their works to contribute to narratives that encourage dignity and autonomy in these communities.

Related to this, I have explored the ways in which social pressures both external and internal influence Sámi identities. Most specifically, I discussed the ways in which silence can contribute to internalised colonisation, which, in Lipsky's definition, refers to the "turning upon ourselves, our families, and upon our own people the distress patterns that result from the...oppression of the (dominant) society" (Lipsky 1987, pg. 6). This discussion leads me to the following question: how are Sámi communities actively working to heal from this injurious legacy of social and cultural devaluation? Further, can film and art be contributors to this healing process? Before I address this inquiry more thoroughly through a discussion pertaining to my fieldwork, I must first address the idea of intergenerational trauma in indigenous communities. It is this concept that provides a pivotal context through which we can understand the necessity for "healing from history." I also wish to make a note here that, though colonialism's legacy has yielded clinically validated effects on physical health and wellness in indigenous communities, for the purposes of this thesis I am primarily addressing psychosocial health and healing (Apen et al 2016). I believe that, based on my research, social and cultural psychosocial health are the aspects most applicably addressed by the decolonisation of the mind as it relates to film and fictional storytelling.

## Intergenerational Trauma and the Healing Power of the Indigenous Arts

Inextricable from the idea of healing in indigenous communities is the hypothesis of intergenerational trauma. The theory of intergenerational, transgenerational, and/or historical trauma was conceptualised in the 1960s by psychiatrists who observed significantly high rates of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder diagnoses or associated symptoms in Jewish Holocaust survivors *in addition* to their family members who had not experienced those same distressing events. Researchers was observed that, among the descendants of Holocaust survivors, patients often described themselves as feeling “different or damaged by their parents’ experiences” (Sotero 2006, pg. 17). In a pivotal study assessing three such patients who presented for psychiatric treatment, Rakoff (1966) observed: “The parents are not broken conspicuously, yet their children, all of whom were born after the Holocaust, display severe...symptomatology. It would almost be easier to believe that they, rather than their parents, had suffered the corrupting, searing hell” (as quoted in Lerner & Yehuda 2018, pg. 244). Similarly, a study by Harkness evaluated the intergenerational impact of trauma in the offspring of Vietnam War veterans. Results yielded that comparable trauma-related symptomatology was present in the children of fathers who had served. These included:

Feelings of over-identification and fused identity with parents, impaired self-esteem stemming from minimisation of offspring's own life experiences in comparison to the parental trauma, tendency towards catastrophising, worry that parental traumas would be repeated, and behavioral disturbances such as experiencing anxiety, traumatic nightmares, dysphoria, guilt, hypervigilance and difficulties in interpersonal functioning (Harkness 1993, pg. 635).

In terms of current research, there exists some converging evidence to indicate that historically transmitted intergenerational trauma may yield psychological effects that are heritable through non-genomic (or epigenetic) means. Some researchers have demonstrated interest in the biological mechanisms that underlie the transmission of intergenerational and transgenerational trauma, but explanations related to trauma transmission in families have thus far been primarily psychodynamic and/or behavioural

(related chiefly to attachment theory, social psychology, and learning theory). Similarly, many researchers who have evaluated and analysed the phenomenon of inter- and transgenerational trauma have also noted similar incidences of transmission in broader collective cultural contexts. For example, historical events such as colonisation, slavery, and displacement have been demonstrated to yield observable and consistent trauma-related responses in the formative affected and subsequent generations of many cultures, including and especially First Nations and Native American peoples, African-Americans, Australian Aborigines, and New Zealand Maōri, as well as in societies exposed to genocide, ethnic cleansing, and war, such as Cambodians, Rwandans, and Palestinians. As a result of these findings, in recent decades, the connections between psychosocial health and cultural identity have come to the forefront of scholarly discussions regarding intergenerational responses to traumatic and/or generally impactful historical events (Lerner & Yehuda 2018).

A historical trauma event can be defined as a “community-based incident that [causes] massive upheaval or high levels of distress amongst and within...communities...” (Evans-Campbell et al 2006, p. 160). Though the term “trauma” connotes rather monumental events, I also wish to include here smaller incidents of thinly veiled aggression indigenous peoples (and other demographics that have experienced exposure to collective injurious events based on prejudice) frequently encounter.

For Indigenous peoples, not only are the memories of previous massacres, genocide, dislocation and displacement a part of ancestral heritage but also contemporary traumas persist (e.g., exploitation through natural resource extraction on reservation or sacred land, high rates of violence against women, displacement and forced relocation due to environmental or economic devastation), ongoing experiences of structural inequality (e.g., high rates of unemployment, lack of access to education, housing and safe neighbourhood environments), racial discrimination (e.g., racial profiling by police, being followed while shopping) and daily...microaggressions (Begun & Beltrán 2014, pg. 159).

In terms of smaller forms of culture- or ethnicity-based antagonism, I can provide some examples gleaned from my own fieldwork experiences. I heard anecdotes of Sámi children experiencing harassment for playing sport in open spaces even in Sámi core areas;

specifically, non-Sámi passers-by would swear and yell at the children to speak Norwegian instead of Sámi. I also heard some Norwegians refer to Sámi people as “special,” or “different,” in a way that was seemingly mild but also carried a clear pejorative tone [author note: I also engaged in discussions with Norwegians and Swedes who outright condemned discrimination against Sámi people, but for the purposes of this thesis, the previous observation is important to note]. In the Norwegian newspaper *Nordlys*, I read that, at a Kiwi grocery store in Tromsø, about 650 employees wore what is now known as the infamous Kiwi-*kofte* (with *kofte* being the Norwegian word for *gákti*), a distortion of the Sámi traditional dress in their thematic lime green (Pellicer 2010). This happened nearly ten years ago, but incidents like these are not particularly uncommon; Sámi people still find themselves reminding majority cultures that their traditional wear is not a Halloween costume. Some even pushed back against Sámi peoples’ contention that the Kiwi-*kofte* was inappropriate, claiming that the costume was a “lively and funny invention, and [something] that...the Sámi must endure” [author translation from *NRK Sápmi* article] (Manndal 2010, pg. 1). Events such as these can undergo a cumulative effect and communicate negative messages to Sámi individuals regarding their indigenous identity, possibly impacting the way Sámi adults raise their children and conceptualise their place in society. Effects of cumulative traumas both large and small can include “denial, personalisation, isolation, memory loss, hypervigilance, substance abuse, survivor’s guilt, and/or unresolved grief. [Indigenous individuals] may also share in the ancestral pain of their people through loss of culture and language, as well as through proximate, first-hand experiences of discrimination, injustice, poverty, and social inequality” (Sotero 2006, p. 96). These observations take on particular weight when discussing and evaluating historically situated trauma in an indigenous context.



Fig. 28: Johnson R. (2010) *Kiwis koftestunt vekker reaksjoner* (Kiwi-kofte stunt provokes reaction) [Photograph]. Retrieved from: <https://www.nordlys.no/nyheter/raser-mot-kiwis-koftestunt/s/1-79-5306233>

Indeed, the eminence of intergenerational trauma in these discussions relates intimately to what constitutes some core components of indigenous identity. As Sepie puts it, “identity, for the indigenous, is grounded in their relationships with the land, with their ancestors, and with future generations who will come into being on the land...we are the relationships that we hold and are a part of” (Sepie 2017, pg. 10). When we consider the fact that ancestral and familial ties are of great personal and cultural significance to indigenous peoples, it becomes easy to understand why they would be profoundly impacted by intergenerational/historical traumatic occurrences. In stating this, I do not mean to frame indigenous peoples as pregnable victims of negative cultural experiences. By contrast, in the coming sections I will detail how several of my informants have utilised their arts to cope with and resist culture-based injustices and social oppression productively. I will also highlight the ways in which many of them have pointedly cultivated a sense of pride in their cultural identities as a constructive response to prejudice that has traversed several generations. With that being said, in a Sámi context, we must utilise an indigenous frame of reference to understand how intergenerational social experiences impact individuals and families. Specifically, I am referring to indigenous peoples’ profound connections to their ancestors, their lands, and their familial groups. Further, the idea of historically situated

trauma also provides the theoretical groundwork for a discussion of psychosocial health and healing in an indigenous context.

Of course, the term “trauma” connotes psychosocial injury. Within indigenous communities, a disruptive phenomenon can occur with what Duran and Duran refer to as “internalised colonisation...which occurs when individuals presented with various forms of bio-psycho-social and cultural violence identify with the coloniser” (Begun & Beltrán 2014, pg. 160). The effects of internalised colonisation, as described by Pyke, can include “individual inculcation of the racist stereotypes, values, images, and ideologies perpetuated by the...dominant society about one’s racial group, leading to feelings of self-doubt, disgust, and disrespect for one’s race and/or one’s self” (Pyke 2010, p. 554). Sunna Nousuniemi described this phenomenon concisely at the *Skábmagovat* Film Festival panel: “Successful colonisation occurs when you don’t have to actively participate in a community perpetuating self-hate anymore.” In other words, with internal colonisation aversion to one’s own ethnicity becomes an integrated part of the psychological orientation surrounding indigenous identity. Visual artist and filmmaker Anders Sunna spoke briefly to the necessity of countering this experience during our interview in early 2018:

**ANDERS SUNNA:** *We are so colonised – maybe not everyone – but obviously we are colonised. And some of us talk about how we have to be decolonised...but the problem is that they are trying to decolonise outside, but they don’t want to decolonise the inside first. You have to work from inside and out, and also you have to work from the lowest bottom up.*

When speaking of historical or cultural trauma events transmissible across generations, Anders Sunna’s family situation provides a particularly pertinent example. Anders spoke very candidly to me about the political tumult in which the Sunna family has been embroiled since the early 1930s:

**ANDERS SUNNA:** *In this area, if you own land, you can buy reindeer marks if you are Swedish. You don’t have to be a Sámi to buy reindeer marks in Sweden. And that’s something Sweden never talks about – you can own reindeer marks like as a hobby, just for fun, but it’s really expensive, but rich people can do that. And in this village, you need one person who is a Sámi to take care of his own reindeers, but also to take care of these hobby*



*reindeers. In our case, they [author note: referring to Swedish hobbyists] wanted us to work for free, or to pay them to work for them. And we said, 'no, we are not going to do this,' because you cannot live on it. And the government said that we are troublemakers and 'you need to obey the government.' So they forbade our reindeer marks in 1980. This conflict started in 1971, but [problems] started even further back, in the 1930s. Back then the government accused us of being angry communists. They wanted to get rid of us, but it didn't work, so then they tried again. And in 1986, the police patrol forced us away – forced our reindeers away – and around 1,500 reindeers disappeared in one year from us. During the 80s and 90s, [we had] around three to four hundred police investigations on our family. The police could come to our house and pick my dad or my uncles for questioning, and they would be sitting in the police station for six hours straight. They were interrogating them about trying to 'burn down the forest,' but this is in the middle of the winter, so there is quite a lot of snow. You cannot do it! But they always tried to get rid of us at some point. And the police would be following us when we were herding reindeers, because we did not accept that they had forbidden our reindeer. So we just kept going, because we know we have rights. But when you are fighting a State, the State can always change the law so it fits them. They have the resources to do this. And in 1987, the government built a fence to make sure our reindeers would never come back to our place. It was like thirty kilometers long. They were also threatening other Sámi around the area, and making us an example, like 'if you don't obey us, we will treat you like the Sunna family.' This fence cost like three million Swedish krone to be built, and it was just for one family! So we have no help from the Swedish society, and we don't have help from the Sámi society, so we are blacklisted from all the groups. We are like...the rebel family.*

As Eriksen puts it, “the state has rarely been the friend of people living in remote areas. It bulldozes its way across territories, counting and classifying its inhabitants, collecting taxes and sending people to fight other people’s wars, transforming landscapes and destroying traditional paths of communication...threatening local livelihoods and the very self-esteem of its traditional inhabitants” (Eriksen et al 2019, pg. 67). For several generations, it is clear that the Swedish state and Anders’s family have been fixed in an adversarial relationship. Notably, Anders observes that the situation relates intimately to

the “colonial structure,” as he describes it, both in terms of the Sunna family’s relationship to the State and to Sámi institutions.

**ANDERS SUNNA:** *It’s also [about] how we Sámi people are to each other [author note: he is referencing one of his upcoming film projects]. And that’s something you will never hear Sámi people talk about or question, because it’s all about, ‘we are in solidarity with each other...’ And I have never experienced that...but it’s having a lot to do with the colonial structure.*

Anders also speaks of the ways in which the circumstances previously described impacts his art:

**ANDERS SUNNA:** *At first, I made really colourful paintings, not so political, but after a while I started to change...really slowly. I started to make really political, sort of radical art. I’m inspired by my family and my life, what has happened to our family, but I’m also inspired as to how the colonial power works, and how they are treating minority people. I started to use their own tactics against them, like I said, with paintings...like sneaking them into art spaces, and it went quite good. Also, I made it political because nobody was listening to us. We had been demonstrating, we had been meeting up with politicians and writing to all kinds of different news channels and journalists, we tried everything except art. So that was the best way to get out with the problems...to show they exist, and to try to get our voice heard better.*



Fig. 29: Sunna A. (2014) *Area Infected* [244 x 288 cm]. Retrieved from: <https://anderssunna.com>

Anders also speaks to constructive versus maladaptive responses to culturally related traumatic situations like the circumstances his family has endured, and how he has utilised art as a productive coping mechanism:

**ANDERS SUNNA:** *If you fill up with so much anger and so much frustration, you have to get it out somehow. You cannot carry it around inside of you... The most creative thing you can do – before war – is art, and you can affect more that way without hurting anyone physically. And you feel like you’re getting a sort of revenge by making these art pieces, like these really physical art pieces, not like when I am just sitting down painting or working on something in Photoshop. I want to be really connected – the brain to the hand – because it will have a more human effect on what you are creating.*

Anders also adds, “it’s much more difficult to stop an artist than something else,” illustrating the sense of power and agency associated with the creative process. I suggest that Anders’s observations, in confluence with his previous statement about the necessity of decolonising from the “inside out,” speak relevantly to the role the arts can play in the process of psychosocial decolonisation and healing from trauma events related to vestigial colonial and/or anti-indigenous structures. Film and art in particular are laden with possibilities for decolonising from the “inside out” by 1) facilitating opportunities for new

and nuanced visuals and narratives expressing indigenous lives and stories, and 2) offering productive and cathartic mediums through which its creators *and* viewers can engage in an active and participatory healing process. Pertinently, I will also note here, that, while many studies indicate low self-esteem and shame as common consequences of historical trauma and colonial infrastructure, all of the artists I spoke to seem to have achieved some degree of resistance against narratives that might instigate this kind of cultural ignominy. I have surmised, based on their statements and insights, that their intimate connections to art and culture have been instrumental in facilitating this resilience. Indeed, many of them directly indicated that art has been heavily contributory in expressing and validating their cultural identities and sense of personal pride. Related to this, Elle Sofe Sara Henriksen observes that art has been very influential in the advancement of Sámi political agendas and self-determination in a broader context.

**ELLE SOFE SARA HENRIKSEN:** *We don't have that long [of a] history...if you think of art in a Western perspective. But like in the 70s, with Alta, the artists were very present. I don't know why it is but [art] is a very big part of the Sámi democracy as well. And maybe it's because it's a small society, maybe because it inspires new artists or Sámi artists to understand what influence art can have in political decisions.*

Elle Sofe Sara speaks to the profound connections among social life, politics, history, and the arts in Sámi culture and indicates that these associations constitute an intuitive part of Sámi life (these observations regarding the intersections between Sámi life and art will become particularly relevant when I discuss indigenous theories of aesthetics in Chapter 6). When considering these connections, it is unsurprising that an overwhelming proportion of my informants spoke of significant culture-based events in their family timeline as highly influential to both their artistic works and, more generally, their individual identities. Anders serves as a meaningful example of this. By way of another example, consider Marja Bål Nango, whose lineage stems from two families whose homes were under threat from two massive national development projects:

**MARJA BÅL NANGO:** *I was born in the late 80s, just after this big happening in Norway. You know about the Kautokeino demonstrations? I was born right after that. So I grew up in the*

*aftermath of this, which is a good aftermath. But my uncle, on my father's side, who was one of the demonstrators – even though we viewed them in a good light, the aftermath for them was... They experienced being looked down on for what they chose to do. But I grew up with him as a very strong figure in my life. He was always telling stories about the demonstrations, but also Sámi stories. My grandfather passed away before I was born, but [my uncle] always told stories about my grandfather. I always felt like I knew him from the stories he told. He was a very strong personality also. He taught me to have a very strong stance in moral ethics – do not give up on them, even if you have to go to jail, don't bend because of popular opinion. If you believe something, you have to believe it always. So that's my father's side. You know, my father was also from a village they wanted to dam; they were going to put the whole village underwater.*

*My mother's side is from a place called Galgo, and they wanted to dam that place also. That's really special, you know. I think that's a key point as to who I am. Galgo is only, I think, ten houses now. [My father's village] is a bit bigger, it has a church and a store. But these villages were both meant to be dammed at the same time, and at that time my parents hadn't met. Both grew up trying to save where they were from. My mother's family also staged demonstrations. They were very small demonstrations of course; they hammered signs into houses, on the walls. And none of the places were dammed. They dammed Galgo a little bit...but they did not send the whole village underwater. So I think that's a very important part of me. I come from very small families; I don't come from a very big Sámi family. Some Sámi families have many, many people, but both Bål and Nango are very small, but very strong families.*

From my perspective, it is very noteworthy that Marja describes the situations her parents encountered as a “key point as to who [she is].” Her observation validates the hypothesis of intergenerational transmission, which postulates that significant events in familial timelines develop, construct, and impact the identities of individuals in subsequent generations. Of course, Marja's situation is unique to the Bål and Nango families just as Anders's situation is unique to the Sunnas, but, as Inga-Wiktoria Påve puts it, similar cultural and sociopolitical struggles are relevant and impactful to many Sámi peoples and their familial networks.

**INGA-WIKTORIA PÅVE:** *I think our generation – we’re very connected to these kind of themes in general. So every Sámi community has their own battle in some way, a political battle in some way. It’s very close to everyone...every Sámi person can relate.*



Fig. 30: Påve I.W. (2015) *Generation to generation* [Oil on canvas, 73 x 60 cm]. Retrieved from: <https://www.ingawiktoriapave.com>

With this being said, it became clear to me through my fieldwork discussions that even destructive and painful historical events can potentially yield constructive outcomes in indigenous communities. Consider again the Bål and Nango families, which exhibited enormous fortitude in the face of seemingly insurmountable threats to their homes and livelihoods. Marja details her family as one “with a lot of tradition, but also a lot of pain.” At the same time, in her own words, the strength exhibited by her family members amidst



these painful experiences lent itself to how she manages her own contemporary encounters with racism.

**MARJA BÅL NANGO:** *I grew up in a time with lots of racism and that kind of shaped me also. I grew up in a time when you were told you were a ‘fucking Lapp’ or a ‘fucking Sámi.’ For me, I got to a point where I said, ‘yeah, I am a fucking Sámi, and I’m proud of it.’ I come from a very proud family, so even though we were the only reindeer Sámi family in Skibotn, we were proud and I have never been embarrassed of being Sámi. For me at least, racism didn’t feed shame, or anything like that. But it made me realise at a very young age that I am not Norwegian. A Norwegian citizen, yes, but I am not a Norwegian. I am from another culture, with other cultural codes and languages. So that is very important for me, that I am Sámi, and our culture – we don’t need to explain whether we are Norwegians or Swedish, because those are other cultures. They’re our states, yes, but we don’t need to defend the fact that we are Sámi. So I think that’s kind of been the most influential part of who I am and where I come from.*

### **Art as a Resilience Strategy**

One of the constructive ways in which otherwise destructive traumatic events can yield positive outcomes relates to a concept implied in Marja’s anecdote: strategies of resilience attained from formative generations. It is clear that Marja, as well as my other Sámi informants, is intimately acquainted with the negative societal aspects of being indigenous, namely, discrimination, misapprehension, misrepresentation, and prejudice. However, Marja also describes a sense of pride as being communicated intergenerationally through her family as a productive counter-response to negative events associated with their indigenous identity.

The breadth of responses to historical trauma is complex. Though distressing intergenerational events can yield deeply injurious psychosocial responses, such as “depression, substance abuse, breakdowns in family and personal structures, and other collective pathologies [in indigenous communities],” it has become evident to me through my discussions with filmmakers that individuals experiencing these kinds of historical traumas can alternatively emerge with a sense of cultural pride and hardiness (Begun &

Beltrán 2014, pg. 160). These positive aspects can be accessed in part through the resilience strategies employed and perpetuated by family members across generations. I also postulate that, based on statements made by several informants, the arts constitute a conduit for and expression of these resilience strategies. Indeed, many of the filmmakers I spoke to indicated to me that the arts were passed down through family members as integral mechanisms in the construction of cultural identity and the self.

**MARJA BÅL NANGO:** *My mother – when she was 26 – she was the one who won the competition for designing the Sámi flag. And my mother was a student when I was growing up. You’re a child and you know your mother designed the Sámi flag...but what does that mean? Being an art student and having a family is not easy.*

Marja also adds, “I come from an artistic family. I come from a family of thinkers, people who like to philosophise about life.” She describes the “interesting conversations and also interesting happenings” occurring within her family units as instrumental in crafting her as an individual and as an artist. Per-Josef Idivuoma also describes his encounters with the narrative arts in his early life as instrumental in terms of shaping his interests, his love of storytelling, and his present career in film.

**PER-JOSEF IDIVUOMA:** *I grew up in a village that has the same name as my last name, Idivuoma. It is a village with no more than 100 people. There were about 15 to 20 kids my own age living in the village, so we spent a lot of time playing in the mountains. In particular, we would spend a lot of time at an Elder woman’s house, and she took a lot of interest in telling us stories. That’s probably why stories interest me so much.*

Similarly, Inga-Wiktoria Påve points to the arts as a central foundation to her identity as an indigenous woman and as an artist when describes her family’s occupational and artistic history with *duodji*, or Sámi handicraft, as “the ground that [she is] standing on.”

**INGA-WIKTORIA PÅVE:** *I was raised in one of the most northern parts of Sweden, in one of the most northern reindeer herding communities. And I’ve always been around the culture, and my grandmother and my parents have always been working with handicraft. So*



*handicraft is basically the ground that I'm standing on. I started painting and went to art school when I was about twenty.*

When considering their present careers, it is perhaps unsurprising that each of these filmmakers point to the arts as an integral aspect of their familial cultures and upbringings. Connected to this, it seems quite rational and, as Inga-Wiktoria Påve puts it, “natural” for the arts to constitute an effective and cathartic conduit through which these filmmakers express and negotiate social concerns related to culture and ethnicity. Echoing statements previously made by Elle Sofe Sara Henriksen, Inga-Wiktoria intimates that the arts have always been instrumental in voicing social, political, cultural, and interpersonal agendas in the Sámi world, in a broader context as well as on an individual level.

**INGA-WIKTORIA PÅVE:** *I think that the Sámi people are really creative people. If you just look at the handicraft we make and for what reason we are making it, it's with meaning and that things are going to be beautiful is also a meaning. So even though we haven't made this kind of contemporary art, for thousands of years we have made art for ourselves and stepping into the contemporary field is kind of just a step in a way – it feels really natural. And it also feels really natural that that's how we express our political views and our views of life. I think it has always been really close to us.*

Inga-Wiktoria suggests here that art is and has always been instrumental in cultivating, maintaining, and expressing a constructive sense of cultural identity in a Sámi context. As such, I postulate that the arts constitute an effective resilience strategy (which may be deliberately or incidentally utilised) for indigenous individuals and families who must navigate social environments that have historically been and, in many cases, continue to be hostile to them. Indeed, a growing body of research validates these expressions and indicates various “aspects of culture and cultural identity [as being] useful in moderating the effects of life stressors...in indigenous communities” (Begun & Beltrán 2014, pg. 161). Based on these conversations with my informants, I have ascertained that the arts may constitute one of these fundamental aspects in the Sámi world. Therefore, it stands to reason that engagement with this facet of expression is one of the mechanisms through which indigenous individuals can engage with, celebrate, conceptualise, and contemplate their

culture as well as the social issues enveloped within it. Related to this, I maintain that the arts provide a culturally relevant context through which indigenous individuals can engage with the process of healing from a legacy of sociopolitical subjugation and historical trauma.

### **Stories as Medicine**

The discussion in previous sections pertains to healing from and resilience in the face of intergenerational cultural traumas through the arts in a generalised sense. Here I will return to a concept I addressed in earlier chapters, which shines a light on a more specific facet of creative expression in the Sámi world: story. Interestingly, researchers both indigenous and non-indigenous indicate that one of the processes through which intergenerational memory is transmitted is the very pathway through which individuals and communities impacted by intergenerational trauma can also undergo healing. This conduit can be best described as storytelling. By way of example, I will return here to the study conducted by Braga, Fiks, and Mello. The authors validate that secondary and subsequent generations may experience “‘vicarious traumatisation’ through the collective memory, storytelling, and oral traditions of the [former] population,” and assert that “traumatic events become embedded in the collective, social memories of the population,” as do the resilience strategies of formative generations (Sotero 2006, pg. 100). However, related to this, I observed something I perceived as quite telling in the context of this study: every single informant made a reference to “his story” or “her story” when referencing his or her parents’ experiences (Braga et al 2012, pg. 4). I also wish to point out here that, though this study acknowledges narrative as a common conduit for both intergenerational trauma and resilience responses, it is not one that analyses or inquires about storytelling or oral history directly. Instead it is an article in a psychiatric journal that evaluates the ways in which historically situated intergenerational trauma influences the offspring of the affected individuals and the ways in which they negotiate this impact. Even so, the results of the study clearly indicate the overwhelming influence of storytelling in transmitting both the impact of traumatic experiences to subsequent generations, as well as the resilience tactics employed by the former generation. Further to this, the study points to performance and art in confluence with storytelling as possible means of re-conceptualising and healing from traumatic generational histories (Ibid 2012). For example, Interviewee 05 stated: “I asked

my father for permission to write his story [of life during the Holocaust]. Each day I tell this story in my play, which I have performed for nearly four years, it seems I can understand a little more” (Ibid 2012, pg. 7).

Because storytelling and collective social memory are routes of transmission for negative historical experiences, as well as positive or negative resilience strategies utilised by formative populations, it also follows that storytelling can provide an avenue for catharsis and healing from the very same events that populate these stories. There are a few different conceptual mechanisms that underlie this particular form of catharsis. One aspect related to the healing capabilities of storytelling can be explained in the context of neuroscience. According to clinical research, both the transmission and consumption of stories are associated with the release of the hormones oxytocin and cortisol. Oxytocin, the so-called “hug hormone,” is related to the generation of empathy, whereas cortisol corresponds to stress. When a story introduces a character encountering a difficult problem, oxytocin release instigates an empathetic response, allowing both the storyteller and the listener to become invested in the character’s circumstances. Correspondingly, the stress hormone cortisol causes the human brain to “participate” in the experiences of the protagonist, allowing the listener/writer/speaker to effectively struggle alongside the main character as he/she negotiates difficult problems in the story. That same response allows the listener/writer/speaker to experience relief or euphoria when the protagonist overcomes those same tribulations (Zak 2014). As Zak suggests, these neurobiological reactions can be so powerful that they “move people to action,” referring to behaviours as simple as sitting erect to more extreme decisions such as “joining a movement or donating to a cause” (Ibid 2014, pg. 2). Clinical research also indicates that storytelling and engaged listening strengthens memory, focus, and organized thought processing (Abelson & Schank 1995).

This neuroscientific framework explains the therapeutic mechanisms underlying storytelling in a very generalised sense. Here I will circle back to the healing aspects of narrative and how they apply in a more specific cultural context. As has been discussed in previous sections, storytelling constitutes an integral aspect of indigenous life, education, and culture. Connected to this, storytelling has been demonstrated to facilitate more intimate and constructive connections to culture for indigenous individuals and communities; in turn, these connections have been indicated to yield psychosocial health

benefits among indigenous groups and individuals. As clinical psychologist and member of the Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa Native Americans Renda Dionne states, “Stories are how we come to understand ourselves and the world around us. For [indigenous peoples] stories are medicine...being present with yourself and the audience and speaking from the heart” (as quoted in Native Hope 2018). Gonzales agrees:

For many Indigenous cultures, storytelling and oral tradition is understood as a medicinal practice and form of traditional knowledge. Stories are part of a ‘mythic mind,’ where psychological truths are transmitted. As such, they provide opportunities to recover personal and communal knowledge (Gonzales 2012, pg. 39).

Begun and Beltrán describe the nature of indigenous stories as “simultaneously engaged in the present as well as the past... [They] provide a framework for fostering empathy and extending grace when considering the manifestation of social problems...as triggered by such historical atrocities, rather than a way by which blame and disparagement is conversely cast upon *an entire people*” (Begun & Beltrán 2014, pg. 179). Through a confluence of the neurological, the psychosocial, and the cultural, storytelling facilitates collective interpersonal empathy in indigenous communities as well as empathy for the self, while providing a context through which indigenous listeners and storytellers can conceptualise and understand their own cultural histories. Inga-Wiktoria Påve describes the ways in which storytelling through film can foster healing, compassion, and self-worth for indigenous viewers:

**INGA-WIKTORIA PÅVE:** *Like, the movie Sameblod, that kind of movie shows people how difficult it is. It also gives people who are feeling this kind of low self-esteem some credit, that it's okay, that it's not their fault. It's a really big and complex process and [film] can help people understand the complexity of it. I think that's important. And I think it's possible to do it through movies and films.*

To provide context to Inga-Wiktoria's statement, I will very briefly describe and analyse the film *Sameblod* in relationship to her observations. The film takes place during

the 1930s in Sweden and chronicles the journey of a young Sámi woman struggling with her indigenous identity in the face of tremendous, ubiquitous, and systematic prejudice. Fourteen-year-old Elle-Marja, who later goes by the less Sámi-sounding pseudonym Christina, desperately wishes to shed the shame associated with her ethnicity by assimilating thoroughly into mainstream Swedish culture. Alternatively, her younger sister Njenna insists on speaking her native South Sámi language in private, though it is forbidden at her boarding school, and she steadfastly clings to her indigenous identity. Though audiences will likely conceive of Njenna's response as the more admirable one, we can nevertheless empathise with Elle-Marja's desire to be appraised like an ordinary Swede based on the treatment she receives from outsiders. We see her being shamed and disciplined for speaking her native language in school, tormented and referred to as a circus animal by the local Swedish boys, and examined and measured in the nude like an animal by the Institute of Racial Biology at her boarding school. We understand her perspective particularly since the film is presented entirely from her point of view. At the end of the film, a seventy-eight-year-old Elle-Marja attends the funeral of her younger sister, from whom she has been estranged for years, in *Sápmi*. Though Elle-Marja continually demonstrates shame for being Sámi (she still insists on going by the name Christina and persistently denies her knowledge of her South Sámi dialect), she also expresses regret for abandoning her culture, her family, and her people (Kernell 2016).

Though Elle-Marja is a very flawed protagonist, the audience is able to empathise with the impacts of forced assimilation, language suppression, and cultural subjugation on her young mind by engaging with the events of her life through her own perspective. And as Inga-Wiktoria intimates, through this film, the Sámi audience in particular is provided the opportunity to negotiate and relate their own understandings of indigenous history and cultural identity with Elle Marja's perceptions and experiences. Iseke describes the process associated with this type of storytelling as a "powerful form of witnessing" (Iseke 2011, pg. 311). She defines witnessing in this context as an "[act] of remembrance in which we look back to re-interpret our relationship with the past in order to understand our present" (Ibid 2011, pg. 311). She further describes three levels of witnessing that take place within the storytelling process:

A first level is when a person is a witness to oneself in his or her own recollections of an experience or event. A second level of witnessing is being a witness within the process of sharing testimony about an experience or event. The final level is being a witness in the process of witnessing the testimonies of others (Iseke 2011, pg. 311).

In Susan Oakdale's ethnography of ritual performance and traditions of autobiographical narrative within an indigenous Amazonian Kayabi community, the anthropologist observes and describes a similar form of witnessing through storytelling. Among the Kayabi people, there exists a ritualistic oratory practice in which a leader and narrator "foresees" his or her own life by offering "a series of relational identities, roles, interests, and moralities" through story (Oakdale 2005, pg. 7). These stories are then "mapped onto and come to be inhabited by other participants" (Ibid 2005, pg. 7). By way of example, in the opening of her ethnography, Oakdale observes Kayabi shaman Stone-Arm performing a cure for his ill grandson. Stone-Arm recites a narrative about his career as a shaman and dictates how to address ancient Kayabi spirit beings, as well as how to interact with Oakdale, the newly arrived foreign researcher. According to Oakdale, "this was...after he issued a diagnosis of his grandson's illness that called attention to just how dangerous the world from which I came could be" (Ibid 2005, pg. 1). Oakdale further describes how Stone-Arm takes on the subjective perspectives of different audience members ["Then, looking at me, he said, 'After writing and recording sitting down, I'll bring this to my country to show,' she is saying" (Ibid 2005, pg. 2)] in order to establish a "subjective alignment through our orientation to his autobiographical account" (Ibid 2005, pg. 3). He concludes with "Thus, I foresee my life" (as quoted in Ibid 2005, pg. 3). By utilising storytelling in this way, Oakdale concludes, Stone-Arm simultaneously establishes commonality and connection among his audience members while weaving a narrative that makes sense of current events and contemporary concerns among the Kayabi people; namely, illness, the risks of associating with those outside of their Amazonian community, the arrival of a foreigner. He demonstrates through narrative how these elements hold resonance and relevance to the autobiographical testimony of his own life (Ibid 2005).

I suggest, with support from Inga-Wiktoria's commentary, that this type of witnessing process associated with storytelling (and in this case, film) allows indigenous audiences to access crucial aspects of healing, particularly in the context of colonial and/or

historical trauma. I will again use *Sameblod* as an example of this process. First, the filmmaker (in this case, director Amanda Kernell) relays a series of experiences and events through filmic narrative, sharing the “testimony” of the protagonist, which is rooted in a shared indigenous history. The audience bears witness to the protagonist’s testimony, empathising with her and, by extension, with the storyteller through whom the character has been brought to life. This witnessing process facilitates an empathetic “conversation” between storyteller and audience, allowing the audience members to participate in the inner life of the narrator and her creator. In the Sámi context, this could mean that an audience member who may be experiencing low self-esteem in a similar way to Elle-Marja is able to see his or her experience reflected in the story. He or she can extend empathy to the main character, and thus to him/herself. In the case of *Sameblod*, indigenous viewers can engage in a shared testimony related to historical/colonial trauma, thus collectively participating in a healing process alongside the storyteller and through the main characters. This process appears to be remarkably similar to that which Oakdale observed among the Kayabi people, in which a narrator performs a healing ritual that is partly administered through the personal narrative of an individual.

### **Healing In and Through Sámi Film**

I previously addressed the film *Sameblod* in brief and discussed the ways in which the content of this film may provide a platform for healing for viewers, as well as, potentially, the filmmaker herself. Here I wish to provide a few more examples of film *and* filmmaking as potential avenues for healing in an indigenous context. The first that comes to mind is the partially animated Sámi-language film *Bihttoš* by Elle-Máijá Tailfeathers, an award-winning director, producer, and actor of Kainai First Nation (Blackfoot Confederacy) and Sámi (from Norway) ancestry. *Bihttoš* (or “*Rebel*” in English) explores the complex relationship between Elle-Máijá and her father and chronicles the love story and ultimate deterioration of the relationship between her Blackfoot mother (Mariel) and Sámi father (Duncan). Simultaneously, *Bihttoš* addresses the political activism of her parents, which is what initially brought them together [note: *Bihttoš* is not a documentary film, though it chronicles true events in Elle-Máijá’s life and the lives of her family members].



Fig. 31: Tailfeathers E.M. (2015) *Bihttoš* [Film still]. Retrieved from: <http://www.kunalsen.net/bihttos-the-rebel>

“Dad was part of a group of Sámi activists fighting for Sámi rights,” Elle-Máijá explains in the film. “He helped organise many actions that changed history for our people. People called him ‘Rebel *Bierna*.’ He was truly ČŠV.” Quickly, however, the narrative translates into a deeply personal one as Elle-Máijá delves into the deterioration of her father’s mental health and, concomitantly, his relationship with his wife [“When I was sixteen, my dad tried to kill himself,” she recalls in opening of the film, “How did we come to this dark place? Why couldn’t our love guide him through the darkness?”].

Author Sabrina Furminger interviewed Elle-Máijá in an article with *Vancouver Is Awesome News*. In it, the writer spotlights the ways in which the film provided an artistic platform for healing from the past for the director herself, but also for her family (Furminger 2016). “Few non-medical healing therapies are as effective as art...art gives us a safe space in which to confront our demons and move on from the bad stuff,” writes Furminger (Ibid 2016, pg. 1). She continues, “In the case of Vancouver filmmaker Elle-Máijá Tailfeathers, her work of art literally healed her family” (Ibid 2016, pg. 1). Elle-Máijá affirms Furminger’s assertion. She describes her anxiety at the genesis of making the film, and the ultimately constructive outcome:

I reached out to my parents, and said, ‘Listen, this is what I’ve been challenged with, and this is the story I want to tell, but I want to tell this story with total and complete love and respect for my family.’ Obviously, the last thing I wanted to do was cause any more damage or hurt (as quoted in Furminger 2016, pg. 1).



Her family urged her to move forward with the project, and over the course of the next year, Elle-Máijá delved deeply into her family's history, exploring her parents' love story against a backdrop of a global movement for indigenous rights and sovereignty in the 1980s. According to Elle-Máijá, her parents were not on speaking terms before *Bihttoš* premiered, but after watching the film, "they've reconciled, and my father's been over to visit a couple of times since the film was made. They're friends again" (as quoted in Furminger 2016, pg. 1). She describes the emotional impact of the very first screening of the film at the Blood reserve in Southern Alberta: "I could hear laughter and silence, and laughter and silence, and then I came back into the room and most of my family was crying. My mom and my brother were at a loss for words. They were touched – in a good way – by the film" (Ibid 2016, pg. 1).

*Bihttoš* is a profoundly personal film and provides an intensely affective experience for the family of the filmmaker, and indeed, the filmmaker herself. However, I suggest that *Bihttoš* also holds a broader potential for catalysing healing for indigenous viewers particularly, who may palpably relate to the macro-level issues that are being addressed in the film alongside a profoundly personal story. I suggest that the film reflects a theory put forth by Abadian, who examines unresolved collective traumas among indigenous peoples in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, linking the "generational impacts of the settler governments' genocidal policies...on indigenous peoples...to the stories of the people" (Abadian 2006, pg. 8). She refers to these stories as "post-traumatic narratives," and argues that collective traumas necessitate individual and institutional renewal so that, "at a minimum, trauma is not reproduced into the next generation" (Ibid 2006, pg. 8). Christian agrees, offering in her Master's thesis that "the visual narratives we create collectively as Indigenous groups and individually as Indigenous film/video makers reflect where we are in our reparative or toxic healing process" (Christian 2010, pg. 29). I believe it is appropriate to say that, based on the ultimate outcome of *Bihttoš*, whether it was intentionally or unintentionally engineered with intergenerational and/or post-traumatic healing in mind, that the film falls within what Christian would refer to as a "reparative healing process," one which has its roots in a personal family narrative but also addresses unresolved collective traumas related to broader struggles experienced by global indigenous peoples (Christian 2010, pg. 29).

Barclay describes this healing process as part of a “talk-in approach” in indigenous storytelling and, most relevantly to the topic of this thesis, indigenous filmmaking (Barclay 1990, pg. 76). He elaborates: “The talk out approach has been tried, not only in filmmaking but in many other areas too – in education, public broadcasting and publishing. By and large, the approach has failed” (Ibid 1990, p. 76). To clarify, when discussing the “talk-out” approach, Barclay is referring to the process of educating non-indigenous viewers about the impact of colonialism and their own issues with ethnocentrism, for example. He explains that the “talk-in approach” has been demonstrably more effective, which involves indigenous filmmakers “turning in” to their own communities and provoking discussion regarding colonialism, racism, and intergenerational trauma amongst themselves (Ibid 1990, p. 76). He elaborates:

I do not think this is turning inward in an unhealthy way. Rather, I see it as asserting a cultural confidence so that, if we shape things our own way, we shall come to make images that will be attractive to those humans on the planet who wish to enjoy them. I am not talking about minority programmes directed at a minority. I am talking about a minority being confident enough to talk with its own voice about whatever it chooses (Barclay 1990, p. 78).

Szymanski goes as far as to describe indigenous filmmakers as “‘therapeutic activists,’ at once artists and storytellers, clinicians of a neocolonial wartime reality and speculators of a decolonial health” (Szymanski 2017, pg. 10). Anna Laijla Utsi of the ISFI echoes these sentiments:

I think cinema is one of the most important mediums for all Indigenous peoples and also for the Sámi people, because we need to define our own reality. I think film has a deep effect on so many levels, not just for our own people but also when it comes to mainstream society. Indigenous people do need film more than anyone else, because it is about time our languages and cultures get a chance to break out from the silence, prejudice and invisibility we have experienced throughout time. It is about healing, talking about sorrow, forgiveness and moving on into the future. It’s about being strong and visible with all of the wonderful stories and pride we have

carried through thousands of years in our oral storytelling. We need to tell our stories because we need to be visible and exist (as quoted in Commanda 2015, pg. 1).

Indeed, as we can observe in the case of films such as *Bihittoš* and *Sameblod*, stories can enact a healing function by offering community, a sense of belonging, and cultural pride to audiences who have taught to be ashamed of their heritage. Further, these films have the capacity to dispute colonial ideologies, and reclaim the freedom of Indigenous peoples to narrate their past, present and future. If we consider Sámi filmmakers to be therapeutic activists as Syzmanski describes, it can be no coincidence that motifs related to healing and catharsis are prevalent in many Sámi films (Syzmanski 2017). I have also noted that many Sámi films exemplify these concepts through the lens of ancestral healing. *Jorinda's Resa* served as one such example, particularly towards the end of the film, during which Jorinda experiences relief from her troubled mind only when an elder speaks to her with soothing words, narrating a story about the sanctity of the feminine while gently washing her feet.

*Áile ja Áhkku (Áile and her Grandmother)* by Silja Somby is one such film that also employs images and narratives related to healing and catharsis. I first watched this film as a part of the Seven Sámi Stories project, which aired at the Leeds Arctic Film Festival in 2015. *Áile ja Áhkku* juxtaposes young Sámi girl Áile's relationship with her mother – who is presented as more “modern” and disconnected from traditional Sámi knowledge – with her grandmother, with whom she is very close. Áile's grandmother teaches the young girl how to cure illnesses with herbal remedies and is eager to pass on her knowledge regarding plants and healing. Her grandmother teaches Áile how to interact with nature in accordance with Sámi values, which dictate that one must not take more than one needs from the land. In one scene, as Áile extracts water from a stream, Grandmother explains, “You must not do it against the stream. You must follow nature's own ways” (Somby 2015). At the end of the film, Áile finds that her grandmother has passed on, and runs to her mother in grief to tell her. Her mother is bewildered and tells Áile that her grandmother passed away when she was a baby. Áile realises that she has been working with the spirit of her ancestor, and vows to continue to perpetuate what she has learned. A gentle, contemplative story, *Áile ja Áhkku* contains themes related to healing, the perpetuation of indigenous knowledge, and thus cultural pride (which I believe can be healing for indigenous audiences in itself).

The film *Eahpáraš* (*The Dead Child Legend*) by Anne Merete Gaup is another such film that thematises healing and catharsis through the somewhat unexpected thematic lens of folk horror. *Eahpáraš* chronicles a brief, virtually silent story of a young Sámi woman who becomes haunted by the spirit of an unbaptised child. Ultimately, the young woman heals the restless spirit from his/her torment. At the opening of the film, the main character, portrayed by Anne Merete herself, is collecting foliage in the tundra, slicing it with a scythe and tying it to her back. She is suddenly alerted by the troubling sound of a baby wailing, to which she promptly collects her scythe and makes her way into the boreal forest. She comes upon a stream, hesitates for a moment, and then wades through to the other side. Eerie, resonant music plays as she proceeds to a field and later to a swamp rippling out from the center. The ripples cease when she arrives at its edge. The viewer perceives that something is watching Anne Merete from under the water. Suddenly, the entity explores out of the ponds and attacks her. She fights back with her scythe, slashing wildly, but is unable to strike the being. Finally, out of breath, she declares, “My child, I baptise you. Amen, the Holy Spirit, the Son and in Father’s name. Your name is Needle’s Eye.” And the screen goes dark. The final shot is of Anne Merete, sitting quietly by a now-calm swamp, the dead child having been released from its suffering. *Eahpáraš* is particularly interesting because it centralises the Christian faith – perhaps Læstadianism (I am unsure of this point as I was unable to interview Anne Merete) – as a form of healing, while for many Sámi Christianity has constituted a form of oppression. In this film, Anne Merete utilises traditional Christian baptism and repurposes it in the context of a Sámi legend. Perhaps this film can be thought of as a form of decolonising religion and repurposing it thematically as a healing entity in a Sámi context.

### **Reconceptualising Narratives**

In previous sections, I emphasised that historical trauma stemming from colonial infrastructure is not the only context through which outsiders or indigenous peoples themselves must conceptualise indigenous identities. However, it is also important to note here that clinical evidence indicates an understanding of historicity as a vital component of collective and individual healing in the indigenous world. In a study evaluating the impact of historically transmitted intergenerational trauma on Maōri communities, researchers found

that “participants found learning about the term [historical trauma] to contain elements of healing. For [participants], the knowledge allowed [them] to find forgiveness for the current struggles [they] see within [their] *iwi* (tribe), and also within [themselves]” (Begun & Beltrán 2014, pg. 168). The authors continued:

From individual to family, community and society, HT [historical trauma] also connects Indigenous people of other continents to one another’s stories of loss and healing. As described earlier, HT articulates an experience connected to colonisation that has repercussions for Indigenous people all over the world. There are remarkably similar legacies of stolen land, forced relocation from original land, prohibition of practicing cultural traditions and forced acculturation, often by excessively harsh and brutally oppressive methods. Understanding the reach of the collective experiences helps reduce the burden of solitude often felt and opens an additional space for healing (Begun & Beltrán 2014, pg. 169).

Another component of healing through storytelling entails the re-conceptualisation of narratives. I will here refer to a notable observation made by an interviewee in the previously mentioned study by Braga, Fiks, and Mello. Interviewee 02 states: “I had the opportunity to go back to Poland with my father... It was a very intense experience, because we went to the camp where he was held, we paid a visit to Auschwitz-Birkenau... This trip was a very strong experience, because he told me the story again and he worked this story over for himself” (Braga et al 2012, pg. 7) I note here that the informant makes a reference to his father’s re-conceptualisation of his own story, or “working the story over for himself” (Ibid 2012, pg. 7). The other informants made similar observations; as was detailed in the previous section of this thesis, Interviewee 01 described her mother’s stories as always containing messages of “hope,” and Interviewee 05 spoke to the particular type of “Jewish humour” that characterised his father’s stories of his painful internment experiences (Ibid 2012, pg. 4). Put another way, it is clear that an effective coping strategy with inter- and transgenerational trauma, and the successful transmission of positive resilience strategies, involves a re-articulation of narratives that might otherwise be demoralising.

My conversations with Sámi filmmakers yielded similar observations. For example, Marja Bål Nango describes her family as one with “a lot of pain,” but also a lot of cultural

pride and endurance. For Marja, the racism she and her family have encountered did not “feed shame,” in part because of her family’s conceptualisation of Sáminess as something to be proud of despite the pain associated with it. Below, Marja describes how she engages with narratives of strength and endurance embedded her family’s history and how these narratives influence her contemporary artistic works.

**MARJA BÅL NANGO:** *I have a little bit of a different background from other Sámi people. I think it will be very evident in the films I will make. You will see what I mean... [My sister Ingir and I] come from a very strong tradition and culture, like many other [filmmakers] also have, but we also have a different back-story to everything.*

Per-Josef Idivuoma has also described the reconceptualisation of typical narratives as integral to his artistic process. He states that he likes to “add some spice” to stories based on real contemporary and historical events by utilising satire and parody. I will note here that his narrative process, which often employs a particular type of satirical humour, is similar to the one Interviewee 05 described in the study by Braga, Mello, and Fiks (when he/she describes the “Jewish humour” utilised by his/her father even in narrating painful memories) (Braga et al 2012, pg. 4). Similarly, Sara Margrethe Oskal points out that part of Sámi culture and identity involves having a keen sense of “self-irony.” She further emphasised during our interview: “That is why we have survived.” “We don’t always have to defend our culture,” Per-Josef agrees. “Sometimes we can tear it apart and make fun of it.”

With Sara Margrethe’s and Per-Josef’s statements in mind, it is worth noting here that the reconceptualisation of narrative does not necessarily have to be positive to be cathartic and healing for the audience and the filmmakers. Indeed, in the film *Sameblod*, we witness and empathise with the shame Elle Marja feels related to her identity, as well as the grief and regret she awakens to after years of rejecting her family associations and her indigenous identity. As Marja Bål Nango puts it, “You cannot just give a positive picture, because then it’s propaganda. I think that’s very dangerous.” She continues:

**MARJA BÅL NANGO:** *We don’t want just one side of everything. And I think that’s why Sameblod did succeed – Amanda chose a very difficult time, and her character Elle Marja is*

*so flawed. She is morally corrupt sometimes. And that's when films succeed – they show true stories of people, that they are not perfect or one-sided.*

Essentially, the critical component underlying healing through storytelling in the Sámi world is empathy, which provides a context through which Sámi creators and viewers can explore their identities and their history in an honest, holistic, human way, rather than compulsory positivity.

In Chapter 4, I discussed storytelling in the indigenous context as a re-articulation of the colonial “truth,” which victimises, stereotypes, and disadvantages native communities. Here I will suggest that historical events and narrative are inextricably linked. Colonial events both yield and stem from colonial perspectives. In order to counter the consequences of these events and their associated narratives, as Anders puts it, one must decolonise “from the inside out.” This involves indigenous peoples both producing and consuming alternative narratives regarding their identities, ones that are diverse and nuanced. Storytelling is powerful in this context because it is agentic, participatory, and made to be transmitted.

As Castelloe writes, “transmission is the giving of the task. The next generation must grapple with the trauma [of the former population], find ways of representing it...” (Castelloe 2012, pg. 3). She also states that a “main task of transmission is to resist disassociating from the family heritage” (Ibid 2012, pg. 3). In other words, the author implies that healthy coping strategies of subsequent generations necessitate engaging with, listening to, and conceptualising the stories of their parents and grandparents, with “special attention to the social and historical milieu in which they lived,” rather than succumbing to the temptation to emotionally disengage (Ibid 2012, pg. 3). From a psychodynamic perspective, disengagement in this context connotes repression as opposed to healing and recovery. It follows that, as also has been previously discussed, it is the engagement with cultural history, traditions, and values that have been demonstrated to yield positive psychosocial and health related effects in indigenous communities, rather than estrangement from these aspects (Apen et al 2016). Storytelling, visual art, and narrative arts provide some very impactful avenues through which this engagement can occur. I suggest here that film represents a marriage of all three of these avenues and is thus rife with possibilities for healing.

It became clear to me throughout my fieldwork that Sámi filmmakers have been engaging with these possibilities in complex and creative ways. I have ascertained this, not just from the content of the films being produced, but also from the discussions these creators have been leading, hosting, and participating in at indigenous film and arts festivals in and around *Sápmi*. Here I will detail my observations and analyses from two film festivals, which I feel are particularly pivotal in relationship to this discussion. The first is the *Skábmagovat* Film Festival, a Sámi and broader indigenous cinema event hosted annually in Inari, Finland at The Sámi Cultural Centre *Sajos* and The Sámi Museum and Nature Centre *Siida*. The second is the *Dellie Maa Sápmi* Film and Art Festival in in Dearná (the village's Sámi name)/Tärnaby (the village's Swedish name), Sweden.



## Skábmagovat: From the Arctic, With Decolonial Love



Fig. 32: Kitti S. (2019) Festival poster for the Skábmagovat Film Festival [Event poster]. Retrieved from: <https://www.skabmagovat.fi>

In late 2018, Joseph Drexler-Dries published *Decolonial Love: Salvation in Colonial Modernity*, a critical response to ideologies that have historically framed structures of colonial oppression and have been underpinned by the theological image of Christian salvation. *Decolonial Love* was published by Fordham University Press in New York, USA and quickly merited critical acclaim for offering “theologians a foothold within the modern/colonial context from which to...take responsibility for the legacies of colonial domination...within a struggle to transform reality” (Fordham University Press 2018, pg. 1). Drexler-Dries’s work represents one of the mediums by which the term “decolonial love” has been utilised in progressive dialogues related to liberation from various imperialist legacies. The term’s originator, Junot Díaz, describes this ideology as “the only kind of love that [can] liberate [people] from the horrible legacy of colonial violence” (as quoted in Moya 2012, pg. 3). Interestingly, though it has become a highly politicised moniker, the concept of decolonial love has its roots in fiction. Díaz, the term’s creator, is the author of *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, a work of contemporary fiction detailing the life of Oscar de

León, a Dominican boy in Paterson, New Jersey, whose story runs parallel Díaz's narrative meditation on the Dominican Diaspora, sexuality, and colonial oppression (Díaz 2007).

At the *Skábmagovat* Film Festival in Inari, Finland (January 26, 2019, my second annual visit to the event), organisation staff members and featured filmmakers hosted a panel expounding upon the concepts introduced in Drexler-Dries' work. However, while the textual *Decolonial Love* focuses on frameworks of modernity and imperialism legitimised and shaped by traditions in Christian theology, the panel *From the Arctic with Decolonial Love* introduced the titular concept within the sphere of healing through the arts and media. The panel featured filmmakers from various indigenous nations, including Greenlandic Inuit, American Native (several tribes), Yakut (of the Sakha Republic of Russia), and Sámi. A vivid discussion was guided – not by continuity in terms of thematic elements in each artist's respective film – but by the ideology of “decolonial love” as it relates to indigenous artists' ability to “take back the self-love that colonialism stole” and heal from the injurious legacy of domestic imperialism in the Nordic states and beyond (Benaway 2017, pg. 1).

Before I delve more deeply into some key observations garnered from the festival panel, I will provide some background regarding the festival itself. The *Skábmagovat* Film Festival takes place annually in Inari, Finland. Almost a third of the citizens of Inari are Sámi and the municipality utilises four primary language in an official capacity: Northern Sámi, Inari Sámi, Skolt Sámi, and Finnish. The festival events are housed at two locations: The Sámi Cultural Centre *Sajos* and The Sámi Museum and Nature Centre *Siida*. The former is a cultural administrative center that houses the Sámi Parliament in Inari, while the latter is a museum exhibiting and celebrating Sámi history and culture, as well as the natural environment of Lapland. The museum also contains a seasonal open-air theatre called the “Northern Lights Theatre,” which is made almost entirely of ice and snow, in addition to an outdoor screen for film viewing (Erdegham 2019).

Among the numerous films screened and premiered at the 2019 *Skábmagovat* Film Festival was Sara Margrethe Oskal's *Beaivvi nieida* (in English, *Daughter of the Sun*), a fictional short film exploring a Sámi writer's encounters with and negotiation with racism in Northern Norway (in Chapter 6, I will spotlight and analyse this film in much greater depth). As I mentioned in previous sections, Sara Margrethe was one of the filmmakers who kindly and enthusiastically agreed to meet with me in a café in Tromsø; in fact, she was the first artist I interviewed. She was a bit late to the screening of her film at *Skábmagovat* as she

was driving to Inari from quite far away, but by the time she arrived, she was met with fairly uproarious applause from the audience, which was quite significant given its relatively small size. She was met with both flowers and tears – for reasons I will make much clearer in Chapter 6, the film *Beaivvi nieida* seemed to be deeply affective for the Sámi audience. I perceived much more outward expression of emotion from the audience during this film than perhaps any other I had seen in a public showing; many audience members were weeping quietly. I watched the film *Beaivvi nieida* by myself in my flat in Norway for the first time because Sara Margrethe very kindly offered to let me view the film on Vimeo via a secure password link. I found it extremely profound and emotional as well, and was particularly affected when the main character Ánne finally convinced the protagonist Edvard that he was, in fact, the young man in her memory who stoned her father many years ago in Guovdageaidu, despite his protests to the contrary. However, it was not until I watched the film in a public audience that I was moved to tears myself; the collective experience with the Sámi viewers really drove the impact of racism on the Sámi people in Norway home for me.

I walked up to Sara Margrethe after we watched the film. She looked at me with significant surprise and said, “You’re here!” I didn’t ask her why she was so shocked to see me, but I can surmise that she didn’t think an American scholar would necessarily take the time to travel all the way up to Inari for a film festival. The only other foreigners at the event besides myself were a couple of European attendees who arrived in a small university-based group. I admit that I did not speak to many audience members at this particular festival, and I sat alone during lunchtime, reading a very fascinating new book I bought from the shop about animal folklore in Finland. It appeared to me that all of the audience members knew at least one other person at the festival quite well, and for that reason they sat together speaking Sámi in small groups. This is not to say that anyone was particularly rude to me; people were cordial and friendly indeed, they just kept to each other mostly.

A documentary about indigenous hip-hop, titled *WE UP! Indigenous Hip-Hop of the Circumpolar North* (by P.N. Hensley and D. Holthouse), was also screened. This film portrayed the ways in which indigenous artists are presently utilising hip-hop to advocate for their languages and rights to self-determination. The film chronicled the development of an Arctic performance ensemble called *WE UP!* and evaluated the members’ motivations for becoming engaged with hip-hop as an art medium. I also watched *Through Reindeer Herders’ Eyes* by Aslak Paltto, a documentary evaluating the impact of carnivorous

predation on reindeer herding communities in Finland. The film assessed the cultural, developmental, and economic conflicts between Sámi herders and the Finnish state in this context. I also watched the well-known Sakha film *The Lord Eagle* (2018, directed by Eduard Novikov), which chronicles the gentle story of Old Mkipper and his wife Oppuos, who live in the taiga and establish a close bond with a sacred eagle. I will make note of a particularly interesting observation that was posed by an audience member after the screening of this film; one viewer noted the following: “It seems that we [author note: referring indigenous people] are having the same problems with protecting our land all around the world.” This was a noteworthy comment to me because it speaks to the shared values and environmental ethos that bonds indigenous peoples globally. It also solidified to me that film has the potential to be a powerful uniting force for indigenous communities.

After each film screening, audience members were invited to present questions to the film directors about their thoughts, intents, and motivations surrounding each film.



Fig. 33: International Sámi Film Institute (2019) *Decolonial Love* panel [Photograph]. Retrieved from: <https://www.facebook.com/SamiFilmInstitute/photos/decolonian-love-panel-discussion-at-skábmagovat-film-festival/10155957474936179/>

After several film screenings, the *Skábmagovat* Film Festival administrators invited filmmakers hosted a panel entitled *From the Arctic, with Decolonial Love*. The films

premiered and screened at *Skábmagovat*, as well as the discussions that followed, brought several sociopolitical issues related to Sámi life and culture to light. For example, the discussion following *Through Reindeer Herders' Eyes* focused on the inclusion of Sámi perspectives into the law, the influence of contemporary technology on herding communities, and the conservation and protection of *Sápmi's* natural resources. The panel that followed addressed the colonial structures that continue to perpetuate and influence these issues, and, most importantly, the ways in which Sámi artists are utilising their filmic works and artistic expressions to cope with and heal from social inequalities stemming from the colonial legacy.

At the commencement of the panel, the filmmakers presented their individual conceptualisations of the term “decolonial love.” On the whole, the panelists described “decolonial love” as process of recognising the colonial infrastructures that have perpetuated the subjugation and dehumanisation of indigenous peoples, as well as the strategies currently being employed to facilitate a healthy sense of self-worth in those communities. Festival Director Sunna Nousuniemi described *Skábmagovat* as a hub for open discussion and healing in this regard: “I want *Skábmagovat* to be a place people can come as they are,” she emphasised. “I want it to be a place where people can heal.” As a new filmmaker, she also described a desire to “use film as a tool to heal myself and other people.”

One of the cultural aspects that the panelists described as requiring community and individual healing was “ethno-stress.” This concept links to ideas described in previous sections of this chapter: the cultural aspects of post-traumatic stress and historic and/or intergenerational trauma. According to Antone and Hill, since the early 1990s the term ethno-stress has “[been] the label for the confusion and disruption that [indigenous] people [experience]” as a result of various political and social stressors (Antone & Hill 1992, pg. 1). More specifically, ethno-stress occurs “when oppressive conditions are forced upon a people in their own environment,” resulting in feelings of pervasive hopelessness and powerlessness in indigenous communities (Ibid 1992, pg. 2). While ethno-stress and intergenerational trauma represent massive hurdles to overcome, the panelists optimistically described aspects of film, art, and storytelling as laden with opportunity to counter the negative effects stemming from these issues. They asserted that film can be utilised to provide honest, empathetic, and nuanced role models in Sámi characters, as well

as inspire, motivate, and allow indigenous viewers to identify with interpersonal issues addressed in film so they may clarify their own. “When people tell me they have been laughing, they have been crying – that is healing,” said Sara Margrethe Oskal. “The feedback has made me know it was worth it [to make the film].” Indeed, I noted several audience members quietly weeping together in response to her film *Beaivvi Nieida*, which deals with storytelling, prejudice, perspective, and truth (to reiterate, I will explore this film in greater depth in the next chapter).

The panelists emphasised that an integrally healing element of film allows them to reevaluate, redefine, and reintroduce their indigenous identity on their own terms. They pointed out that cultural self-determination is not merely about criticising misrepresentations of the Sámi ethnicity in media; it is also about crafting relevant narratives that address both the past and the present and taking their stories into their own hands. “Our Sámi history is really hidden,” said Sámi filmmaker, artist, and composer Elle Márjá Eira. “We’re used to hearing about majority history, but the majority has never heard about our history.” Elle Márjá makes note of historicity here insofar as it is a vital element of what constitutes indigenous identity. I refer here to a quote I previously cited from Whiteduck, when he states that “knowing ourselves [as indigenous peoples] means knowing our home, our ancestors, and where we came from” (as quoted in Ritskes & Sium 2013, pg. 6-7). Indeed, in a post-colonial world, “knowing” the self for the indigenous person necessitates the right and the ability to engage meaningfully with his or her own culture and history. Stories and art may facilitate this engagement, allowing the storytellers and consumers of those stories to “resist colonial erasure and violence, living out the stories of the ancestors in ways that sustain, resist, and create anew” (Ibid 2013, pg. 5). All these concepts collude to offer indigenous creatives and their viewers a type of restorative sovereignty through the visual and the narrative.

Related to all this, I took particular note of a quotation inscribed on the *Skábmagovat* Film Festival Booklet; it stated, “Cinema is the closest thing to the Sámi way of teaching” (*Skábmagovat* 2019, pg. 53). In several sections of this thesis, I have described the salience of storytelling in the Sámi world, but I believe this quotation points to the fact that its pertinence as both a teaching and healing mechanism cannot be overemphasised. Connected to this concept is Sunna Nousuniemi’s insight that film offers an opportunity for Sámi people to “[reintroduce] us to us.” Through film, indigenous storytellers are

communicating and creating “new understandings about the dynamics of culture within the complexities of daily life” (Begun & Beltrán 2014, pg. 162). Sámi film allows indigenous viewers and creators to re-conceptualise their senses of self outside of colonial limitations and define their own histories and contemporary stories on their own terms. These ideas are part and parcel of what constitutes the notion of self-determination. In turn, self-determination is an essential aspect of healing from the social ills perpetuated by colonialism.

This is how fictional narrative relates to decolonisation. Decolonisation entails the agentic ability of indigenous peoples to define their cultures on their own terms. From my fieldwork, I have ascertained that an important element of decolonising narrative is hope. The concept of hope exists in a manner that contradicts many popular narratives of indigenous peoples as weak and dying out, as passive victims of colonial subjugation. As I have previously discussed, this is a risk we encounter when discussing decolonisation – framing indigenous lives only as existing in the context of historic imperialist oppression can be dangerous, essentialising, and reductive. The decolonisation of narrative is a complex process that necessitates acknowledgment of past colonial ills and the impact of its enduring vestiges, and also frames indigenous peoples as agentic, contemporary, and dynamic.





*Vadtejen Saemiej Sijte* and member of the first Board of the Sámi Parliament, discussed the repatriation of individual remains of Sámi persons to *Sápmi*. “We wanted a repatriation from a Sámi perspective,” she explained, referring to an event involving the repatriation of twenty-five individuals’ remains to Lycksele, during which the local Swedish church and community spoke before the Sámi officials. “We wanted to say farewell to our ancestors. But it was from the colonial perspective.” She continued, “Sámi stories are still being silenced. All of us must freely choose to tell our own stories.” Her discussion was followed by a presentation from Professor Hiroshi Maruyama of Muroran Institute of Tehcnology, Japan, and Honorary PhD at Uppsala University, who discussed the repatriation of Ainu remains and the continued adherence to principles of racial science in many Japanese anthropological circles. Both Sagka and Hiroshi’s work speaks to the alliance of global indigenous issues; “This is for all indigenous people,” Sagka explained to me in later conversation. Sagka approached me as I was drinking blueberry tea by myself in the cafeteria; I think she was curious about me because I appeared to be one of the only other foreigners besides Hiroshi and his scholarly aide and researcher Leni Charbonneau. “Now where did you come from?” she asked me. I explained my circumstances and, like Sara Margrethe at *Skábmagovat*, it appeared that she was quite surprised that I had made it all the way up to Dearná/Tärnaby, Sweden by myself with only knowledge of the Norwegian language. I was very interested in Sagka’s scholarly work and, in particular, I asked her some questions about the current decolonisation work occurring in multiple spheres of scholarship in *Sápmi*. I learned that Sagka was working on a new book called *Decolonising Futures: Collaborations for Renewed Discourses on Indigenous Rights in the Post-UNDRIP Era* to be published in 2021. Her chapter, co-written with Marie Persson Njajta, Leena Huss, and Hiroshi Maruyama, would be titled “Our Voices Are Never Heard”: Towards the Realisation of Indigenous Rights and a Healthy Life for South Sámi in Dearná, as was the title of her spoken session at the festival. She explained to me that, though many Sámi have suffered from trauma and ill health caused by colonial policies and actions, these realities rarely capture the attention of the majority culture in Sweden.

With that being said, narratives of hope and healing were prevalent throughout the three-day event. Professor emerita of Finnish at Uppsala University and professor II emerita of minority language research at the Arctic University of Norway Leena Huss led a discussion regarding language revitalisation and the consequences of language endangerment, and

analogised language loss to culture loss. She described a “burden of silence and sorrow,” as well as a feeling of displacement and lack of belonging, as present in those who feel alienated from their native language. However, she also asserted, “We should not stop at these narratives of hopelessness and despair... Instead, we should replace them with narratives of hope!” To that end, she described successful language resurgence initiatives from the Ojibwe Nation in Canada and the Midwestern United States to *Sápmi*. In particular, Leena cited an appeal from twelve elders to the South Sámi community from 2012: “Negative thoughts are created when we all the time hear doomsday prophecies about the South Sámi language dying out, but the young people have shown us that they have a strong will to learn the language and also that we are needed...” (as quoted in Huss 2019).

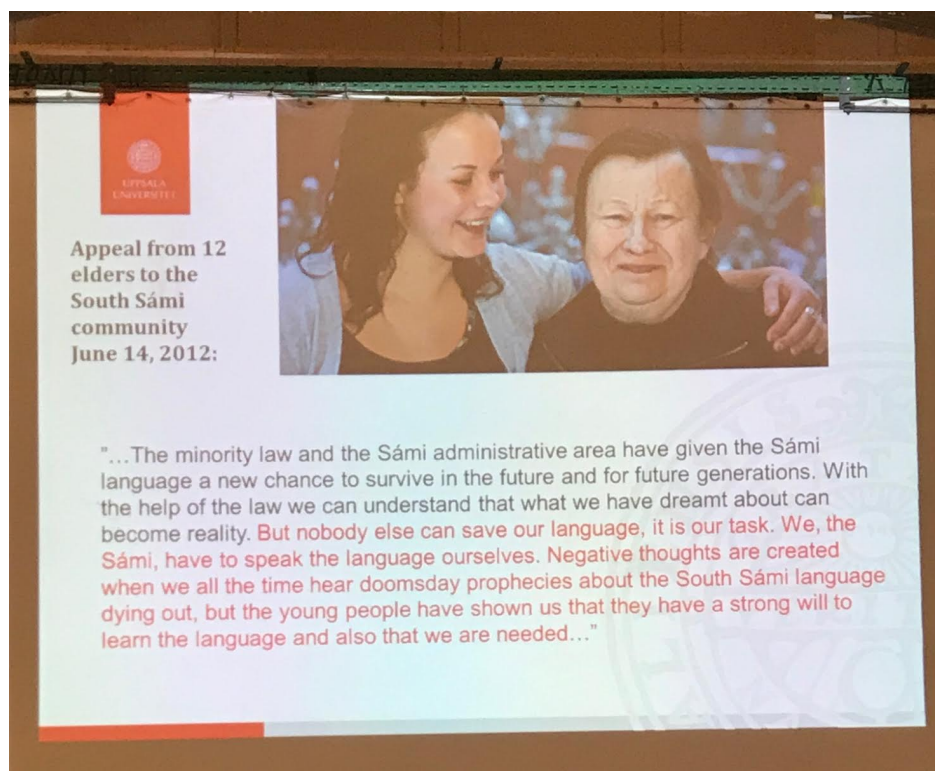


Fig. 35: Huss L.M. (2019) *Appeal from 12 elders to the South Sámi community, June 14, 2012* [PowerPoint presentation]. Image taken by author at the *Dellie Maa Sápmi* Indigenous Film and Art Festival, 17-19 October 2019.

Later, activist, filmmaker, artist, and founder of Native Moving Images Antonie Frank Grahamsdaughter (Canada/Sweden; Metis, Ojibwe), spoke of the continued prevalence of images portraying caricaturised versions of indigenous peoples in contemporary media. “There is no ‘chief of nachos,’” she quipped, presenting an image of an ambiguous Native

American chief's head on a Swedish brand of nachos and salsa. "If you see blackface, you think 'that is so racist!' But if you see this [image] of a First Nations person, you don't even think about it. It is so normalised in our society." Optimistically, she added, "But maybe it is the right time to change these things." Indeed, after organising a protest against the Swedish company's disrespectful imagery, Antonie and her colleagues were able to get the logo removed in a year.

After a Norwegian-language lecture entitled *Fra samekvinnor* (Literally: *From Sámi Women, or About Sámi Women*) from Sámi historian, educator, and author Leif Elsvatn and the screening of two films, *Hello Sweden* (2019) by Antonie Frank Grahamsdaughter and *Human Remains* (2019) by dancer, artist, and filmmaker Marit Shirin Carolasdotter (both of which were created in collaboration with Native Moving Images), Hiroshi Maruyama, Antonie Frank Grahamsdaughter, Marit Shirin Carolasdotter, Sagka Stånberg, Leif Elsvatn, Leena Huss, and Marie Person Njajta led a conversation reflecting upon indigenous history and resilience. The talk was entitled *Our Voices are never heard: Towards the realisation of Indigenous rights and a healthy life for the South Sámi community in Dearn/Tärnaby*. During this conversation, the speakers and the audience spoke candidly about the present-day consequences on indigenous lives, livelihoods, and cultural activities that emerge from vestigial colonial structures in *Sápmi*. Some of the speakers referenced mental health concerns and related them to broader psychosocial health concerns in Sámi and other indigenous communities. I will not reference their individual experiences with specificity here, due to the sensitive nature of this conversation and the fact that I have not received permission to do so. However, I will note here that the speakers and the audience members appeared to be optimistic that cultural revitalisation efforts, particularly those related to the arts, language, and storytelling, were laden with opportunity for "healing from history."

Marie Persson Njajta spoke of self-determination and cultural revitalisation efforts in *Sápmi* as being "part of a healing process." Marie is from Dearn/Tärnaby and has been a member of the Sámi Parliament since 2013. She has a Master's degree in systems science and endeavours to pass on her cultural traditions of fishing, handicraft, and herb gathering to subsequent generations. She is also the founder of the organisation "Stop Rönnbäck Nickel Mining Project in Ume river, Tärnaby," and was elected as citizen of the year in Västerbotten County in 2012 for this work. According to her penned *Dellie Maa* biography and her own spoken testimony, she "grew up with alcoholism, violence and other severe

consequences in a South Sámi area subjected by severe colonial abuses from the state, authorities and others” (*Dellie Maa* 2019, pg. 9). She writes that she “wants to end the dysfunctional colonial abusive circle in order to give the children and next coming generations a healthy future” (Ibid 2019, pg. 9). Marie iterated as much during the first evening’s ending discussion:

**MARIE PERSSON NJAJTA:** *I see this [work] as a start to taking back out history. We need to tell it ourselves. Our story is invisible. Our reality is banned and criminalised by legislation. Our stories are the core evidence we have. It’s taking a risk, but I want to do it because I want this colonial abusive cycle to end.*

The following day marked the official opening of the film festival. I viewed the Anishinaabe film *Sonny Side Up*, directed by filmmaker Sonny Papatie, which chronicles the journey of a young man who escapes his life of drug and alcohol abuse by embracing the traditional dance of his culture. Next, I watched *Haka Puai te Kainga, or Eating Up Easter*, a Native Rapanui film by Sergio Mata’u Rapu that follows four islanders, descendants of ancient Easter Island statue builders, who are working to tackle the consequences of development projects in their homeland. The next day premiered the documentary *Inuk Hunter* (2016) by Inuit filmmaker George Annanack, followed by *Min mors hemmelighet/Suddenly Sámi* (2009), a documentary by Ellen-Astri Lundby that follows her journey to discover her Sámi roots in Northern Norway.

The next films screened were Elle Sofe Sara Henriksen’s short documentary *GITTU GITTU (Thank you Lord)* (2019), an experimental film which depicts a time in which *lihkahusat*, a form of Læstadian trance dancing, still took place in churches and prayer houses in Guovdageaidnu/Kautokeino; *Ho Mamma e Dau for Hælvete* (2019), or *Mum’s Dead for Fuck’s Sake*, by Per Ivar Jensen, a dark comedy that portrays a conflict related to Sámi identity among brothers after reuniting for their mother’s funeral; *Sáminn Leat Rievttit/Samerna Har Rätt* (2019), or *The Sámi Have Rights*, an experimental dance documentary by Elle Márjá Eira and Mai-Lis Eira; and finally *Saajva, The Other World* (2019), a dance film that conveys the mythological concept of *saajva*, the upside-down world of Sámi legends. Next, I watched a Yakut film titled *The Lord Eagle* (2018) by Eduard Novikov, followed by *White Noise* (2018), an experimental dance film by Cree director Joleen Mitton.

In between film screenings, several international indigenous creatives, including Monica L. Edmondson, Sonya Kelliher Combs, Per Enoksson, Tomas Colbengtson, Sissel M. Bergh, and Julie Edel Hardenberg displayed their art pieces and led discussions expounding upon their creative works. Notably, many of these artists cited a desire to explore and exemplify social concerns specifically related to being indigenous in their art. For example, Sonya Kelliher-Combs, an artist of mixed descent (Iñupiaq from the North Slope of Alaska, Athabascan from the Interior, German and Irish) addressed topics such as abuse, marginalisation, and the historical and contemporary struggles of indigenous peoples in her works utilising organic, traditional, and modern materials. “We must continue to heal from the historical ill of colonisation,” she emphasised during her artist talk. Further, Sámi artist Tomas Colbengtson, who experiments with media and material in his works exploring the cultural identities and the histories of indigenous people, led a discussion regarding colonialism and its longstanding influence on the global art world. Next, Sissel M. Bergh, Sámi artist, researcher, and filmmaker, spoke of her endeavours to map lost landscapes through language and discussed how art practice can be a “tool to understand how the clashes of different knowledge systems, the violence in hierarchical structures inhibit and inhabit us” (*Dellie Maa* 2019, pg. 11).

Tomas Colbengtson was one of the artists I spoke to directly in between screenings and lectures. He approached me and said, “I have seen you at other events before.” I said that I had recognised him as well from Riddu Riđđu. I was quite pleased and surprised that he remembered me, and I told him honestly that I thoroughly enjoyed his presentation and his work. I also explained that the themes of his work were particularly relevant to my own work as he is heavily invested in the ways in which colonial history impacts art and visual culture. From a more personal perspective, I am also quite aesthetically fond of his art; Tomas has a very experimental way of working with media and material and he has even developed his own innovative way of screen printing; he prints on Graal-glass, a type of overlay glass that reflects colour very vividly. We had a thoughtful discussion about the ways in which colonialism has its hands in everything, and how this is not only applicable to the art world in *Sápmi*, but also to the global sphere of art history. In other words, he explained how many famous artists have taken significant inspiration from indigenous creators and creative concepts without providing substantive acknowledgment, such as Jackson Pollock, who was heavily influenced by Native American aesthetics. Tomas was also

very kind and urged me to speak to more people after he learned what my thesis was about, including Ellen-Astri Lundby, a filmmaker with whom I exchanged emails and discussed her work exploring her Sámi identity and her 52-minute documentary *Suddenly Sámi* (2018). According to Ellen-Astri, her mother never told her about her Sámi heritage and she utilised film to explore what it means to “become Sámi” as an adult woman.

Throughout this thesis, I have referred to Sunna Nousuniemi’s quote “we are reintroducing us to us” several times, as I feel it exemplifies one of the most important outcomes of and objectives for creating Sámi film and art. At the *Dellie Maa* Indigenous Film and Art Festival, I was introduced to another phrase that I believe holds salience with Sunna’s critical observation. The term is a South Sámi word called *dalvedh*, which is a verb that means “to come into view, to reappear” (Huss 2019).



Fig. 36: Huss L.M. (2019) *Dalvedh: to come, to come into view, to reappear* [PowerPoint presentation]. Image taken by author at the *Dellie Maa Sápmi* Indigenous Film and Art Festival, 17-19 October 2019.

By utilising the visual arts and film, emphasised the creatives at *Dellie Maa*, Sámi people are “coming into view” after decades of forced assimilation and erasure. Most importantly, they are coming into view on their own terms. To reiterate a point I made previously, several prominent themes of the *Dellie Maa* festival relate back to the event’s

title *Decolonisation and the Strength from Within*: strength, resilience, and hope. Without underestimating or delegitimising the impact of colonial infrastructure on Sámi lives, the speakers, artists, and presenters at *Dellie Maa* critically explored the ways in which the arts can be successfully utilised to explore, conceptualise, and analyse indigenous history and contemporary concerns, and finally the ways in which the arts can facilitate community health through cultural revitalisation.

### **Concluding Remarks**

This chapter has concentrated primarily on the constructive and creative ways in which indigenous filmmakers are utilising their arts to facilitate health and hope and bolster self-determination in Sámi communities threatened by vestigial colonial structures. With that being said, I will note here that, while I have provided some limited description of the artists' filmic works themselves, I have principally focused on the words and perspectives of the filmmakers and evaluated the ways in which they theorise their art in relationship to concepts such as representation, decolonisation, and, correspondingly, healing. The actual content of the films themselves have, thus far, been topics of ancillary discussion. This decision was intentional; as this is an ethnographic account of film and filmmaking, I have endeavoured to engage with the theories and discussions as led by the filmmakers themselves as a principal point of analysis, thus privileging the human element of this thesis. With that being said, in the forthcoming chapter, the films themselves will finally take center stage. More specifically, I will analyse three of my informants' films in the context of a holistic indigenous point of aesthetic theory. In other words, I will specify the theoretical constituents of indigenous aesthetics in a broad sense and explore three short Sámi films from this point of departure. This analysis will emerge partially in contrast to theories of Western aesthetics, which, speaking generally, tend to compartmentalise and problematise, whereas indigenous aesthetics focus more keenly on the holistic. Related to all this, I will argue for what Sámi scholar Rauna Kuokkanen describes as an "indigenous paradigm" as a foundation for understanding and conceptualising Sámi art and aesthetics (Kuokkanen 2000, pg. 411).

## Chapter Six: Indigenous Aesthetics

### Is There a Sámi Aesthetic?

My initial endeavour into the analysis of Sámi film aesthetics found its roots in the material. In other words, in the earliest stages of my thesis I was principally interested in identifying a network of symbolic objects that might collude to create a Sámi film from a visual perspective. This approach, I hypothesised, aligned itself well with the tactics utilised during the Sámi Cultural Revival, during which traditional Sámi clothing, material cultural objects, and artworks were utilised to represent and further cultural cohesion and thus organised advocacy. However, based on information gleaned from my fieldwork expeditions as well as from written scholarly sources, I quickly became acquainted with the idea that an analysis of Sámi aesthetics necessarily involved a greater holistic understanding of indigenous ways of knowing, and concomitantly a partial departure from non-indigenous Western conceptualisations of aesthetics and art. As such, simply analysing presentations of material culture as representations of “Sáminess” in films became a somewhat limiting venture, as well as a potentially problematic one.

This is not to say that material and visual representations of Sámi culture do not exist or bear no relevance in these films. Indeed, throughout my numerous viewings of Sámi films, it has become clear that there are representations and symbols often utilised in Sámi media that are immediately recognisable and relevant to most Sámi audience members. These presentations range from traditional clothing to particular locations. As Marja Bål Nango states, “The Sámi audience feels very connected. They think, ‘Yes, this is what I know, this is what I have experienced. I have been to that car park, or I have been to that space. I know the vibe and energy of the film.’” By way of example, one of my earliest viewings of a Sámi short film was Elle Sofe Sara Henriksen’s *Sámi Boja*, which tackles a topic that is at once highly universal and specifically relevant to contemporary Sámi communities: mental health and youth suicidal ideation. In *Sámi Boja*, the titular character literally wrestles with his darkest thoughts, which are personified by an ominous hooded character dressed in all black. Shots of him wrestling the entity are presented intermittently alongside presentations of him grappling with reindeer in their corral. Notably, there is very little dialogue in *Sámi*



*Boja*. The film primarily communicates its message through the physicality of the main character, as well as through material and visual manifestations that are immediately recognisable in the Sámi context, i.e. reindeer and reindeer pastures, herding materials, and the Arctic pastoral setting (Henriksen 2015). In other words, the setting and characters (both human and animal) serve to typify the character's family as a reindeer herding family, and the anxieties and pressures associated with being a young Sámi are thus insinuated symbolically, without the necessity of language. This quietude is characteristic of Elle Sofe Sara Henriksen's filmmaking style; she has a background as a dancer and a choreographer, so she prefers to communicate physically rather than verbally in her art. As such, many aesthetic aspects of her films are recognisable and identifiable by Sámi audiences, but may be elusive to outsider viewers.



Fig. 37: Henriksen E.S. (2015) *Sámi Boja* [Film still]. Retrieved from: <https://ellesofe.com/portfolios/sami-boja/>

With this all being said, an issue with framing Sámi films exclusively in terms of symbols such as reindeer and reindeer pastures emerges when one considers that these markers of culture can be somewhat essentialising. Defining a Sámi film *only* in terms of reindeer herding, for example, mirrors historically oppressive paradigms that framed herders as the only “real” Sámi and discourages alternative cultural projections in media. This is just one example, but the idea holds true in a more general sense. “I think it is a little problematic that a Sámi film has to be one way,” explains Marja Bål Nango. “For example, I’m not from Kautokeino or Karasjok or Kiruna... I dare to show my present because it is still relevant, it is true. It doesn’t need to be true for the Sámi person living in Alta, but it is real and it is still recognisable for them. It is not 100% the same, but nothing is 100% the same for anyone in the world. Some part of the Sámi culture is still there.”

If there is a Sámi aesthetic (or perhaps more appropriately, a series of Sámi aesthetics), based on experience and research I suggest that it has more to do with “the Sámi way of thinking,” as Elle Sofe Sara Henriksen describes it. Even this idea of a Sámi ontology is multifarious, and, as Elle Sofe Sara elaborates, though it exists, “it is not just one thing.” For my part, attempting to understand the “Sámi way of thinking” in the context of aesthetics necessitates a partial departure from the idea of the aesthetic as I am accustomed to thinking about it as a Western researcher. To understand what I mean by this, I must necessarily provide a very brief chronicle of theories of aesthetics in the Western tradition and identify where these theories overlap with and diverge from indigenous epistemologies.

### **Western Art and Aesthetics: Art for Art’s Sake**

The anthropology of film lies at a somewhat complex intersection of visual anthropology, the anthropology of art, and the anthropology – and/or perhaps, the philosophical study – of aesthetics. Though I delved relatively deeply into the history of visual anthropology and its genesis as a discipline in Chapter 3, I feel it may be useful here to revisit the concept of visual anthropology from a relational perspective; in other words, in comparison and relative to the anthropological study of art and, concomitantly, aesthetics. After offering a brief comparative study in this regard, I will expand the discussion to explicate upon the differences between non-indigenous and indigenous conceptualisations

of “art,” which is necessary to understand the ways in which indigenous art and media can be approached from two principal anthropological standpoints: one that addresses the study of “art” and, alternatively, “aesthetics” or aesthetic *values*. Indeed, this thesis is predicated upon the idea that Sámi film can be understood as part of an anthropologist’s understanding of the term “art,” which of course is complicated by the fact that “art” as it is broadly understood in the West is somewhat difficult to reconcile with an indigenous conceptualisation of the word (with “art” being a term that doesn’t really “exist” as non-indigenous Westerners understand it in many indigenous languages). I will necessarily discuss these differences related to the philosophical categories of “art” in Western and indigenous frameworks, ultimately arguing that a synthesis of principles from the anthropology of art and the anthropology of aesthetics, respectively, may offer a more holistic system for understanding Sámi art *and* audiovisual media.

Visual anthropology, broadly described, is a “modern interdisciplinary field of knowledge,” which, as Ilbeykina puts it, can be best understood as a method of study for “describing and analysing the phenomena of culture, founded on photos, video, and audio records” (Ilbeykina 2014, pg. 1471). The anthropological component of visual anthropology addresses social and cultural problematics in visual products and recorded images. Further, visual anthropology engages the study of visual arts, sociocultural cognition, and information data/technology. In perhaps more recent years, visual anthropology has gained disciplinary acknowledgment as an independent social scientific practice, as well as, quite possibly, “a special area of humanitarian practice” (Ibid 2014, pg. 1475). The sources for visual anthropological study are all related to the audiovisual form; “not only gramophone records, but also architecture, religious buildings, rock painting, etc.” (Ibid 2014, pg. 1478). These sources are of course quite broad, but some anthropologists have narrowed down the definition of visual anthropology by asserting the necessity of photo shooting and audiovisual footage produced during the *act of studying* particular cultures; e.g., visual ethnography. Jay Ruby is one such example; he defines visual anthropology as a subdiscipline of cultural anthropology that “aims to study human culture using video and photo shooting in the process of research” (Ibid 2014, 1478). Indeed, there are numerous examples of well-known anthropologists who have integrated visual anthropology into their practice by recording their informants in the field, such as Margaret Mead, Alfred Cort Haddon, and Walter Baldwin Spencer. Ilbeykina agrees with Ruby, positing that visual

anthropology is necessarily emergent directly from field experience as well as immediately embodied in it, “reflecting both personal experiences of a field anthropologist and his/her contact with the carriers of another culture” (Ibid 2014, pg. 1481). The objective of these activities is to allow viewers and the anthropologist him/herself to “perceive other peoples’ experiences by involving affective and emotional knowledge” (Ibid 2014, pg. 1481).

Though I thoroughly agree that visuality allows researchers and viewers of media content to explore cultural phenomena, social relations, etc. by forming emotional connections between the members of one culture to another, it is worth revisiting that my research departs somewhat from traditional visual anthropology in the sense that I am studying fictional film produced by the makers of another culture, rather than producing ethnographic footage and studying it reflexively. As I iterated in Chapter 3, I am studying film as a creative social product within an anthropological framework, but I am not studying film *as* a product emergent directly from anthropological inquiry. Consequently, it might be argued that I am studying film as a work of audiovisual “art” within an anthropological framework. I would posit, as I did at the beginning of this chapter, that the study of film in anthropology actually converges visual anthropology, the anthropology of art, and the anthropology of aesthetics, and is not necessarily 204problematized or bound to one single sub-discipline.

Of course, this last statement begs a few questions related to the anthropological study of film. First, if film is to be approached as an art object in this thesis, what does “art” mean for me as an anthropologist? How do anthropologists study “art” differently from other social scientists? Finally, how is the study of film applicable to a traditional anthropology of art if we consider that the indigenous “arts” don’t necessarily imply the same conceptualisations as Western “arts”?

### **What is Art to an Indigenous Eye?**

According to Coote, “art” can refer to virtually any “patterned application of skill,” from poetry and rhetoric to cooking to a variety of graphic productions (Coote & Shelton 1994, pg. 15). However, historically speaking, in the West painting, sculpture, architecture, literature, and music have been distinguished as the “fine arts,” or “Beaux Arts,” if we turn our eyes back to the standards set forth during the European Enlightenment. Indeed,

contemporary ideologies of art and aesthetics that are credited as emerging from Western culture are heavily influenced by the European Enlightenment thinkers of the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. The 18<sup>th</sup> century in particular is often hailed as the “Century of Philosophy,” an epoch in which free thinkers were arguably first able to expand human knowledge outside of the constraints of religious doctrine (Roberts 1991). As Carroll puts it, “the shaping influence of the eighteenth century upon the contemporary philosophy of art and aesthetics continues to be momentous” in the Western world (Carroll 2009, pg. 157). It is during this time that questions such as “What is art?” and “What are aesthetics?” came to the fore of European philosophic inquiry (Ibid 2009, pg. 157). While theories of art and aesthetics have, of course, proliferated and expanded in scope and complexity based on the contributions of a great breadth of theorists since the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, it can be said that some of the answers to the aforementioned questions introduced during this epoch still command some primacy in Western art scholarship (Roberts 1991).

For example, in the West, the “fine arts” are often understood to be high-minded, non-utilitarian, and distinguishable from “craft,” which employs technical skill applied to useful objectives. In the early modern era of art scholarship, the division between “high” and “low” arts became very pronounced, and Carroll points out that these new thought paradigms related to art and aesthetics arose in part because of new public “patterns of consuming art, [which] occurred as the bourgeoisie were becoming an important part of the clientele for art” (Carroll 2009, pg. 167). In other words, the rising bourgeois classes, with increasing amounts of leisure time at their disposal, began to appreciate art as “a delightful way of passing time,” ultimately engendering the idea of “art for art’s sake” (Ibid 2009, pg. 167). Worth noting here is that the Beaux Arts were generally thought to include what was once categorised under the umbrella of “liberal arts,” including poetry and rhetoric, and they expanded to include forms of music, painting, sculpture, and dance. Carroll suggests that these categories still fall under what is sometimes described as the “Modern System of Arts” in the Western world (Ibid 2009, pg. 161).

Sharman argues that the distinguishing of “high” from “low” arts resulted in a rigid, Kantian view of aesthetic beauty as “disinterested appreciation” in the West (Sharman 1997, pg. 177). In Kant’s *Critique of Judgment*, he argues for the concept of “pure aesthetic reflective judgments...as [judgments] of taste...[and] of the sublime,” with the sublime arising from an aesthetic event in which we become “aware of our supersensible nature”

(Matthews 1996, pg. 165). According to the philosopher, human beings operate on three primary fronts: “knowing, acting (and in particular, acting morally) and feeling. Each of these faculties is the source of judgments” (Ibid 1996, pg. 166). Further, if the judgment arises from a feeling, it is a “*pure aesthetic judgment*” (Ibid 1996, pg. 165). In the section of his work entitled *Critique of Aesthetic Judgment*, Kant expounds further on the notions of aesthetics and art, dividing the experience of consuming art with four distinct qualifiers. The first and perhaps most controversial qualifier is that the pure aesthetic judgment must necessarily be disinterested (Kant 1781/1999). Put simply, according to Kant we “take pleasure in something because we judge it beautiful, rather than judging it beautiful because we find it pleasurable” (Rogerson 1982, pg. 301). Second is that these aesthetic judgments must be “universally valid” (Zuckert 2002, pg. 239). Third, pure aesthetics are “subjectively purposive,” and fourth, “necessary” (Ibid 2002, pg. 239). Put a bit more simply, according to Kant, one can only enjoy a “pure” aesthetic experience of an artwork if one appraises it from a point of disinterest. It seems that “fine” art must be approached from this particular point of perception in order for the observer to achieve a “pure” aesthetic judgment, and that utilitarian art, such as handicraft, does not provide the opportunity for this experience (Kant 1781/1999).

In more recent years, and in the West especially, art has become more closely associated with “freedom from restraint” and individual expression as opposed to aesthetic “judgment” (Coote & Shelton 1994, pg. 17). Firth argues that this may be partly resultant from a popular image of Bohemianism as it was associated with artists in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Consequently, categories of art in the non-indigenous West have become a bit broader, with many experimental movements – like surrealism, abstract, and pop art, just to name a few – have challenged conventional art formalities and standards of artistic appreciation (Ibid 1994). Such experimental movements have contributed in their own ways to efforts towards decolonising the research sphere related to art and aesthetics by allowing for cross-cultural conceptualisations of beauty to gain recognition as valuable and worthy of both display and study.

I suggest that this is where an anthropological approach to art scholarship is particularly useful. Anthropologists approach art from sociocultural perspectives, theoretically providing scholarship that allows members of other cultures to access alternative conceptualisations of beauty and value in art. Related to this point, there are a

couple of anthropological definitions of art that I believe are particularly apt in relationship to the study of art, but also to film *as* art. The first has been put forth by Robert Redfield, who sees art as “an enlargement of experience,” or a window through which one might observe culturally-specific human affairs (as quoted in Coote & Shelton 1994, pg. 15). He also posits that the viewer of an artwork is necessarily bound by his or her own culture-bound “aesthetic meanings,” and that the anthropologist’s job is in part to interpret alternative aesthetic meanings and values, as well as the “intellectual and emotional experiences” that led the artist to create the piece (Ibid 1994, pg. 16). He analogises art to a “garden” of experience that allows values and interpretations of beauty and aesthetic meaning to be reconciled between individuals across cultures and puts forth that the anthropologist’s job is to be an interpreter in this process (Ibid 1994, pg. 16).

The next definition of art is one that was put forth by Raymond Firth, who views art as “the attributing of a meaningful pattern to experience or imagined experience” (as quoted in Coote & Shelton 1994, pg. 16). He continues: “It is primarily a matter of perception in order of relations, accompanied by a feeling of rightness in that order, not necessarily pleasurable or beautiful, but satisfying some inner recognition of values” (Ibid 1994, pg. 16). He also suggests that art “involves some degree of ideational and emotional engagement with the relations suggested by the object” (Ibid 1994, pg. 16). In other words, there are necessarily elements of a work of art that satisfy a variety of aesthetic values associated with the creator and the consumer, and these may differ cross-culturally. This discussion will factor in more distinctly when I discuss the concept of value in association with indigenous aesthetics, which I will delve into shortly, in later writing.

Anthropologists’ scholarship of art can also be understood in terms of both form and content. In terms of form, anthropologists heavily rely on the classical ethnographic method of study, which involves participant observation, interviewing informants, and short-term or long-term placement in the field. As Roger Abrahams puts it, “we can now...listen to our informants, who have long been telling us that it is [within art/performance] that a people depict themselves most fully and regard themselves most seriously (even when the event is carried out in fun)” (Abrahams 1983, pg. xxiv). Put simply, engagement with the maker is pivotal in terms of the ethnographic study of art. In terms of content, Plattner suggests (perhaps somewhat awkwardly), that there is a focus on marginalised or “exotic” societies in the anthropological study of art (Plattner 2003, pg. 15). Indeed, this could be perceived as

somewhat problematic because, historically, anthropological studies of artworks were “engineered to benefit the Western museum curators who classified art as ‘fine’ or ‘primitive,’” categories that undermine the social complexity embedded in indigenous forms of art especially (Coote & Shelton 1994, pg. 15). However, from a more optimistic point of view, a more contemporary anthropological standpoint – which acknowledges social complexity within artworks produced from marginalised or non-Western cultures – allows viewers to establish greater understanding and empathy related by establishing emotional connections to or at least interest in these artworks.

Essentially, part of the anthropologist’s job is to acknowledge and assess the “social, ritual, and economic matrix” in which various art objects are produced. Even something as seemingly simple as the naming of an object indicates at least one way in which an artistic production is necessarily embedded in an *art world*, and a “complex set of social relationships” (Coote & Shelton 1994, pg. 15). The anthropologist knows that, within the context of his/her discipline, it is inappropriate to focus on the art object itself without addressing the social relations ingrained in its production. Interestingly, it is for this very reason that the very idea of “art” itself becomes somewhat murky, particularly when discussing indigeneity and artistic production. Therein lies another element of the anthropologists’ work; it is our job to navigate the complex relationship between modern conceptualisations of and culture-bound differences and expansions upon the definitions of “art” as such and the impact of sociocultural tradition on contemporary art products, especially in indigenous cultures.

The idea of problematisation and/or categorisation of art products provides one such window through which we can begin to understand the ways in which indigenous conceptualisations of art differ from Western conceptualisations (very broadly speaking). For example, Sámi culture is heavily centered on the idea of holism. In the context of art, this means that there has historically been very limited differentiation between “art” and “craft,” unlike in the West, where “fine art” and “craft” are often distinguished from one another in terms of form, intention, and function. In the Sámi art world, artisans do not generally exclude an actionable or serviceable quality from the arts in a general sense (Leuthold 1998). In fact, according to Rauna Kuokkanen, “Sámi ‘aesthetic values’ are determined to a great extent by practicality” (Kuokkanen 2000, pg. 423). I will expand upon her statement here and emphasise that her insinuation is *not* that art and aesthetics in the



Sámi conceptualisation are utilitarian *only*. Instead she is suggesting that beauty and practicality are intimately linked in Sámi philosophies of aesthetics, in accordance with a more holistic, synthetic worldview that characterises indigenous philosophies more generally. In the Sámi conceptualisation, items or entities that are beautiful, for example, are made more so *because* they are practical or “beautiful” to use and are made in a beautiful way (I will expand upon what the latter concept means very shortly), though they may be visually appealing or picturesque in their own right as well (Ibid 2000). Sámi author Kirsti Paltto describes some examples of this way of thinking in a Sámi context:

A tourist may find fells beautiful but to a Sámi they may seem ugly because it is hard to walk there, difficult to get through. In the old days, a girl who was round and fat was considered to be beautiful because such a girl would better resist and get along in the cold. A landscape covered with heather is not as beautiful as one covered with lichen because reindeer need it to feed on, and so on (Paltto 1998, pg. 27).

What does this mean for the anthropologist interested in understanding and conceptualising Sámi art? Essentially, it means that it is vital to address concepts related to art and aesthetics from what Kuokkanen refers to as an “indigenous paradigm” (Kuokkanen 2000, pg. 411). The use of an indigenous paradigm necessarily involves breaking away from Western paradigms of art and aesthetics, including, for example, the dichotomisation of art and craft, in order to understand indigenous ways of understanding and crafting beauty. I suggest that it is necessary to approach indigenous art from an indigenous paradigm because the underestimation of the culture-bound perspectives and social complexities embedded within an art object – as Plattner puts it, the “deculturation” of the object – is both oversimplifying and dehumanizing (Plattner 2003, pg. 16).

In the previous paragraphs, I discussed an example of indigenous art as reflective of a complex and culturally specific system of aesthetic values. Indeed, it can be said that aesthetic experience is inextricable from the study and consumption of art itself. However, I feel it may be useful here to briefly touch upon the anthropological study of aesthetics as its own discipline, as some scholars have suggested that aesthetics – rather than “art” specifically – provides a more holistic and cross-cultural foundation from which we can conceptualise the indigenous arts. First, I must address the principal differences between

“art” and “aesthetics” respectively. Sharman suggests that “art is a qualitative category of objects and events,” while “aesthetics is an evaluative process that subsumes such culturally specific categories as 'art' in its incorporation of all value attachment systems” (Sharman 1997, pg. 184). Indeed, aesthetics are generally understood to be broader in scope than “art,” which, according to Sharman, “is an important, but largely unique, aspect of a Western aesthetic. The fact that many languages seemingly lack a word translatable as 'art' illustrates this largely unique character” (Ibid 1997, pg. 184).

Depending on the context, an aesthetic experience of something might be elicited by “the perfect functional utility of a chair, the simplicity of an idea, or the elegance of a solution to a problem” (Morphy 2006, pg. 302), in addition to, for example, the use of colour in a Van Gogh painting. In the Western aesthetic, there is a category of “art” that is concerned with the attachment of value to certain formal qualities of objects or events, which retain that value regardless of context. In the indigenous conceptualisation, aesthetics values are intimately related to function *and* context:

To the Western eye, a Trobriand canoe-prow board can be considered an 'art' object whether it is viewed cutting through the surf on its way to a Kula exchange or suspended from a museum ceiling. Its aesthetic appreciation is not dependent upon its cultural context. The problem with 'art' as a cross-cultural category is its particularly Western connotation as an end in itself. The Western art object, whether it be an Italian fresco or Duchamp's urinal, is viewed and critiqued in isolation (Sharman 1997, pg. 184).

Conversely, aesthetics gives “primacy to the expressive process, where product matters less than production” (Sharman 1997, pg. 185). Many anthropologists, such as Guss, Morphy, Coote, and Shelton – to name a few – have argued that the study of aesthetics provides a more appropriate foundation from which we can understand indigenous “art” because it “incorporates every aspect of the creative process, placing objects and events in the specific aesthetic setting crucial to its meaningful experience” (Sharman 1997, pg. 185). For this reason, I feel the study of aesthetics, very broadly, is particularly apt when discussing Sámi and other indigenous arts, which are, again, grounded in holistic and purposive philosophies of beauty and utility.

I stated previously that the anthropology of aesthetics provides a more appropriate foundation from which we can approach indigenous art from an indigenous paradigm. However, I suggest that both the anthropology of art and anthropology of aesthetics are useful in this respect. Essentially, it depends on what one wishes to study and understand in the context of indigenous art. In studying film, for example, I am interested in the construction of indigenous identity through cinematics and audiovisual arts and media. And indeed, the conceptualisation(s) of identity hinge upon a collective acknowledgment of a cultural aesthetic, or a particular way of knowing, seeing, and hearing one's cultural environment. As Eagleton points out, this collective cultural aesthetic "colours [one's] sensory perception of the world [within] a group of people who...recognise and express beauty in a similar way" (Eagleton 1990, pg. 20). He also notes that the "binding force" of one's cultural aesthetic can be – not exclusively, but partially – be a product of "some coercive apparatus like slavery," or in the indigenous case, I suggest, a shared history of colonisation (Ibid 1990, pg. 20). I suggest that this shared history is what results in many Sámi films and artworks addressing issues such as imperialism, subjugation, and colonisation in their productions while expressing many recognisable audiovisual characteristics recognisable to Sámi audiences, from traditional attire to particular colours (I noted a lot of red and blue in Sámi films, particularly in terms of the clothes the characters wear and in terms of material and symbolic items; note the red thread in *Jorinda's Resa*, Marja Helander's bright red dress in *Suodji*, etc.) to the sounds of wind howling through the tundra and the huffing of reindeer. However, I must reiterate here what I pointed out at the very beginning of this chapter; I hypothesise that the essential "Sámi aesthetic" relates more to the "Sámi way of thinking" rather than a series of visual markers (though those visual markers do indeed bear great significance in Sámi films). To exemplify what I mean by this, I will next explore the linkages between aesthetics, values, indigenous "art," and the "Sámi way of thinking" through an art form that bears tremendous significance in the Sámi world: *duodji*, or (very loosely translated) handicraft.

### **Sámi Aesthetics: What's Good to Use Beautifully**

*Duodji* possesses tremendous importance in terms of the creative and spiritual lives of many Sámi people. Though "handicraft" is indeed the most pertinent translation for the

term *duodji* in the English language, the word *duodji* is quite difficult to interpret in English because the connotations of the term extend far beyond the idea of a decorative domestic object as it is commonly thought of in a Western context (Guttorm 2011). For example, *duodji* does not refer only to the product being created, which can include knives, bags, wooden cups and other cutlery, clothing, and decorative pieces; it also “refers to the creative activity that is being formed with the hands” (Vidmar 2016, pg. 31). Sámi *duojárat* (the term for a *duodji* practitioner [author note: this is not an “exclusive” term, as many Sámi consider themselves *duojárat*]) and scholar Gunvor Guttorm emphasises that *duodji* must principally “be understood as putting Indigenous knowledge and experience to work” (Guttorm 2011, pg. 165). Hansen expounds on these suggestions of the engaged and actionable in Sámi art further when he states that *duodji* “embraces an understanding of nature and gathering materials...[and] the maker’s training as artist or craftsperson; place, process, and the result” (Hansen 2016, pg. 5). Thus, the term connotes utilitarian, actionable, and creative components, which, again, cannot be conceived of as separate from the idea of visual aesthetic beauty in the Sámi context. Aamold expounds further upon the vital spiritual, tactile, visual, and serviceable components of *duodji* in Sámi culture:

Sámi [people] treasured their tools, clothes, and equipment for their practical utility, their symbolic value (for instance, as a marker of a specific *siida* or family) and their beauty (formal or decorative qualities such as shape, patterns, composition, colours, materials, techniques, endurance, and craft). We may initially distinguish between an object which is intentionally well-shaped with regard to its use(s) *and* decorated or ornamented, such as...*gákti* (a jacket or coat), *giisà* (a wedding box)...*goavddis* or *meavrresgárri* (a holy drum). Their stylistic qualities adhere to...traditional European ideas of aesthetic value. On the other hand...the term *hávski* (pleasant) comprises more than a gratification of the senses. It includes the idea of a place and time in which it is pleasant to act or to rest (Aamold 2017, pg. 16).

I will return to the concept of *hávski* in later writing, as it provides an imperative theoretical context through which we can understand the idea of what is “beautiful” and/or “pleasant” in Sámi ontology more generally. Before doing so, I will round out the conversation regarding handicraft and reiterate that *duodji* does not distinguish an object’s

utilitarian value from its visual aesthetic properties, in accordance with broader, more synthetic Sámi philosophies of beauty and art. To provide a deeper understanding of the concept of *duodji* in its wholeness, I must also note here that *duodji*, as Guttorm intimated previously, implies an indelible connection between Sámi “traditional” knowledge and more general Sámi philosophies of aesthetics as well. Note that I am placing the term “traditional” in quotations here, not to devalue the time-honoured and enduring quality of indigenous bodies of knowledge, but to convey the idea that the “traditional” in the Sámi conceptualisation does not have the same connotations of stasis as we typically associate with the term “traditional” in the Western vocabulary (Guttorm 2011). Kuokkanen explains that “the term ‘traditional knowledge’” can be problematic in that “it can be argued that all knowledge is contemporary, for it is given meaning and value from a frame of reference that is continually updated and revised” (as quoted in Stevenson 1996, pg. 280). I will explore further the practice and products of *duodji* to illustrate Kuokkanen’s meaning here.

Though “*duoddjon* [author note: this is the term for the activity of *duodji* creation in North Sámi] is an ancient process,” Guttorm explains, “*duodji* is always a *contemporary* expression based on knowledge, whether it be knowledge of *duodji* or Sámi life” (Guttorm 2011, pg. 164). *Duodji* and the process of its creation, *duoddjon*, are further associated with the Sámi term *árbevierru*, which “refers to something that has been repeated and passed on from generation to generation, implying tradition and repetition” (Ibid 2011, pg. 65). However, in the North Sámi language *árbevierru* also suggests the idea of, as Guttorm puts it “traditions then and now, which of course alludes to change over time” (Ibid 2011, pg. 65). Pertinently, Guttorm utilises the example of the *náhppi*, or reindeer milking bowl, to exemplify this idea. To understand why a *náhppi* is beautiful according to a Sámi person, one must “look at the use of the *náhppi* during milking and in light of the later autonomous application of the *náhppi*” (Guttorm 2017, pg. 165). The item must be understood from the perspective of “two periods, that is, when the *náhppi* was made for a specific use...and when it is a contemporary product made primarily for an audience” (Ibid 2017, pg. 165). These relationships between new and old, between stasis and movement, between beauty and utility, are all inherent even just within the word *náhppi*. Guttorm explains: “most Sámi speaking people will...have an association with the ‘old’ (from the milking period) while looking at a contemporary *náhppi*, even if its shape does not support that association” (Ibid

2017, pg. 166). My point here is that there is an inherent quality of temporal flow within Sámi traditional knowledge, which is exemplified in the artistic tradition of *duodji* as well.

I will also suggest here that the idea of the “traditional” can be understood as much more complex in the Sámi context even if we look at the abundance of words under the terminological umbrella of “tradition” in the Sámi dialects. For example, the North Sámi term *árbediehtu* refers, very generally, to bodies of Sámi “traditional knowledge.” The term *árbečehppodat*, more specifically, refers to “traditional skill” (Guttorm 2011, pg. 60). Both of these terms, according to Guttorm, “are concepts which relate to possessing knowledge, i.e. having knowledge about something (*diehtu*) and having knowledge in something (*máhhtu*)” (Ibid 2011, pg. 60). Guttorm explicates on the nuances between these terms further:

A person may know a great deal about something but will not necessarily know it. This may sound a little strange. But the distinction between *diehtit* and *máhhtit* can be expressed briefly as the difference between, on the one hand, knowledge of an action and on the other hand, the ability to perform the action, i.e. bodily knowledge... Somebody may know (*diehtit*) how to make a e.g. a *gietkka* (‘Sámi cradle’), even though this person has never made one themselves. He or she can learn this by looking at cradles, being instructed in how to do it or reading about it in books, etc. However, if he or she actually also makes a *gietkka*, he or she will gain hands-on personal experience, i.e. knowledge through action (Guttorm 2011, pg. 62).

The term *čehppodat* further specifies that a person is good at something, or, even more specifically, *giehtačehppodat* (in general, “handy”), *čállinčehppodat* (“good at writing”), or *lávlučehppodat* (“good at singing”) (Guttorm 2011, pg. 62). Personal knowledge can be understood as a prerequisite for the assertion that a person truly has attained *máhhtu*, or a certain traditional skill. It is not until a person has, for example, actually made a *gietkka* that we can say with certainty that he or she has the *máhhtu* to create a beautiful one. In the context of *duodji*, the more knowledge and experience one has related to a particular object, the more beautiful that object becomes based on the creator’s engagement and expertise (Ibid 2011).

Guttorm emphasizes that *duodji* is part of “the everyday” for the Sámi people. “The everyday,” he explains further, “happens when people sit and create while life happens around them” (Guttorm 2017, pg. 165). Doctoral Research Fellow in Art History with the Sámi Art Research Project at the Arctic University of Norway Irene Snarby agrees when she states:

The Sámi people have traditionally focused on aesthetics in all of life’s activities. In everything from cups and knives to sleds, traditional clothing, religious objects, *joik*...and behaviour, the idea was to live so cautiously that one left no visible trace after oneself. As long as aesthetics infused everything, there was no need for a concept of art (Snarby 2019, pg. 1).

As such, in the Sámi lifeworld and in indigenous aesthetics more generally, art and creativity, or the production of beautiful objects and engagement in beautiful and constructive activities, are “part of being human” (Ibid 2017, pg. 165). In this way, we must understand that indigenous aesthetics, and more specifically in the context of this discussion, Sámi aesthetics, are *not* Kantian or disinterested. *Duodji*, a vital component of Sámi culture in a general sense and a key concept through which we can understand Sámi philosophies of aesthetics, contains and exemplifies the practical and utilitarian, the actionable and creative, the visual, and the spiritual. With support from Sámi theorists and scholars, I have exemplified upon the former points perhaps most thoroughly in the previous section in order to convey a crucial difference between Western and indigenous aesthetics; namely, that Western aesthetics tend to compartmentalise the visually beautiful and the practical, whereas no such problematisation exists in Sámi cosmology. However, I have only briefly touched upon the spiritual aspects of Sámi aesthetics in the discussion thus far. I have insinuated that there is a spiritual component to *árbediehtu* and thus with *duodji* and indigenous art more generally, but in the coming section, I will elucidate in more depth exactly what that means in a Sámi context.

As I have emphasised through an introduction to and analysis of the concept of and practices associated with *duodji*, indigenous aesthetics, and correspondingly the broader indigenous worldview, is one that embraces and depends upon the holistic. Leuthold maintains that Western epistemic paradigms in general tend to be more “analytic,

attempting to separate and reduce experience into its constituent parts for the purpose of mechanistic understanding” (Leuthold 1998, pg. 190). Conversely, indigenous philosophic positions tend to be more synthetic, centered on “a search for and appreciation of connections between categories of experience” (Ibid 1998, pg. 190). Accordingly, there is no clear distinction between the visually beautiful and the utilitarian in *duodji*, which exemplifies well Sámi conceptualisations of art. Related to this, I wish to make note here that, just as there is no division between the practical and the beautiful in Sámi art and craftsmanship, there is similarly negligible distinction between visual aesthetics, art, utility, and spirituality, or as Aamold puts it, the “unseen” spiritual environment, in the Sámi lifeworld (Aamold 2017, pg. 85). Leuthold expands upon this idea: “the traditional function of art in Native cultures is so closely tied to religion that it is difficult to speak of a social function of art beyond its role in religious expression” (Leuthold 1998, pg. 189). However, when speaking of “religion” I am not necessarily referring to the “old religion” in a literal sense, though vestiges of pre-Christian spirituality unquestionably factor heavily into contemporary Sámi cosmology overall. I am instead referring to a more holistic sense of worldview and spirituality among indigenous peoples, one that encompasses the “Sámi way of thinking,” as Elle Sofe Sara describes, which emphasises the interrelationships among art, myth, time, and place.

Here I will return briefly to the idea of traditional knowledge in the Sámi context, as it is inextricable from the Sámi spiritual world *and* indigenous aesthetics. Guttorm maintains that *árbediehtu*, or traditional knowledge, encompasses both the “outer” and the “inner” (Guttorm 2011, pg. 64). Outer tradition “refers to one’s behaviours and customs in certain contexts, as well as the products created by these events” (Ibid 2011, pg. 64). A *goahti*, or turf hut, for example, is considered a tradition in itself. At the same time, it can also be understood as “an *embodiment* of traditional knowledge,” as its construction “requires knowledge of the area, the materials, the earth, the seasons, etc.” (Ibid 2011, pg. 71). A *goahti* also contains aspects of inner tradition, which include “views, values, beliefs, and ideals,” as well as a “spiritual aspect in the sense that we as human beings see ourselves as part of nature and act accordingly” (Ibid 2011, pg. 70). In the context of the *goahti*, this means that the Sámi *duojárat* has collected the materials for and constructed the turf hut in accordance with his/her spiritual values, which involve, in part, offering respect for nature and not taking more than what one needs for any intended purpose. Related to this, in



speaking of the spiritual aspect of *árbediehtu* and, correspondingly, *duodji*, we must acknowledge an intrinsic link to nature and the environment (Guttorm 2017). I am also suggesting that there is a key association between ethics and nature inherent to Sámi ontology. Explicating that there are “both moral and ethical aspects involved” in *árbediehtu*, Guttorm expands upon these associations by way of example (Guttorm 2011, pg. 68):

The use of an area is a social contract requiring interpersonal action. The names of bogs can sometimes give us an insight into these social contracts. One example is ‘*Elle áhku jeaggi.*’ Why is a bog given such a name? The name tells us that *Áhku Elle* (grandmother Elle) made it her *vierru* to pick berries in that bog, and everyone accepted this, because she had bad legs and couldn’t get to bogs farther away...ethical attitudes are...revealed here i.e. a woman with weak legs ‘gets’ a swamp to help her survive (*birget*) (Guttorm 2011, pg. 69).

In keeping with the idea of holism in Sámi epistemologies, Guttorm’s description insinuates that there is a link between the ethical beliefs that underpin indigenous sociality and the natural world, as well as environmental knowledge. The fact that the elderly woman “received” a bog specifically for her implies compassion and respect for the elderly, as well as restraint and selectiveness in terms of the extraction of resources from a particular location. These factors are all translated into *árbediehtu*, or traditional knowledge; to be more specific, because of a variety of ethical selections, the Sámi communities surrounding this particular bog know what and for whom its berries are for. Kuokkanen uses the term *láhi*, or “gift” as “an entry point for understanding the relationship between man and nature, and also...the spiritual aspect” inherent to *árbediehtu* and the constructive and conscientious engagement with nature (Kuokkanen 2006, pg. 24):

*Láhi* is related to what we receive from nature, and our ability to share nature’s benefits. This is a question of sharing with one another both at the material and the spiritual level. In the North Sámi language, we have a word to express this sharing with others: *oassi* which means part, not only a specific part, but it is also used in expressions such as *luonddu oassi*, meaning what nature should have, or what is connected to luck. A group of people fishing may for example agree that everyone

will be ‘partial owners’ of all catches. *Luonddu oassi* is the part that one releases to nature, e.g. by not fishing more than one needs (Kuokkanen 2006, pg. 24).

I will here explain what this all has to do with indigenous beauty, art, and aesthetics. Towards the end of the previous section and in the beginning of this one, I briefly touched upon the fact that there is no clear division between life and art in the indigenous lifeworld. This is a very general statement, but essentially it implies that there are no definitive distinctions between aesthetics, art, ethics, nature, and spirituality in Sámi ontology. All these aspects are linked and feed into one another and collude to create what Guttorm and Kuokkanen describe as *luonddu*, which refers to “Sámi nature, a Sámi way of being” (Guttorm 2011, pg. 89; Kuokkanen 2006, pg. 24). And indeed, an important part of the Sámi “way of being” and thinking corresponds to indigenous aesthetics; more specifically, I am returning here to the concept of *hávski*, which I touched upon very briefly at the end of the last section. The term *hávski* suggests an ability to achieve a life that is aesthetically “pleasant,” and I must emphasise here that I am not strictly speaking of visual aesthetics (Aamold 2017, pg. 16). Just as *duodji* incorporates the visually beautiful, the spiritual, and the actionable, so does the holistic term *hávski*. If a *duodji* object is *hávski*, it is likely beautiful to look at, good to use, and made in such a way that corresponds with Sámi spiritual values. Similarly, if one has accomplished or experienced a life that is *hávski*, it means that he or she has “achieved the necessary knowledge to live life ‘in an effective manner’” (Guttorm 2011, pg. 89). This “effectiveness” is linked to traditional knowledge, or *árbediehtu*, which in turn is linked to nature and the operative use of nature, which is linked to spirituality and ethics, which are linked to beauty, or a beautiful way of being. And, according to Sámi philosophy, the “essential core of the aesthetic act of being mindful lies particularly in contact with – in *contract* with – our Mother the earth” (Gaski 2017, pg. 191). Thus, aesthetic beauty in the Sámi context, and indeed within most indigenous philosophies, is intimately linked to the spiritual, the “unseen” that lies within the individual and also within the natural environment (Aamold et al 2017, pg. 85).

## Sámi Aesthetics and the Indigenous Nature Relation

There are alternative ways of living—we do not have to sabotage the home we live on in order to live good lives. In fact, if we exploit and pollute the earth, then *none* of us—like the Sámi now—will have anywhere to go. Colonial society is blind to this (Blomqvist 2016, pg. 10).

Coote states that “what is morally good is expected to display valued aesthetic qualities, and what displays valued aesthetic qualities is expected to be morally good” (Coote 1992, pg. 266). Sharman agrees, arguing that distinctions between good and bad, right and wrong, emerge from the “process of value-attachment that perpetuates the aesthetic system. Beauty is attributed to this experiences that appeal to the socialised senses...” (Sharman 1997, pg. 183). In the previous section, I believe I have exemplified these concepts through the Sámi concept of *hávski* in indigenous art and craft. I also argued that, in part, Sámi aesthetics are intimately related to the ethical and responsible use of land and space; in Sámi ontology, loosely, what is ecologically responsible is what is aesthetically beautiful and good. Indeed, I do not feel I can discuss aesthetics in Sámi culture in its fulsomeness without addressing the indigenous peoples’ relationship to nature, which, I believe is worth noting, has been depicted in ways that are both constructive and destructive, alternatively empathetic and essentialising, in art, media, and politics. Here, I will briefly explore 1) the “nature” of the Sámi nature relation and the ways it factors into the study of indigenous aesthetics, and 2) the ways in which political bodies and majority media structures are at risk of oversimplifying and essentialising the Sámi nature/place relation, to which Sámi film may provide a constructive counterpoint.

Indeed, in Sámi art, poetry, literature, oral storytelling, and film, the indigenous peoples’ relationship to land and place is often thematised in one way or the other; this can be easily observed in the corpus of Sámi media that has been discussed thus far in this thesis. Of course, I don’t mean to essentialise Sámi films by alleging that these works only thematise particular issues; certainly, not all Sámi films deal with nature or even place relations as focal points. For example, Marja Bål Nango’s *Oh Maigon Girl (OMG)!* is more of a coming-of-age teen drama more than anything else. It follows a group of adolescent girls who pursue a potentially dangerous hitchhiking adventure outside of their small highland

village, out of adolescent boredom and recklessness. The element of place factors into the story, as the girls' relationship with their hometown serves as an impetus for their venturing, but the Sámi nature relation is not particularly emphasized (Bål Nango 2015).

Similarly, in Simma's *Bazo* (discussed in Chapter 3), which chronicles a rather boorish young man on a journey to collect the possessions of his deceased father, Sámi culture and place relations are portrayed in a rather secular and unromantic fashion. As a final brief example, in *Sameblod*, Elle Marja's troubled relationship with her homeland and her Sámi identity prompts her to leave her reindeer herding community and reject her ethnicity in an effort to assimilate into "ordinary" Swedish society (Simma 2003). In each of these films, place relation is identifiable as a theme, but it is either a secondary leitmotif or the Sámi's harmonious relationship to nature is subverted and played with. Of course, it makes sense that place relation would factor in as an inextricable element of Sámi life and culture in media, particularly when the main characters live in rural areas or participate in land-based occupations.

However, a great abundance of Sámi films do address the profundity of the Sámi land and nature relation from both spiritual and political perspectives. For example, Marja Helander's *Birds in the Earth* offers a quiet, melancholic story about the Sámi people's rights in contemporary Finland, particularly as they relate to land and place. The story is told through the dance performances of two young Sámi sisters, Brit and Katja Haarla. At the opening of the dialogue-less film, the two dancers glide through a fuel station in *Sápmi*, wearing white leotards and tutus and walking forward in unison. They toss two lassos forward, one red and one yellow. The red lasso pulls forth a taxidermied fox, and the yellow a small microwave. Shots of a doll with frost on its lashes, the fox, the microwave, a taxidermied bird, and other items display, and the camera pans back to reveal a clutter of objects, including a wheel, a painting, and a keyboard (Helander 2018).



Fig. 38: Helander M. (2018) *Birds in the Earth* [Promotional image]. Retrieved from: <http://www.wearemovingstories.com/we-are-moving-stories-films/2019/1/17/eyes-at-the-specter-glass-6kcxw249g>

The girls then move to the forest. They extend their legs in an *arabesque* next to a sign that says “Valtion” and “Maata”; the caption below states: “stáhta eana,” or “state-owned land.” Briefly, we see the girls in traditional attire, standing opposite each other at the sign, and they drape their white shawls over it. The sound of a Sámi *joik* plays as, once again in their tutus, the dancers glide across an open field in unison. They reach an assemblage of rocks and boulders in front of the sea, and they lift their arms into second position together. They dance a sculpture of a bear holding a sign that says “open,” and then make their way past a wooden house displaying the words “souvenirs and café” (Helander 2018).

Next, they enter the cityscape. They are in traditional attire again, dancing quietly in front of the Finnish parliament building. We see them in the same space in their white leotards and tutus again, as they bow down into the “dying swan” stance from of Piotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky’s ballet *Swan Lake*. A taxidermied reindeer is positioned in front of the building. Next, we see them dancing in what appears to be an empty reindeer corral as a *joik* is sung

once more. The camera pans back to demonstrate aerial shots of the massive corral and its wide open, snowy surrounding territory (Helander 2018).

Marja Helander explains the impetus for the creation of this unique and poignant art film:

I had this vision of two indigenous dancers...dancing the ballet choreography 'dying swan' in front of the Finnish Parliament house. Then the idea grew to them dancing on the Arctic mountains and villages. It was interesting to combine this really disciplined art form to the wild nature. The film tells also about the contradictions between Sámi people and the state of Finland concerning the ownership of land and the sovereignty of the Sámi people (as quoted in Becher 2020).

Another pertinent example is Elle Sofe Sara Henriksen's moving experimental dance film *Biegga savkala duoddara duohken lea soames* (*The wind whispers there is someone behind the tundra*, 2007). This film also follows numerous Sámi dancers as they travel through the Arctic landscape and encounter their Sámi ancestors (Henriksen 2007). The film's title comes from artist, writer, and activist Synnøve Persen's poem of the same name, which, according to Elle Sofe Sara, "is about a strong connection with the nature here. And that strong bond with the tundra has something to do with those who were here before us, our ancestors. It is their subtle existence you can feel if you really listen" (Henriksen n.d.). Like *Birds in the Earth* and many other films by Elle Sofe Sara, *Biegga savkala duoddara duohken lea soames* has no dialogue. Elle Sofe Sara is also presently working on a film addressing land relations called *Vástádus eana*, or *The answer is land*, which is undergoing development.

Countless other Sámi films deal with land relations and land rights directly or indirectly. The film *Jovgon-19* addresses the recent pandemic and its impact in *Sápmi*. Specifically, it follows a woman who has to dig free her water spring under a frozen lockdown. On the website [Sápmifilm.com](http://Sápmifilm.com), the hashtag #WaterisLife accompanies the description of the film, connecting *Sápmi* to the global indigenous struggle for water protection. #WaterisLife emerged as an indigenous movement and a protest anthem from Standing Rock heard around the world, and it also has spiritual meaning rooted in indigenous worldviews (ISFI n.d.).

## The Political Dimensions of the Sámi Nature Relation: ILO-169

I have provided these examples because I wish to emphasise that the Sámi nature/place relation is complex and multidimensional. It is also vitally important and factors heavily into postcolonial discussions and, as Valkonen & Valkonen describe, “identity projects” in political discourse related to Sámi rights and identity (Valkonen & Valkonen 2014, pg. 25). As they posit, the idea of Sámi peoples’ “special nature relation” is not incorrect or inappropriate, and that in many ways it is very constructive in that it “legitimises indigenous peoples’ special position of agency in international politics” (Ibid 2014, pg. 26). However, they suggest, because it is enmeshed in the politics of Sáminess and indigeneity, the Sámi land relation is of course at risk of becoming oversimplified (Ibid 2014). As was discussed to a certain extent in Chapter 3, oversimplification and essentialisation of Sámi life and values can be particularly rife and problematic within works of media that have been produced by outsiders who may only have a rudimentary understanding of Sámi values. But again, I must reiterate that the idea of the Sámi peoples’ “special nature relation” – while complex – is not false or disingenuous (Ibid 2014, pg. 26). As was discussed previously in this chapter, Sámi aesthetics and values are heavily determined by the ethical and mindful interface with nature. Several Sámi scholars have discussed this concept in depth. Finnish Sámi politician and scholar Irja Seurujärvi-Kari, for example, asserts in her book *Beaivvi Mánát: Sámi Roots and Modern Times* that “the essence of the Sámi grows out of a relationship with nature that has remained unchanged for thousands of years” (Seurujärvi-Kari 2000, pg. 12). Similarly, anthropologist Jukka Pennanen writes in *Siidastallan* that the cultural foundation of “Sáminess” lies at the intersection of nature and culture (Pennanen & Näkkäläjäarvi 2000).

However, it is also undeniable that Sámi relations to land have also become heavily political, particularly since the Alta Affair and onward. Valkonen and Valkonen perceive Sámi and other indigenous identities as they relate to land and nature as “performatively constructed, i.e. as repetitive and reality-creating, and therefore as subjectifying but also deeply political” (Valkonen & Valkonen 2014, pg. 26). They continue: “From a performative point of view, the nature relation can be seen as part of identity processes and politics” (Ibid 2014, pg. 26). The performative aspect of the Sámi land relation, I suggest, is particularly relevant when we discuss film, media, and aesthetics. Indeed, Valkonen and Valkonen point

out that essentialising presentations of the Sámi relationship to land and nature in news, fiction, and tourism media (by outsiders but also sometimes by Sámi producers themselves) can contribute to three primary public presumptions about Sáminess: 1) Sámi culture is “static (the nature relation never changes)”, 2) indigenous Sámi culture is fundamentally rooted in a “harmonious” and constructive relation to the natural world, and 3) this nature relation “characterises the Sámi” (Ibid 2014, pg. 27, 28). The first point is likely the most problematic, because 1) it disregards the constantly evolving, adaptable nature of indigenous tradition, and 2) it assumes evident uniformity throughout Sámi culture.

To the first point, I will loop back to the previous discussion in this chapter that addresses Sámi aesthetics as rooted in tradition, but also constantly evolving and adapting to contemporaneity. To the second point, I must point out again that *Sápmi* is, as Valkonen and Valkonen state, “ecologically diverse, [and] times and places have changed and that Sámi livelihoods vary significantly in different historical and local contexts” (Valkonen & Valkonen 2014, pg. 28) In fact, as Lehtola has observed, “the most misleading generalisation concerning the Sámi people and culture is to see and treat them as a historically and culturally coherent group” (as quoted in Ibid 2014, pg. 28). Sámi moral standards and aesthetics are, as discussed, related in some broad value-related senses, but the specifics of certain traditions are largely determined by locality.

Indeed, in thinking of “culture” as being something politically organised and official, it is worth noting here that the very idea of culture in a contemporary sense is a relatively new concept in Sámi ontology. Gaski suggests that “culture” is essentially a “loan word” in the Sámi language (Gaski 2000, pg. 10). Ingold expands upon this idea when he describes *Sápmi* as “a region with no royal palaces or lost cities...not so much a monument as an improvisation; its concern is not to preserve the past but to keep going” (Ingold 2019, pg. 111). While the cultural history of the West is typically written down, solidified, and monumentalised in order to merit validity, in the Sámi conceptualisation, life and culture are more continuous and fluid; “the hand of nature erases all traces of Sámi migration and settlement, perhaps only leaving behind the ring of stones around a campfire or the folklore surrounding the meaning of a place name” (Gaski 2004, pg. 372).

In other words, Sámi culture prior to the cultural revival respected a more intuitive conceptualisation of “Sáminess,” and knowledge of one’s identity as an indigenous person did not necessitate officially designated characteristics or territories before it became



threatened and fragmented. Thus, the Sámi Cultural Revival involved a very complex series of ontological negotiations; perhaps most notably, Sámi people had to develop their cultural distinctiveness while operating within ideological parameters of the majority culture. To some degree, advocates for Sámi rights had to appeal to the cultural epistemologies of the majority culture in order to be taken seriously on legal and political platforms (Gaski 2000). Put more simply, Sámi people had to demand validation as an organised indigenous group in an official legislative capacity in order to achieve the political agency required to sustain their cultural lives. This was done, in large part, through advocacy related to land rights and indigenous land relations.

Certainly, the Sámi people have made enormous strides in terms of their presence and influence in Norwegian policymaking and development activities, and it cannot be overemphasised that land relations have been instrumental in advancing these endeavours. In his speech at the inauguration of the European Capital of Culture in Umeå in 2014, Stefan Mikaelsson, former president of the Swedish Sami Parliament Plenary Assembly, spoke to this point: “Our lands and territories are the core of our existence – we are the land and the land is us; we have a distinct spiritual and material relationship with our lands and territories and they are inextricably linked to our survival” (as quoted in Viallon 2018, pg. 30). Viallon makes an important observation about Mikaelsson’s statement when she notes: “‘Our lands and territories’ emphasises the idea of the immemorial belonging of the Sami territories, now spread across four states, to the Sámi themselves. This postcolonial discourse is used methodically here, since the audience is local, national and international” (Ibid 2018, pg. 31).

The reference to a “postcolonial discourse” is important here, particularly in relationship to the overarching theme of this thesis (Viallon 2018, pg. 31). Sámi land relationships – and the portrayal of these relationships in film and media – are inextricable from a broader discussion regarding the decolonisation of the relationship between the Nordic states and the Sámi population. Indeed, the idea that the Sámi people have inhabited *Sápmi* since time immemorial factors into the political and legal assertion that they have the right to live on their territories and manage their natural resources. Indeed, the commitment to environmental conscientiousness is emphasised in political discourse as a “common value” that fundamentally permeates Sámi culture and constitutes an important element of Sámi identity (Ibid 2018, pg. 32). As President of the Finnish Sami Parliament

Tiina Sanila-Aikio stated in 2017: “Our people have lived here since time immemorial, managing the lands and waters with great respect and care” (Sanila-Aikio 2017).

With this all being said, despite the apparent enthusiasm of Nordic nations for the preservation of indigenous rights and culture, there are still many matters of importance to Sámi people regarding which the Sámi Parliament’s voice seems to be heavily restricted, even in Norway. For example, though it has acquired authority over the protection of cultural heritage as well as the right to object to planning and building projects, the Sámi Parliamentary assembly still lacks much effective authority over fisheries, mineral resources, and, rather surprisingly, reindeer herding (Koivurova et al 2015). During his address to the public and officials present at the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the first Sami Conference in Trondheim in 2017, Håkan Jonsson of the Swedish Sámi Parliament, observed a common struggle experienced by the Sámi in all four nations they inhabit: “We have almost no influence over our land, water and natural resources in the Sámi areas” (Jonsson 2017).

This statement may seem surprising, particularly when we discuss Norwegian politics. This is because, among other factors, Norway is the only Nordic nation and the first country in the world to have ratified ILO-169 in June 1990. Here I am referring to the revision of the International Labour Organisation’s (ILO) 1957 Indigenous and Tribal Populations Convention, the present iteration of which is pivotal in terms of outlining the collective rights of indigenous peoples around the globe. However, I maintain that – while it should be acknowledged that Norway in particular has grown tremendously in terms of its approach to indigenous self-determination and decolonial justice in the past few decades, there are still unavoidable barriers to the elevation of Sámi voices in political and development dialogues that involve enduring paternalistic perceptions of the Sámi as “a kind of museum piece, picturesque and on their way to extinction because they do not fit into the modern world” (Grant & Lei 2001, pg. 132). I suggest that these perceptions circle back, in part, to misapprehensions regarding the Sámi nature relation, which runs parallel to a majority dialogue that romanticised the Sámi as a “nature people,” a quixotic idea that reduces the complexity of indigenous cultures’ complex and holistic relationship to their environments. In later writing, I will address some of the specific consequences of this dialogue, and for now I will very briefly touch upon the ratification of ILO-169 in Norway.

In 1957, the ILO adopted its Convention Concerning the Protection and Integration of Indigenous and Other Tribal and Semi-Tribal Populations in Independent Countries

(C107), which encouraged the integration and assimilation of indigenous peoples into the majority social and economic orders that governed where they lived. Indeed, the initial conception of C107 was quite in line with Norwegianisation policies that previously characterised indigenous sociopolitical relations. Even so, in 1958, the Norwegian ILO Committee actually advised *against* the ratification of C107, based on the idea that, based on the current understanding of the term “indigenous,” the Convention “[applied] to groups that [did] not exist [in Norway]” (Vik & Semb 2013, pg. 523). In other words, they did not acknowledge the Sámi people as “indigenous” and thus did not observe the necessity of special rights for them. At the time, they were seen instead as simply a “rural minority” (Ibid 2013, pg. 523). It would not be until the 1970s that national politicians would adopt the understanding of the Sámi as an indigenous population. Indeed, this corresponded with what Vik and Semb describe as a “radical reconceptualisation” in terms of the political understanding and treatment of indigeneity (Ibid 2013, pg. 519). The burgeoning idea of decolonisation and the understanding of its necessity factors in heavily here:

International focus turned to efforts to protect the cultures of these populations, and destruction of such cultures was increasingly understood as a global phenomenon and concern. With de-colonialisation and advocacy by anthropologists in the 1960s and the emergence of an international indigenous peoples’ movement in the 1970s, the concept of ‘indigenous peoples’ gradually gained its contemporary meaning. Assimilation efforts were replaced with an indigenous rights perspective as indigenous activists, academics and specialists of international organisations argued with increasing force that indigenous peoples could be found across the world, suffering in various ways as the result of external or internal colonisation. In the mid-1980s, instruments were drafted to enumerate the human rights of such populations. These designated them as ‘peoples’ and recognized their individual and collective rights (Vik & Semb 2013, pg. 521).

Subsequent to the Alta Affair, in 1980 an official report reassessed Norway’s prior decision not to ratify ILO-C107. In contrast to the 1958 decision, this report concluded that, C107 should be potentially ratified and certainly revised, as it “reflected a paternalistic mode of thinking in relationship to the Sámi population” that was no longer appropriate and

relevant to the present day political climate in Norway (Vik & Semb 2013, pg. 10). Specifically, the report identified specifically that Norway did not fulfill the Convention's requirements to cover indigenous land rights. This is because, in part, Norway had proclaimed itself owner of 96% of the land in Finnmark (a determination that, notably, came into effect in the 18<sup>th</sup> century and had not been changed since). The Sámi had some particular rights related to reindeer herding, but it was nevertheless determined by Einar Høgetveit, the young jurist who had served as the main secretary for the Sámi Rights Commission from 1980 to 1983, that it was "absolutely clear that the legal situation of the Sámi areas in Finnmark did not satisfy C107," which delineated particular land rights provisions for indigenous populations (Vik & Semb 2013, pg. 532).

Among many other stipulations, the revision of ILO-C107 necessitated that terms such as "self-determination," "participation," and "peoples/population" would have to be clarified (Vik & Semb 2013, pg. 528). Furthermore, the Committee had suggested that land rights should be a central tenet of the Convention. Indigenous activists agreed and advocated for greater land rights provisions, which they saw as the "soul" of the Convention (Ibid 2013, pg. 27). They maintained that "adjustments were needed in regulations concerning the slaughter of reindeers and the treatment of food in order to protect traditional eating habits. Also, the privileged rights of Sámi to river fishing in the Tana River, to coastal fishing, the gathering of cloudberries and grouse hunting would have to be protected" (Ibid 2013, pg. 542). Norway ultimately expressed support for and participated actively in negotiations that aimed at the revision of ILO-C107 to the resultant C169, alongside many other Western governments. In the end, only Norway ratified C169 in June 1990, followed by Denmark in 1996 (Ibid 2013).

Concerning ILO-C169, Aili Keskitalo explained the following to *Arctic Deeply*: "That obligates them to consult with us, and they do. It's not perfect, but it is a good example on how to organise a minority or an indigenous people within a national state, and how to structure the interaction between an indigenous parliament and a national state" (as quoted in *Arctic Deeply*, pg. 4). However, despite these constructive moves forward in terms of indigenous politics, Sámi people are *still* often silenced, dismissed, and neglected in terms of their territorial and cultural rights to land, water, and to practice their traditional ways of life. There are countless examples to that end, but for the purposes of brevity I will focus on an article published in 2020 titled "'Green' colonialism is ruining indigenous lives in

Norway,” published by Eva Maria Fjellheim and Florian Carl of *Aljazeera* (Carl & Fjellheim 2020).

In April of 2020, the wind energy company Eolus Vind developed a new wind power project in *Sápmi*, ultimately leading to a conflict among Norwegian authorities, project developers, and the Sámi herding community *Jillen Njaarke*. This is because the domesticated reindeer of the Sámi herders tend to avoid grazing in areas where they can see or hear wind turbines, and thus the erection of the wind power plant would disrupt their migration, particularly in the winter when calving mothers and infants are often at risk. Though, on paper, the Norwegian reindeer herding was meant to provide legal protection against the disruption of migration routes, Norwegian authorities overlooked this stipulation in this instance and allowed construction to move forward. The Sámi people often describe this kind of environmental encroachment as a form of “green colonialism,” which ultimately disrupts natural processes and disadvantages indigenous people while at the same time claiming environmentally friendly resource extraction (Carl & Fjellheim 2020, pg. 1). Regrettably, as Fjellheim and Carl note, “many...environmental movements in Europe tend to remain silent on these issues” (Ibid 2020, pg. 3).

Earlier in June of that year, the Frostating Court of Appeal observed that approximately a third of the herding community’s winter pastures were destroyed by the construction and ordered 89 million *krones* to be paid as compensation. However, the court assumed that the Sámi people would be responsible for the short-term technical fixes for their loss of pastures, like relying on the import of processed fodder to feed their animals during the winter. “This verdict shows that human rights conventions in Norwegian law do not protect us Sámi,” herder Arvid Jama told Fjellheim and Carl. The authors also make the observation that, by awarding community compensation for their losses, the court placed a monetary value on the Sámi traditional way of life; “it reinforced the tendency of the Norwegian government and the industry to ‘sell’ indigenous rights in the name of development and resource extraction” (Carl & Fjellheim 2020, pg. 3).

Silje Karine Muotka, a member of the governing council at the Sámi Parliament of Norway, elaborated on this: “Herding is not a money industry. It’s a way of life. It’s cultural heritage, your family, your identity, your connection to the land” (as quoted in Carl & Fjellheim 2020, pg. 3). At the core, these kinds of conflicts are not simply monetary or even ecological in a practical sense; they threaten the fundamentals of indigenous ways of life.

The mutual dependence between humans, the lands, waters and ‘non-human relatives’ is integral to Sámi world views and ancestral practices. This kind of reciprocity should also be central to finding new and more effective solutions to current global challenges, such as sustainable food production, community resilience and land use (Carl & Fjellheim 2020, pg. 4).

I am referring to developmental disputes in *Sápmi* because they demonstrate quite clearly that the Sámi people are rarely provided the opportunity to provide to enjoy their rights in full. They are frequently told by majoritarian officials that their testimony – one in which they are consistently attempting to defend their land and traditional livelihoods against outside encroachment – is a false one, and that the Nordic majority governments are generous with their approach to Sámi rights. Further to this, in many instances Nordic governments fail to acknowledge the perpetuation of colonial practices that continue to disadvantage the Sámi people and result in oppressive everyday experiences. All these events, ironically, run parallel to a discourse about Sámi privilege, which Blomqvist argues is fairly pervasive throughout the Nordic nations; he suggests that there are widespread:

...prejudices claiming that the Sámi both receive special privileges to keep reindeer *and* benefit from modern infrastructure and technology. What these claims entirely leave out is that the Sámi did not choose to be incorporated into this modern industrial society. The state never asked the Sámi if they would like to abandon a subsistence lifestyle for a professional, regulated reindeer trade. Part of the decolonisation work is to confront this racist discourse about Sámi privilege (Blomqvist 2016, pg. 3).

I feel it is apparent where this discussion relates to the necessity for decolonisation in *Sápmi*. But what does this all have to do with art, media, and indigenous aesthetics? First, I suggest that the “Sámi way of thinking” inevitably comes into play here. It is evidently vitally important for the survival of Sámi culture that they are able to sustain their relationships to the natural world through traditional livelihoods, traditional forms of sustenance, and forms of expression, as constructive land relations and ethical systems related to these relations are constitutive of what is essentially the core of Sámi identity (for

a great many Sámi individuals, that is; it is inappropriate here for me to assert that *all* Sámi people must feel this way). These environmental ontologies are holistically linked – not only to survival and subsistence in the indigenous world – but to networks of ethics that inform Sámi aesthetic systems. This is where *hávski* comes into play once more; it is very difficult to grasp this way of thinking if one does not attempt to understand the spiritual, cosmological, tactile, utilitarian, material, historical, and sensory relationships the Sámi people bear to their indigenous territories and environments. In later writing, I will elaborate further upon these concepts in relationship to film and explain what indigenous Sámi spiritual aesthetics and associated land relations mean in terms of Sámi film. I will argue that Sámi film offers the opportunity for viewers to engage with Sámi culture spiritually, cosmologically, mythologically, and aesthetically in a way that is, as Barclay puts it, “not [otherwise] easy to access” to outsiders (Barclay 2003, pg. 7). He pays particular attention to the “interiority” of indigenous film, which is rooted in indigenous values, beliefs, and associated aesthetics (Ibid 2003, pg. 7).

### **Film Analysis and Indigenous Aesthetics**

Kuokkanen argues for an “indigenous paradigm” as a starting point from which outsiders can better understand indigenous aesthetics, philosophy, and ontology more broadly (Kuokkanen 2000, pg. 411). She elaborates that an indigenous paradigm “maintains a critical stand towards Western metaphysical dualism...[and] is based on a holistic approach which strives towards a balance between different areas of life and does not separate intellectual, social, political, economic, psychological, and spiritual forms of life from each other” (Ibid 2000, pg. 417) Put simply, we cannot approach Sámi epistemologies from a dualistic, divisive, Cartesian perspective and expect to gain a thorough or even fundamental understanding of Sámi aesthetics and of Sámi life in general. I will exemplify this statement in terms of *duodji* once again. In the Sámi lifeworld, something that is *hávski* must be aesthetically pleasing all-around; a *duodji* object, for example, will be beautiful if it looks beautiful, works beautifully, and has been made in a beautiful way (Aamold 2017). And, to reiterate, Sámi aesthetics are “tied to the land,” so making an object in a beautiful or pleasant way involves ethical use and interface with the surrounding environment (Paltto 1998, pg. 27).

With all this in mind, my suggestion here is that a film analysis must be approached in a similarly holistic manner with which one would approach the analysis of a *duodji* object, or one of Johan Turi's watercolour paintings – we must take into consideration the visual, the social, the political, the iconographic, the material, and the spiritual dimensions inherent to a Sámi work of art in accordance with indigenous aesthetic epistemologies. With this being said, I don't mean to insinuate here that, for example, *duoddjon* and filmmaking are precisely the same. As has been described, *duodji* is intimately linked to nature, the ethical and skillful use of nature, the artistry involved with using one's hands, and traditional knowledge in a way that is deeply significant and profound for many Sámi practitioners. Indigenous filmmaking, conversely, emerges from a different series of social and historical contexts and of course necessitates different kinds of artistic and technical proficiency. Thus, my insinuation is not that filmmaking mirrors *duoddjon* or painting in terms of praxis, intent (necessarily), or result, but that a holistic indigenous paradigm is nevertheless applicable to all forms of Sámi creativity, at least in terms of aesthetic philosophy.

I will also consider that there is an argument to be made that Sámi film is more related to indigenous storytelling than art. Indeed, I have emphasised the intimacy between the indigenous tale-telling tradition and filmmaking heavily throughout this thesis. However, I will also point out here that there is little theoretical distinction between the elucidation of story and the creation of visual art in the Sámi conceptualisation. Kuokkanen describes the continuum of visual art and storytelling in Sámi culture and frames it in terms of Sámi illustrator, translator, and songwriter Kerttu Vuolab's works:

Her pictures create stories and many of her stories create pictures. She makes both stories and pictures herself, and she doesn't consider them to be different or separate from each other. For her, they are two different sides of the same thing. She learned both oral tradition and visual perception in her childhood by listening and watching her parents and other relatives on a daily basis. At the same time, she was told stories, that were an important part of her learning and upbringing (Kuokkanen 2000, pg. 423).



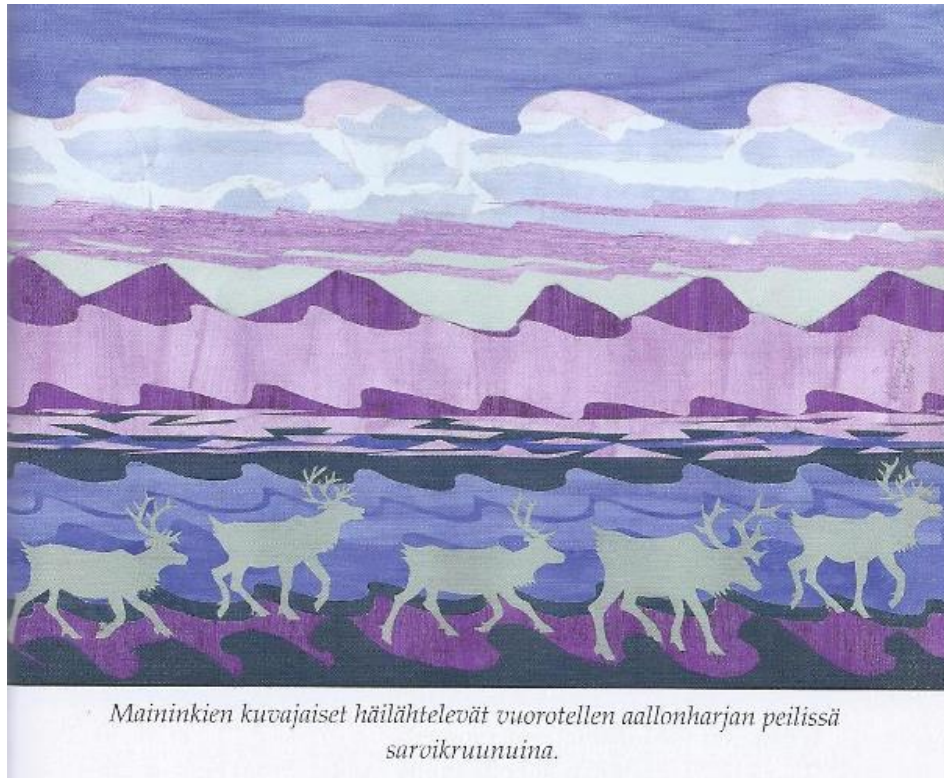


Fig. 39: Vuolab K. (2008) *Maininkien kuvajaiset häilähtelevät vuorotellen aallonharjan peilissä sarvikruunuina* [Watercolour and ink]. In: Vuolab K. (2008), *Valon airut*. Retrieved from: <https://www.maailmankirjat.ma-pe.net/kerttu-vuolab-valon-airut-2/>

Sámi writer Kirsti Paltto expands upon these sentiments:

We [Sámi] have among us many people with multiple talents and knowledge. They write, draw and *joik*. In fact, it is not appropriate to draw such boundaries since a human being is a whole. If only as children we could learn everything instead of being made to specialise in one thing. When a person takes a specialty in one and only one field, she becomes knowledgeable only in that even though she might have become well- rounded in many areas. Life is a form of art. And one's lifestyle is part of that art (Paltto 1998, pg. 41-42).

I am writing of these associations because I wish to impress upon the reader the fact that, though different types of art certainly emerge from different contexts and require diverse forms of expertise, in indigenous philosophies of aesthetics there is little philosophic division between art forms, just as there is little division between creativity and life more generally. Thus, it can be said that indigenous thought paradigms as they relate to

aesthetics are inherent and applicable to all forms of Sámi art, from *joik* to visual art to storytelling, and indeed filmmaking, which integrates both of the latter aspects. These philosophies integrate and appreciate various spheres of life, but perhaps most importantly, in the Sámi world aesthetics relate intimately to visual beauty, spirituality, nature, and place and how these elements interact.

With all this in mind, in the forthcoming examination of three Sámi films (in Chapter 7), I intend to utilise a holistic framework of analysis. First, I will address the purpose of the film, or perhaps more appropriately, the “message” or messages being conveyed, through each film’s series of metaphorical presentations. Put another way, I will frame the context in which the film’s particular narratives emerge and are presented. Second, I will analyse each film’s utilisation of visual symbolism, and address how particular material and immaterial presentations are relevant in the Sámi cultural repertoire. Finally, I will assess all these aspects in relationship to Sámi cosmology and spirituality, in which indigenous aesthetic theory finds its roots. Using all these components, I will explore the 1) contextual, 2) social, 3) material, and 4) spiritual aspects of these films. In the context of “finding” a Sámi aesthetic, I feel the fourth element is perhaps the most important, as it relates intimately to what Barclay referred to previously as the “interiority,” the “soul,” or as Marja put it, “the vibe” that makes a Sámi film a Sámi film.

## Chapter Seven: Three In-Depth Analyses of Sámi Short Films

### *Morit, Elena, Morit!*



Fig. 40: Påve I.W. & A. Sunna (2017) *Morit Elena Morit!* [Film poster] Retrieved from: <https://www.ingawiktoriapave.com/moritelenamorit/>

*Morit Elena Morit!* (2017) is a stop motion animated film created and directed by Inga-Wiktoria Påve and Anders Sunna, two artists and filmmakers from the Swedish side of *Sápmi*. Inga-Wiktoria holds a dual degree in Education in North Sámi and in Art Education from Umeå University. In 2015, she was awarded the *Young Artist of the Year Award* at the *Riddu Riđđu* Festival in Manndalen, Norway. Since then, she has continued her work in the visual arts and has exhibited projects at such notable venues such as the Lilla Galleriet (Umeå, Sweden) and Adäka Festival (Whitehorse, Canada) (Inga-Wiktoria Påve n.d.). Anders Sunna holds degrees in fine arts from Konstfack College of Fine Arts and Umeå Art School. He describes his art, which combines collage painting and street art techniques, as explicitly political, often commenting on institutionalised racism and its consequences. His work has been exhibited at several notable institutions, including the World Culture Museum in Gothenburg, Gallery Koch, and the Gällivare Museum (Bohman-Knäpper n.d.). *Morit Elena Morit!* is both Inga-Wiktoria's and Anders's first film.

*Morit Elena Morit!* was created in association with the indigenous music and arts festival *Riddu Riđđu*, which hosts a mentorship program that invites young Sámi artists to collaborate with one another on artistic projects. The film has won several awards, including “Best Sámi Short Film” at *Skábmagovat* 2018, and Jane Glassco’s award for emerging artist at *imaginATIVE* in Toronto, 2017 (Inga-Wiktoria Påve n.d.). *Morit Elena Morit!* chronicles the arduous journey of a young Sámi woman, Elena, named for Anders Sunna’s daughter. The film utilises many images and motifs that would be immediately recognisable to Sámi audiences, particularly those who were raised in or around reindeer herding communities, including the reindeer, traditional attire (more specifically, the *gákti*), the *lavvu* tent, and landscape elements like snowy mountains and wind turbines. *Morit Elena Morit!* is a film heavily laden with social commentary; in Anders Sunna’s words, it issues a call to “make the [Sámi] people wake up” and embrace their heritage and identity in the face of enduring prejudices and pressures to reject their culture. The film also utilises symbolic imagery to illuminate eco-critical and sociopolitical issues in the North from a Sámi perspective.

The short film opens against a silhouette of the titular character Elena, who is wearing what appears to be a Four Winds Hat and a traditional hand-woven shawl. She is moving urgently through a tundra landscape, with snow-capped mountains looming in the distance. The shot opens up as Elena walks swiftly forward, revealing her reindeer companion in tow. Suddenly, Elena is halted by a priestly figure in front of a church building, who pulls out a glowing Bible and shakes it emphatically in her direction. The priest’s movements are forceful and even hostile in this scene, indicating that he may be a less than benevolent figure (Påve & Sunna 2017). The significance of imagery is easily recognisable to those familiar with the history of Christian proselytisation in *Sápmi*. The scene serves a reference to an epoch in Sámi cultural history referred to as “the end of drum time,” a period characterised by aggressive Christian missionising efforts that devalued the “old religion” and perpetuated the idea that Sámi shamans has “given themselves to immortality or the Devil” (Lehtola 2002, pg. 29). This scene is also chronologically significant in terms of Sámi history, as European missionising efforts were essentially what prompted and commenced a long history of colonial domination efforts in *Sápmi*. As Walls puts it, one of the “major solvents” of Christianity during this time in *Sápmi* was, in fact, colonialism (Walls 2002, pg. 34). The scene with the priest thus begins a chronicle that follows the history of

colonial subjugation of the Sámi people, and conveys a young woman's interaction with the events of her cultural history.

Elena bows her head and attempts to move along from where the priest stands, but as she passes, his head transforms into that of a wolf as he snatches her cap from her head and consumes it (Påve & Sunna 2017). This imagery references the cultural destructive nature of imperial Christianisation in *Sápmi* during the "end of drum time" (Rydving 1995). Further to this, Anders and Inga-Wiktoria choose to utilise animal imagery that is overwhelmingly significant in the Sámi environmental mythos. In Sámi mythology and beliefs, which have their roots in animism, animals often serve as central characters. According to Cocq, scholar of Sámi history and folklore, wolves, bears, wolverines, reindeer, and other Arctic animals are often described in a manner that is almost anthropomorphic in Sámi tales. As Cocq describes it, the animal is described "as a person, with shamanic powers, preferences, and will" (Cocq 2008, pg. 84). Animals are also associated with ethical paradigms, and specific creatures correspond with good and evil. In the words of Sámi wolf hunter, folklorist, and writer Johan Turi: "*Beargalat* (the Devil) made the wolf - *lbmel* (God) breathed life into him through his nostrils. And therefore, the wolf will only do evil like *Beargalat*" (Turi 1910/2011, pg. 99). Conversely, the reindeer is associated with benevolence and creation. According to a story relayed by Risten Lango, a Sámi herder: "A white reindeer [created] the world. The reindeer's veins became rivers, its fur became forest, its stomach became the ocean, and its horns became mountains" (as quoted in Harris 2007, pg. 1). During our interview, filmmaker Sara Margrethe Oskal (whose short film I will be analysing in later writing) expanded upon this creation myth:

**SARA MARGRETHE OSKAL:** *The head of the reindeer made the atmosphere, the fur made the trees, the eyes became stars, and the heart is under the surface of the earth. If you can hear those beats, you will not get lost.*

With these tales in mind, it is clear why the priest morphs into a wolf-like creature in the context of Sámi cosmology; historically he constitutes a direct threat to the cultural integrity of the Sámi people, and is thus portrayed as a threatening figure. On the other hand, Elena's reindeer companion is associated with goodness and purity in Sámi culture, and is presented as a creature who must be protected from the wolf. Indeed, the

importance of the reindeer in Sámi cosmology and correspondingly the danger associated with the wolf cannot be overstated here:

**ANDERS SUNNA:** *For us, for Sámi people, we get the food from them, the clothes from them, transportation from them, so it has been a really important animal. If I had to choose one animal to be with me on an island, I would pick a reindeer. For Sámi people the reindeer is almost like a holy animal.*

In *Seeing The Wolf Through Sámi Eyes*, Sjoegren and Matsuda's informants echo similar ideas.

*Hans:* [The reindeer] is culture. Had it not been for reindeer husbandry, there would be no Sámi culture left. It would have perished. *Ingrid:* We have woodwork handcraft that carries the alliance with the reindeer. There is also the *joik* (traditional Sámi singing), it tells a lot about places, about reindeer, the nature... A lot is connected to the reindeer. There is language as well, Sámi has expressions for the reindeer and so forth. There are various forms of culture, but it is the reindeer husbandry which is the usage of the land [...] If the reindeer does not utilise the land [...] we won't have the right to utilise the land (either). [...] I usually say that, it is not me who has this right; it is the reindeer that carries the right (as quoted in Matsuda & Sjoegren 2016, pg. 41).

Practically speaking, the imagery of the wolf is also particularly significant for those Sámi who participate in reindeer herding and husbandry, for the wolf is an enduring threat to their livelihoods and the very lives of their semi-domesticated companions. The legacy of the wolf as a principal antagonist to the Sámi herder is well-documented; for example, in 1910, Johan Turi warned in the groundbreaking *Muitalus samiid birra* that the "reindeer's worst enemy [is] the wolf... It kills reindeer all year round, in every season...it will kill as many as it can get hold of, sometimes ten, twenty, or thirty in a night" (Turi 1910/2011, pg. 27). In keeping with Hans's statement that "the reindeer is culture," the imagery utilised for the priest in *Morit Elena Morit!* can easily be understood; the priest constitutes a threat to

Sámi cultural vitality (Matsuda & Sjoegren 2016, pg. 41). In the film, this threat is exemplified through culturally and mythologically relevant imagery.

As Elena moves swiftly onward, the voice of a spirit (a woman speaking in South Sámi) encourages her to “Listen to the voice of your heart. Wake up! Don’t sleep until you die.” Abruptly, a series of city buildings rises in the distance, which was formerly a wide expanse of forest and mountains. Elena is startled as a city building is violently erected in front of her, destroying a traditional Sámi *lavvu* tent (Påve & Sunna 2017). The *lavvu*, mentioned in brief previously, is a traditional seasonal dwelling for Sámi people. Wood and reindeer innards are typically used as poles and rope-like materials to tie the structure together, and reindeer hides are utilised as cover, sewn together with bone needle. Historically, the *lavvu* allowed Sámi herders to move swiftly along to summer and winter pastures alongside their semi-domesticated herds. However, the *lavvu* is not simply a dwelling space; it represents an integral aspect of Sámi social organisation. The basic social system of the Sámi people, before it was threatened by Nordic administrative settlements, was the *siida*, which can best be described as a single or multi-family unit. Depending on the needs and availability of resources, these family units utilised particular territories and divided hunting and gathering work among family members (Tennberg et al 2011). The success of a *siida* “[depended] largely on its level of consensus and its members ability to exchange information and act on the knowledge and insight gained by regular participation in the daily life of the household” (Ibid 2011, pg. 229). As such, the destruction of a *lavvu* can be thought of as allegorical to the destruction of Sámi social organisation.

It is worth noting here that an integral aspect of Christian missionising efforts involved not only the devaluing of cultural cosmologies; it also involved the supplanting of Sámi social systems, the most fundamental of which was the *siida* system. Former vice-president and president of the Finnish Sámi Parliament Tiina Sanila-Aikio explains this event succinctly: “First, they took the religion, then they broke the *siida* system, then they took the lands and the language” (as quoted in Wall 2019, pg. 1). With this in mind, the narrative of the film is chronologically significant in terms of significant events in Sámi history. First, Elena encounters a direct threat to her spiritual foundations, followed by the methodical destruction of the foundation of her cultural and social organisation. It can be said that all those aspects that collude to create the idea of “home” for Elena are being systematically threatened. As such, this scene in *Morit Elena Morit!* can be seen as a direct commentary on

the destructive nature of colonial expansion. Lehtola describes the colonialism of the Sámi as follows:

The way the original lifestyle of the hunting population, based on seasonal migration, changed into settlement is fully consistent with the characteristics of colonialism...from the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century...the expansion of [Nordic] rule in Sámi land was solidified with three strategies: Christian missionising, social control, and colonisation... All this entailed substituting Sámi systems, such as converting them from their traditional religion and replacing the Lapp village or *siida* systems, with Nordic administration and settlement (Lehtola 2015, pg. 25).

This makes the commentary of the film's voiceover all the more significant when she says, "You need to carry the legacy of your ancestors," as the *lavvu* is being violently destroyed. The voice encourages Elena to remember the history of her people in spite of the systematic destruction of the social constituents of her culture. The voiceover also makes reference to Elena's "inner voice," and "the voice of [her] heart," encouraging Elena's internal resilience against destructive external pressures to capitulate and assimilate (Påve & Sunna 2017).

Next, Elena comes upon a sinister-looking human figure. He pats her on the shoulder in a benign gesture, but suddenly transforms into a wolf as Elena walks past, ripping her *duodji* belt from her and gnashing it in his teeth. He consumes the object and transforms back into a hunched male figure. The screen goes black as Elena presses on. "Listen," the voiceover whispers to her, "to your inner voice. Your inner voice. Isn't it your own voice? Raise your kin, it says." As the spirit speaks, a series of windmills rise as the sky darkens and wind whips at Elena's hair and clothes. Eventually a forceful gust of wind takes Elena's shawl, one of the last remaining pieces of her ensemble. Still, Elena and her reindeer push forward (Påve & Sunna 2017).

In this last example, *Morit Elena Morit!* presents an eco-critical perspective from the standpoint of Sámi culture. In 2018, Sámi reindeer herders in Norway protested what was described as the largest windmill project in Europe. This endeavour was widely controversial, with many opposing the project under the premise that it would harm the nature and wildlife of protected Arctic areas. Further, those who opposed the project



suggested that it was unnecessary, given Norway's already existing surplus of eco-friendly hydropower. For Sámi herders specifically, the windmill project would constitute an enormous threat in terms of reindeer grazing pastures. As such, the project received vocal opposition from Sámi authorities. "The windmill project at Storheia simply can't be accepted by the Sámi people," asserted Aili Keskitalo, president of the Sámi Parliament in Norway (as quoted in Berglund 2018, pg. 1). Herder and activist Maja Kristine Jåma agreed, "Against our will they (local and state authorities) have taken a third of our winter grazing area, as if our income source has no value. But we know that what we do has great value for the...Sámi culture and language, and that this is an issue that affects the entire community" (as quoted in Berglund 2018, pg. 1). While *Morit Elena Morit!* does not necessarily reference this project specifically, the film provides ecocritical commentary on development issues constituting direct threats to Sámi livelihoods. By portraying gusts from the windmill ripping Elena's clothing from her person, the film suggests that development projects like these threaten the Sámi people both practically and culturally. After all, for those Sámi who do keep reindeer, herding is not only a profession; it is a way of life that links its practitioners to culture and traditional knowledge (Turi 1910/2011).

In the following scene, Elena and her reindeer struggle through an expanse of glutinous mud. Though the titular character struggles to rescue her reindeer from the place where it becomes stuck, her rope snaps and a pack of wolves descends upon the animal. Elena runs from the wolves, stumbles, and collapses briefly in the tundra. As the pack of wolves, now wearing modern Western business suit attire, begins to pursue her, Elena struggles forward and plunges her hand into the body of water that appears before her. An upside-down mirror image of herself, still wearing all her traditional attire and bearing her reindeer in tow, grasps her hand and pulls her into the water, embracing her. The film concludes with the following statements from the speaking spirit: "Lend your ear to the ancient nature. Listen to its delightful sound. *Morit, Elena, morit*" (Påve & Sunna 2017).

This very last scene refers to a spiritual concept in Sámi cosmology called *saavja*. The fundamental idea behind *saavja* is that there exists an upside down "otherworld," and by traversing this territory one attains wisdom. In keeping with the narration over the film, it can be surmised that listening to her "inner voice," or keeping the traditional knowledge and wisdom of her culture alive, is what allows Elena to enter this otherworld, ultimately saving her from the pursuit of the bloodthirsty wolves. This alludes to Anders's and Inga-

Wiktorija's message to "make the people wake up" in a mythological sense; as Elena's ties to her culture and heritage are what save her from her assailants, perhaps it is those same ties that will release the Sámi people from the enduring legacy of colonial subjugation.

## *Edith & Aljosja*

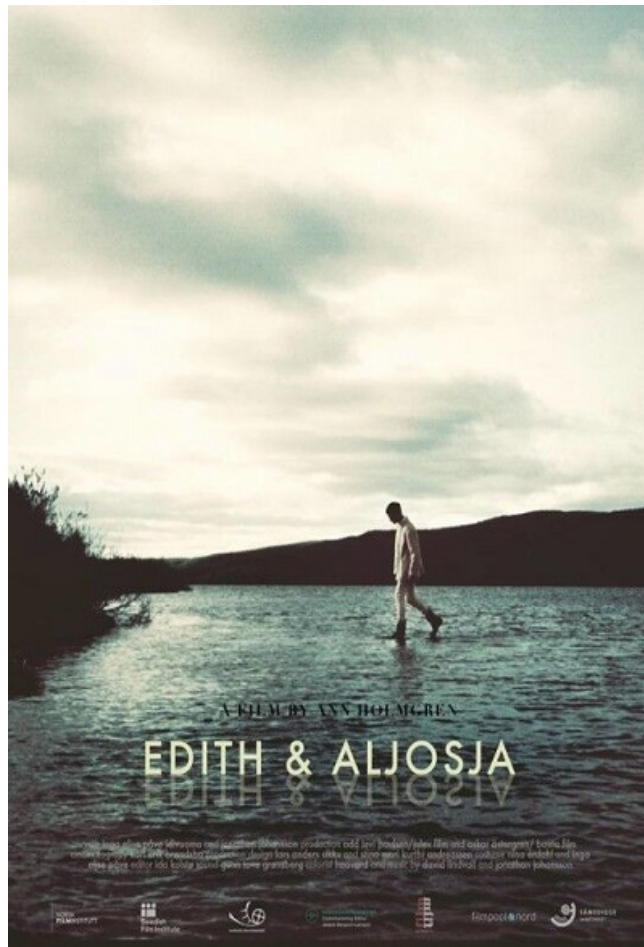


Fig. 41: Holmgren A. (2015) *Edith & Aljosja* [Film poster]. Retrieved from: <https://www.sapmifilm.com/film/30006>

**ANN HOLMGREN:** *I read a short story by a Swedish author who comes from the northern part of Sweden as well. It was years ago...and it was about two authors, and their writings, and how they couldn't really reach each other but at the same time they knew they were connected. I really liked some elements of the story, so it stuck with me, so...and I thought about making a film, but I didn't want to make a film on that theme [of writing]. So I just left it, but it stayed with me in a way. I just didn't know how or when to do it. And then I was invited by the Sámi Film Institute to make a short film in Kautokeino. And it was going to be a part of a bigger [project] – you know, the Seven Sámi Short Stories – and I thought about this film idea again. And that story [the one that inspired the idea] was about artistic drives, so it's a totally different theme. But the element that was still there was the water, and a way of connecting over it. So I decided to make a love story.*

The film *Edith & Aljosja* was written and directed by filmmaker and writer Ann Holmgren, who hails from Idivuoma in the Kiruna Municipality of Sweden. Ann received her degree in filmmaking from The Norwegian Film School in 2008. She is a filmmaker, photographer, and published author, and is currently working as a writer on a Norwegian television series and a producer on a Sámi language children's program (Ann Holmgren n.d.). Her film *Edith & Aljosja* follows two young adults, the titular characters, on a quiet journey to connect with each other, both physically and emotionally. *Edith & Aljosja* employs no dialogue, instead conveying its narrative through the movements and expressions of the main characters.

The scene opens with a young Sámi woman, Edith, cutting wood. She slings the collection of foliage onto her back and walks along the curve of a river. Edith is clothed in traditional Sámi dress, or the *gákti*, which is, as has been previously discussed, an important identity symbol, especially in relationship to ceremonious events, such as weddings, funerals, christenings, etc. Edith's *gákti* is mostly red. On the other side of the river is a Swedish man, Aljosja, dressed in all white, bent at the knee to touch the surface of the water (Holmgren 2015). With each character's clothing and positioning on either side of the river the filmmaker has quietly established two different cultural identities. Aljosja's non-indigenous background is implied through his all-white attire, possibly indicating his ethnicity as corresponding with the notion of "whiteness" as a cultural category. In other words, Aljosja's white attire indicates his sociopolitical status in the same way that Edith's *gákti* indicates her indigenous identity and social position as a Sámi.

In the next shot, Aljosja notices Edith and stands to acknowledge her, but she continues walking past him. She returns to her home, a small blue wooden dwelling with a *lavvu* tent, a red vehicle, and a string of laundry outside. Across the river, we see Aljosja sitting quietly in his own home, reading a book. He takes out a pair of binoculars, keeping an eye out for Edith on the other side of the river. Next, we see Edith standing outside, smoking in front of the *lavvu* (Holmgren 2015). Here we revisit an important symbol in the construction of Sámi identity and notions of home and belonging. The *lavvu* indicates Edith's place of cultural belonging on one side of the river, separate from Aljosja, a non-Sámi. Throughout the film, Edith demonstrates anxiety regarding the idea of leaving her dwelling space on one side of the river. This anxiety may also correspond with Edith's concerns regarding the cultural differences in her burgeoning relationship with Aljosja.

Next, we see Aljosja exiting his home to take down some hanging laundry. He and Edith observe each other from across the river. Aljosja waves to Edith in a friendly gesture, and steps out onto the surface of the river, slowly making his way towards her. However, Edith turns on her heel and rushes away, discouraging Aljosja from coming further. In the following shot, Edith is stood anxiously, contemplating, inside her home. She takes out her own pair of binoculars and sees Aljosja playing with his dog across the river. On the wall behind him is a series of paintings of bird feathers with the species belonging to each penned in below each illustration (Holmgren 2015).

Edith decides to approach the river's edge herself. However, unlike Aljosja, she cannot walk on the surface of the water. Still, she continues forward in all her clothing, slowly making her way out until her head is submerged under the river (Holmgren 2015). In discussion with Ann, I asked if there was a reason why Edith was the character to submerge herself under the water as opposed to Aljosja, and she explained the following:

**ANN HOLMGREN:** *Yes, there is a reason why she is going under the water. In the Sámi culture, we have something called saavja – it's like an idea where you can go under and then come out on the other side of the lake, and you come to an otherworld, where everything is upside down, but a bit better. You collect wisdom from that side. So it is a part of the Sámi mythology in a way. Even though she's not coming out in another world, she's still going down into the depths.*

Notably, this is the second time I have seen this concept exemplified in film. In *Morit Elena Morit!*, Elena meets her "truest self" in the spiritual realm, in the underside of the river (Påve & Sunna 2017). In *Edith & Aljosja*, Edith also pursues wisdom in her journey to the other side of the river in the upside-down realm, though we as the audience are not able to see her journey to the other side. Instead, we watch from Aljosja's home, where he waits at the window, watching for any sight of Edith. Several tense moments follow until Edith finally emerges from the water, having walked from one shore end to the other. Aljosja opens his door to greet her, welcoming her inside his home. A white halo descends on the house, symbolising their harmonious union, and the film ends (Holmgren 2015).

*Edith & Aljosja* is a romantic parable, but it is also, according to the filmmaker, also an allegory for two cultural identities uniting:

**ANN HOLMGREN:** *My father is Swedish but my mother is Sámi. And I grew up in between those two cultures, and I know that I am one personality, in a way, in the Sámi society and another in the Swedish one. And I kind of have to be, because my mother's family are reindeer herders, so they're still living the traditional life. Individuality and personality are quite different in the Sámi traditional reindeer herding society. I wanted to make a film where – in a way, you know, I took these two different parts of me and made them into two different personalities. And I made them unite in a love story. So the man in the film is Swedish, and the woman in the film is Sámi. And they both have to overcome some difficulties and do an impossible thing to actually have a meeting, in a way. They have to cross their own borders.*

In *Edith & Aljosja*, the titular characters must quietly surmount their cultural differences as the layers of their story gradually unfold. While Aljosja seems eager to connect, Edith initially rejects his advances despite her interest. This may be allegorical to a wider context of Sámi-outsider relations. Historically, the Sámi people have been subject to forced assimilation, linguistic suppression, and territorial infiltration from majority cultures. Edith's reticence may be symbolic to the wider context of Sámi anxieties regarding relationships with outsiders; in other words, engagement with Aljosja may constitute a direct threat to Edith's cultural integrity. Eventually, Edith chooses to reach Aljosja in her own way, but first she must gain wisdom and confidence by completing a potentially dangerous journey across the underside of the river. Finally, both Edith and Aljosja are able to overcome that which separates them. "It's about different perspectives and how our different views separate us from each other," Ann explains, "but also a way of trying to reach each other despite these differences."

## *Beavvi Nieida*



Fig. 42: Oskal S.M. (2018) *Daughter of the Sun (Beavvi Nieida)* [Film poster]. Retrieved from: <https://www.nfi.no/eng/film?name=daughter-of-the-sun&id=1884>

Actress, comedienne, poet, screenwriter, and filmmaker Sara Margrethe Oskal holds a PhD in the Performing Arts from the National Academy of Arts, Oslo, where she researched Sámi humour and jester traditions in *joik* and storytelling. She was raised in a reindeer herding family and continued with this profession until pursuing a new lifestyle in the arts; however, she maintains, “In my heart, I will always be a reindeer herder.” Sara Margrethe made her directing debut in 2015 with the short film *Aurora Keeps its Eye on You*. Her second film, *Beavvi Nieida* (in English, *Daughter of the Sun*), premiered at the Sydney Film Festival in 2018, and has been screened at numerous international festivals, including imagiNATIVE Film and Media Arts Festival, Skábmagovat Film Festival, Indigenous Film and Arts Festival in Denver, Colorado, and Encounters Film Festival in Bristol, United Kingdom. In 2019, the film was awarded “Best Short Film” at B3 Biennial of the Moving Image in Frankfurt, Germany (Nordisk filminstitutt n.d.). Sara Margrethe is currently

directing the Sámi language version of Disney's *Frozen II* while developing her feature film script, *The Flame Keeper* (Nordic Women in Film n.d.).

The film *Beaivvi Nieida* opens as a young reindeer herder, Ánne, enjoys a quiet moment walking alongside her father in Northern Norway. After a brief title screen, we are introduced to a much older Ánne as she attends her first session at an adult writing course. When prompted to introduce herself to her classmates, Ánne does so in North Sámi, her native language. She is met with laughter and derision from her classmates as she speaks, each of whom demand that she speak Norwegian (with the exception of one kind classmate). Ánne eventually introduces herself in Norwegian as well, though she insists on the correct pronunciation of her name, which the course instructor struggles with (Oskal 2018).

Throughout the events of the course, the audience traverses through Ánne's present and past, witnessing visual snippets of events and childhood memories that initially appear incongruent with the present narrative. However, a pattern begins to emerge in terms of Norwegians' treatment of Ánne based on her Sámi identity. At one point early in the film, the students are asked to imitate animals as a sort of expressive exercise, and the Norwegian "cats" immediately antagonise and hiss at Ánne, with the exception of the friendly classmate, who purrs at her instead. As this happens, we are suddenly transported back to a scene in the past, in which two Norwegian girls tell Ánne that she cannot pretend to be a princess along with them; she instead must pretend to be their "slave" because she is Sámi. The viewer can easily see parallels between past and present here; even in relatively benign "play" behaviours, Ánne experiences aggression from non-Sámi people due to her ancestry and attire. Back in the present time, a particularly aggressive student, Edvard, snatches Ánne's scarf from her and scathingly imitates the traditional Sámi *joik*. Ánne keeps a level head and retorts that the colours of the scarf look nice on him, to Edvard's vexation (Oskal 2018). Sara Margrethe made Ánne's composure a very deliberate character choice: "She should be clever enough to handle the situation, clever but not mean."

Back in the past, the viewer witnesses a disturbing event; two Norwegian boys antagonise and stone Ánne's father for being Sámi, while Ánne hides in nearby shrubbery and watches the incident, devastated. Meanwhile, in the present, the course instructor requests that her students create a visual collage narrating a story. Edvard presents his drawing board first, describing the events of his own childhood as a boy in Northern



Norway. From his anecdotes, it becomes clear to Áinne that Edvard is one of the young boys who assaulted her father many years ago (an element Edvard pointedly excludes from his narrative), and she begins to challenge his interpretation of events. She suggests that the anonymous man Edvard refers to in his story is a reindeer herder, to his scornful counter that, “There are no damn reindeer herders in this story.” As Áinne follows along with Edward’s chronicle, she reminds him that he, along with a young companion, attacked her father in their childhood. Unsteady, Edward says, “Things like that don’t happen in real life,” further suggesting that Áinne is exaggerating her circumstances because she is Sámi: “You Sámi are always victimising yourselves!” Eventually, Áinne passionately proclaims, “It happened,” raising her voice for the first time in the film. With her proclamation we witness brief scenes in the past of Áinne’s father crying out to his young daughter for aid. Edward is seemingly struck with the truth of the memory and he sinks quietly into himself in shame and bewilderment (Oskal 2018).

I have previously discussed the idea of agency in narrative and the importance of this concept in terms of indigenous self-determination. *Beaivvi Nieida* offers a sort of meta-analytic message regarding this concept. We are guided through the events of Áinne’s past and present through her eyes, indicating her ownership over the events of her life’s narrative. Put more simply, the audience is granted the opportunity to see the world through Áinne’s eyes because of the intimate and reflective way the story of the film is presented. Within this overarching chronicle is a struggle for narrative agency between two storytellers: Áinne and Edvard, Sámi and Norwegian. Though Edvard dismisses and rejects her based on her Sáminess (“You Sámi are always victimising yourselves!”), Áinne fights for her truth to be acknowledged by asserting her perception of events. Her agency is thrust to the fore when she commands that Edvard acknowledge what was done to her family. *Beaivvi Nieida* also speaks to the importance of the storytelling. This becomes particularly relevant in the indigenous context, as I have emphasised in previous chapters. Ford-Smith describes “the tale-telling tradition” as “[containing] what is most poetically true about our struggles [as indigenous peoples]. The tales are one place where the most subversive elements of our history can be safely lodged...” (Ford-Smith 1987, p. 3). And indeed, in the film Áinne negotiates and asserts the truth of her struggles with discrimination through narrative, utilising this story as a medium through which she can affirm herself. She demands that Edvard acknowledge that the chronicle of events that bring his and her pasts

together is not his alone to remember or tell.

In the production of *Beaivvi Nieida*, Sara Margrethe Oskal took inspiration from the stories of three different Sámi women experiencing discrimination in personal and professional environments. “I got the idea because I was experiencing racism among colleagues. I thought, ‘I need to make a film about this’...but how to address this issue? Hopefully this film can help people change their attitudes.” Interestingly, in Sara Margrethe’s endeavour to change attitudes through story, the filmmaker constructs a narrative *about* changing attitudes through story. Ánne does not challenge Edvard’s racism through aggressive encounters; she simply tempers and counters his perception with her own truth. This was another deliberate choice by Sara Margrethe: “My aim is to make a film that is not having anger, not judging...just telling the experiences of this woman.” In *Beaivvi Nieida*, Ánne’s capacity to communicate her own experience ends up being the most powerful offensive against the intolerance of her classmate.

While the previous two films *Morit Elena Morit!* and *Edith & Aljosja* exhibited visual elements related to Sámi mythology and cosmology in their narratives, *Beaivvi Nieida* instead references the Sámi mythos in its title. In the “old religion,” *Beaivvi* refers to the deeply revered sun deity, who is often female in folkloric accounts and is associated with spring, fertility, and the well-being of all living things, particularly reindeer. *Beaivvi Nieida* is the daughter of the sun deity, also connected to spring and fertility and personified by a sacred white reindeer:

In the beginning, there was the solar deity, Mother Sun. The solar deity is radiant. Light and warmth stream from her. The sun, the source of light and life, is venerated in the mythic tradition of the Sámi as a female divinity. Her name is *Beaivvi Nieida* (‘Sun maiden’) (Pentikäinen 1995, pg. 120).

Like her mother, *Beaivvi Nieida* is associated with healing and medicine. In Sámi folklore, she travels with her mother through the sky in an enclosure of reindeer bones, bringing verdant plant life back to nourish the reindeer during the spring months. She is also associated with psychological well-being and mental health in Sámi mythology. Historically it was believed that some individuals were susceptible to madness during the northern winters due to the lack of sunlight (this is perhaps an early reference to what we understand

now as seasonal depression), and that prayers to *Beaivvi nieida* could aid the psychologically unwell (Pantikäinen 1995). The reference to this titular deity in the film *Beaivvi Nieida* may be referential to the idea of story as a repository of healing and “medicine” in the indigenous tradition. In the words of African novelist Ben Okri, “people are as healthy and confident as the stories they tell themselves. Sick storytellers can make their nations sick” (as quoted in Parkinson 2009, pg. 31). Ritskes and Sium expand on this: “If stories are archives of...pain, suffering, and resistance, then to speak them is to heal; to believe in them is to re-imagine the world” (Ritskes & Sium 2013, pg. 5).

### **Film Aesthetics and Decolonisation**

In the previous chapter, I argued for the integration of what Kuokkanen describes as an “indigenous paradigm” in research and analysis related to film and, more generally, the arts in the Sámi lifeworld (Kuokkanen 2000, pg. 412). This conversation circles back to what I discussed in Chapter 4; namely, I explained that the colonisation of indigenous minds has led to “internalised colonialism and the acquisition of...Western values, ways of thinking, and worldviews,” but that art and film may be effective in championing indigenous ways of knowing and thinking (Kuokkanen 2000, pg. 412). Related to this, I have argued that the appreciation and integration of indigenous paradigms of knowledge and philosophy into research in general, but especially in research *with* and *about* indigenous peoples, is inherently part of the broader decolonial project. Put another way, my suggestion here is that the application of an indigenous paradigm to the study of Sámi art and film is essential in terms of decolonising the research sphere. Further, I suggest that the championing of indigenous epistemologies relates intimately to intellectual sovereignty and thus self-determination in the Sámi lifeworld. Kuokkanen puts it succinctly when she states, “an indigenous paradigm [is] part of indigenous peoples’ struggle for self-determination and the decolonisation process” (Ibid 2000, pg. 412). She further reiterates that “Western models of doing research, which are often characterised by a Cartesian worldview, based on metaphysical dualism and laden with perceptions that derive from the Enlightenment” have disadvantaged indigenous peoples in various spheres of scholarly inquiry and that an appreciation of and engagement with indigenous thought paradigms are essential in combating this devaluation (Ibid 2000, pg. 413).

My overall suggestion here is that the exploration of indigenous aesthetics through film is not merely an intellectual exercise; there is an inherently political aspect. Throughout this chapter I have attempted to engage with indigenous theory and critical thought paradigms to the extent to which I am able as a non-Sámi person in the analysis of Sámi film, and I suggest that this choice is decolonial in nature, as it stands in opposition to colonial paradigms that have historically devalued and simplified indigenous epistemologies. For myself, this engagement with indigenous paradigms relates to my objective to employ decolonial methods in my research praxis (an intention I specified in greater detail in Chapter 1). For indigenous peoples, embracing indigenous paradigms in research in aesthetics relates to the decolonisation of the mind and the reclaiming of the value of indigenous intellectual sovereignty.

## Conclusion

### Chapter Review

Chapter 1 focused on providing a theoretical framework to contextualise my research. Because my thesis focuses on decolonisation through film, I began this text by addressing the ethics of research and representation in relationship to indigenous peoples in a broad sense. In order to do so, I chronicled a relatively brief history of anthropological research and the colonial origins that stimulated its genesis, through the “reflexive turn” that allowed for more reflective, dialogical, and ethical paradigms in ethnographic praxis. I also reflected upon the epistemic areas in which indigenous and non-indigenous social science research paradigms are able to find common ground, emphasising storytelling as a theoretical keystone. To reiterate, my primary objective in this chapter was to establish the ways in which the decolonisation of research with indigenous peoples would guide my ethnographic praxis, while at the same time the concept of decolonising media would guide my analysis of Sámi film and filmmaking in future chapters. I also endeavoured to provide a framework from which the reader would be able to understand the necessity of the discussion regarding decolonisation and film that would follow, based on the history of colonial activity that characterised early incarnations of research with indigenous peoples *and* the portrayal of indigenous groups in mainstream media.

Chapter 2 spotlighted the Sámi people and their history in the Nordic states, with primary focus on the Sámi in Norway, given the location of my fieldwork. I discuss in depth the Norwegianisation paradigm that influenced Norwegian politics heavily throughout the period of 1850 to 1980, roughly, which aimed to collapse all cultures (with a particular target on assimilating the indigenous Sámi and Kvæn peoples) within the newly independent nation into a homogenous, modernised entity. I characterised these activities as domestic colonialism, and I explored the ways in which contemporary Sámi politics can be understood as partially emergent from and in opposition to this colonial endeavour. I highlighted the Sámi Cultural Revival, which began roughly during the 1960s and has in many ways continued on through the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Further, I explored the ways in which Sámi creatives have historically utilised their arts to combat national attempts at

assimilation and subjugation during this movement, setting the stage for present-day Sámi artists to continue that legacy. Finally, I addressed some of the debates surrounding the need for decolonisation theory and activities in the discourses surrounding Sámi politics, utilising the Norwegianisation paradigm as evidence for colonial activity within the Nordic states. Extending from this, I suggested that there are pervasive and continuous consequences that threaten Sámi self-determination and cultural integrity which stem from that colonial legacy.

In Chapter 3, I briefly widened my lens from a specifically Sámi context to a broader, global indigenous context in order to introduce the concept of visual anthropology and establish its historic relationship with indigenous peoples. In this chapter, I analogised the history of anthropological research with indigenous peoples to the history of indigenous representation in visual media. Specifically, I explored the colonial roots of ethnographic film and photography, which represent the very first visual documentations of indigenous peoples. I established how, in its earliest stages, ethnographic film was often utilised to validate Eurocentric perspectives and colonial objectives, though it was widely believed to cast an objective lens on the world. I chronicled how the trajectory of ethnographic film followed the progression of cultural anthropology in general, ultimately leading to ethnographers engaging with more reflexive, dialogic, and collaborative methods in visual research. To reiterate, though my thesis's primary focus is on fictional film, it was necessary to address ethnographic film in order to fully contextualise the history of the indigenous presence in media. As I noted in this chapter, some of the very first documentary films were indeed depicting indigenous subjects.

Next, I addressed the ways in which indigenous peoples have taken control over the camera in order to express their creative ambitions and assert greater agency over their portrayals in media. I explained how, in the 20<sup>th</sup> century and onward, indigenous peoples have established local and international television and film networks, premiered their works at global film festivals and developed their own events, and earned a variety of international awards, essentially creating a global renaissance of indigenous media. I also pointed towards the abundance of fictional film in the indigenous repertoire, leading me into my reasons for electing to focus on fictional storytelling through visual media as opposed to documentary or ethnographic film. I addressed fictional film as a contemporary extension of the indigenous storytelling tradition, which is of key importance in terms of cultural vitality

and conservation. I emphasised that, though I believe ethnographic and documentary film traditions are both fully capable of addressing and exemplifying indigenous stories and concerns compassionately and effectively, the emotive and creative aspects of fictional film that serve as driving factors for its production lend themselves well to manifesting indigenous perspectives in a truly intimate and intuitive way. Correspondingly, I suggested that the analysis of fictional film in an ethnographic context remains a dramatically under-utilised analytic technique and is one that deserves greater merit in terms of research alongside ethnographic film.

Chapter 4 returned to the concept of decolonisation as a theoretical keystone to my thesis and introduced the more specific concept of the “colonisation of the mind.” I explored this idea in the context of Sámi film and visual communication and explained how indigenous arts can lend themselves aptly to the process of psychosocial decolonisation. In this chapter, my fieldwork also played a central role. As I was heavily interested in the ways in which filmmakers engage with their colonial history in ways both intentional and incidental, I was concurrently very concerned with the motivations and intentions of the artists. I placed particular emphasis on the burden, or perhaps more appropriately, the *opportunity* for representation in Sámi film culture. I also explored very generally the filmmakers’ opinions and feelings surrounding the manifestation of topics that are often quite taboo in Sámi society in film, which, I will note here, is a topic that emerged very organically and without much encouragement regarding the discussion of this idea on my part. Related to this, I evaluated the idea of silence in Sámi culture and discussed the ways in which this concept has been advantageous to Sámi people in terms of their political dealings with majority cultures, but also can serve as a route of transmission for internalised colonisation.

The former conversation led me into Chapter 5, in which the concept of healing from colonial history took center stage. I discussed the concept of historical/intergenerational and/or transgenerational trauma in relationship to indigenous peoples, who have universally endured collective cultural and family-based experiences of displacement and dislocation, racial discrimination, and ongoing structural inequalities emerging from the colonial legacies of various nation-states. I emphasised the salience of these observations in relationship to the testimonies of my informants, many of whom were and are connected to significant social and political “battles,” as Inga-Wiktoria Påve described. I explored the

deleterious effects of these intergenerational traumas and followed up this discussion with a conversation regarding the ways in which the arts, storytelling, and film have been instrumental strategies of resilience against cultural devaluation for many of my informants. I argued, based on the testimonies of my informants, that the arts and creativity constitute a predominant and intuitive part of Sámi life for many people, and are thus rife with opportunities for healing from traumatic culture-based experiences. In the latter half of this chapter, I focused on my fieldwork as a participant observer at various film festivals, with particular emphasis on *Skábmagovat* in Inari, Finland and *Dellie Maa* in Dearná/Tärnaby, Sweden. I analysed the events and discussions occurring at these festivals in the context of healing from history, a concept I have emphasised as part and parcel of successful psychosocial decolonisation, and explored the creative and complex ways Sámi artists and filmmakers are engaging with these ideas.

In Chapter 6, I honed my lens of focus principally on the filmic product itself as a cultural artefact. Doing so necessitated a discussion regarding the pervasive differences between Western conceptualisations of art (in a broad sense, those that have emerged from the European Enlightenment period of the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries) and indigenous aesthetic theories. I explored in particular the idea of an indigenous paradigm as an epistemic position from which we can more closely understand indigenous aesthetics, particularly those aspects of the aesthetic that are “unseen,” located within the spiritual environment of the indigenous North. I emphasised the holistic aspects of indigenous epistemologies in a general sense and concluded that Sámi aesthetics must be evaluated from a similarly broad and inclusive epistemic position, with considers the interrelationships between art, myth, time, and place. Following this discussion, I continued into Chapter 7 with an analysis of three short films by Inga-Wiktoria Påve and Anders Sunna, Ann Holmgren, and Sara Margrethe Oskal. I explored the contents of the films based on their metaphorical, symbolic, and material presentations related to the natural world of the indigenous North, structures and objects that bear particular significance to Sámi culture, and less visually obvious allusions to concepts in pre-Christian Sámi mythology and spirituality.



## “Why aren’t you Sámi?”



Fig. 43: Kernell A. (2016) *Sámi Blood (Sameblod)* [Film still with awards overlay]. Retrieved from: <https://www.kanopy.com/product/sami-blood>

At the *Dellie Maa Sápmi* Indigenous Film and Art Festival, I spoke to a Swedish attendee, who relayed the following anecdote: “I asked my daughter’s [Sámi] boyfriend, ‘Why aren’t you Sámi?’ He said, ‘Have you seen *Sameblod*? That’s why.’” Due to the brevity of the young man’s quote and the fact that I had never spoken to him myself, I can’t claim to know precisely and assuredly what he meant by this. But given an abundance of context clues from the film *Sameblod* in confluence with what I know about the history of the Sámi people, I can make a few educated assumptions. For the purposes of analysis, I will quickly revisit the plot of *Sameblod* here. In the film, we are presented with the story of two young sisters who represent alternative responses to forced assimilation and prejudice against Sámi peoples during the 1930s in Sweden, though we see the film primarily through the eyes of fourteen-year-old Elle-Marja. The young Sámi woman is desperate to escape the shame associated with her ethnicity by assimilating into Swedish culture in various ways, most notably by changing her name to Christina, attending school in Uppsala, and shedding her traditional Sámi dress and language. Alternatively, her younger sister Njenna insists on speaking her native South Sámi language even when it is forbidden at her boarding school and embraces the reindeer herding culture in which she was raised. While the audience may perceive Njenna’s resilience against prejudice as more admirable, we nevertheless

empathise with Elle-Marja's desire to abandon her culture based on the treatment she receives from non-Sámi. She is tormented and bullied by locals, measured and prodded like an organism under a microscope by the Institute of Racial Biology at her boarding school, and harshly disciplined for speaking South Sámi. At the end of the film, Njenna passes away from old age, and an elderly Elle-Marja expresses remorse for abandoning her family at her sister's funeral (Kernell 2016).

In the film *Sameblod*, we see that, socially, Sámi people were and, under some circumstances, still are pigeonholed into a no-win situation. If a Sámi person assimilates and rejects his or her culture, he or she may live a life full of regret, as Elle-Marja ultimately did. Alternatively, if a Sámi person owns and expresses his or her indigenous identity, he or she will usually be appraised as the "other" in Nordic society. According to Dion-Buffalo and Mohawk, colonised or previously colonised peoples essentially have three choices; they can become "good subjects" of the discourse, accepting the rules and cultural paradigms of the majority culture without much question; they can become "bad subjects," arguing that they have "been subjected to alien rules but always revolting within the precepts of those rules"; or they can become "non-subjects, acting and thinking around discourses far removed from and unintelligible to the West" (Dion-Buffalo & Mohawk 1992, pg. 20). There are potentially injurious consequences associated with each decision, particularly: self-denial and subsequent regret or societal alienation.

In the case of the Swedish attendee's anecdote, I can surmise that this is possibly why the young man feels he cannot be Sámi, or at the very least experiences discomfort when expressing his indigenous identity publicly. Though his expression was brief, I found it to be incredibly telling in terms of the power of indigenous media. Perhaps his statement was most telling *in* its brevity. The young man did not feel compelled to launch into an in-depth explanation of the history of his people in Sweden and explain how shame continues to be a pervasive issue in Sámi society; he did not need to. He was able to use the story of *Sameblod* as a reference from which he could express and synopsis his own feelings and concerns. Notably, this was not the first time I heard *Sameblod* being referenced as an indelibly powerful tale in terms of facilitating empathy for and within the Sámi community. To revisit a quote from Inga-Wiktoria Påve (as seen in Chapter 5):

**INGA-WIKTORIA PÅVE:** *The movie Sameblod – that kind of movie shows people how difficult it is. It also gives people who are feeling this kind of low self-esteem some credit, that it's okay, that it's not their fault. It's a really big and complex process and [film] can help people understand the complexity of it. I think that's important.*

Inga-Wiktoria references the “big and complex process” that involves healing from the colonial legacy that continues to impact the self-worth and societal agency of Sámi individuals. She alludes to the power of indigenous media in support of this endeavour. I believe the young man in the Swedish attendee's anecdote speaks to the salience of her observations. For the young man, *Sameblod* helped provide him with referential material through which he could organise, comprehend, and explain the anxieties associated with the history of his ethnicity. This account provides an example of how film can provide a discursive platform from which indigenous peoples can articulate their concerns, showcase truths, help outsiders understand their struggles more empathetically, and, perhaps most importantly, know they are not alone.

This story also speaks aptly to what was previously discussed in Chapter 5; namely, arts, storytelling, and visual communication as instrumental to healing from the lingering vestiges of colonial oppression in Sámi society. The crux of my thesis is that decolonisation can occur through media and storytelling, and in fact, that these avenues are ideal for this venture, particularly when considering the vital importance of art and storytelling in indigenous culture. However, I have also suggested that narratives of decolonial insurgency are not the only frameworks through which media can lend itself to decolonisation. Though stories of empowerment are undoubtedly integral to the decolonial objective, so too are tales that are diverse, humanising, and multifarious. *Sameblod* serves as a powerful example of this. The film is melancholic and could be described as tragic, particularly in the sense that the protagonist grapples with shame her entire life and is consequently never able to reconcile with her sister. Elle-Marja is not particularly heroic, but instead is complex, flawed, and very human, and her story is a sincere and poignant one that many Sámi individuals can relate to and understand. The film also emphasises the idea that not all Sámi people will respond to or process the history and anxieties associated with their culture in the same way; consider, for example, the differences between Njenna and Elle-Marja. To that end, I suggest and have suggested that film is well-positioned to negotiate the subtle distinction

between conveying cultural cohesiveness and diverse individuality in storytelling narratives. Similarly, I reiterate that film is able to articulate indigenous identity out as partially emerging out of a legacy of colonialism without framing that identity exclusively in terms of opposition to that legacy. As Herrington puts it:

As Indigenous cinema negotiates its relationship between mainstream cinema, it must navigate through its colonial past, neither forgetting, nor forced to always speak in opposition to this past. Its emphasis on self-representation seeks to replace the tropes of mainstream cinema, and even as indigenous cinema negotiates with the effect of mainstream cinema, it is negotiating Indigenous identity. Indigenous films....show that this emergence, acknowledgement of colonial crimes, and continual creation of new Indigenous cinema, beyond the bounds of Western cinema, can be possible (Herrington 2011, pg. 1).

Aldama agrees: "In the case of [indigenous people], we cannot discuss 'who we are now' without understanding the continued legacy of imperial violence and our strategic and spontaneous resistance to the forces of material and discursive colonialism" (Aldama 2001, pg. 3). At the same time, limiting the conversation regarding indigenous identity exclusively to the idea of indigenous insurgence against tyrannical colonial powers is essentialising and reductive. Again, this is where film enters center stage in terms of negotiating these seemingly contradictory truths. For example, in *Sameblood*, the protagonist is not one who resists the forces of colonialism and forced assimilation; instead, she actively strives to capitulate. However, her actions and behaviours are readily comprehensible and can easily facilitate discussions and understanding regarding the impacts of colonial subjugation in Sámi society. On the other hand, Njenna's actions and behaviours of resistance represent alternative ways of responding to forced assimilation and prejudice.

Indigenous films have this capacity to create a new legacy, one that acknowledges specific and multiple histories, without collapsing indigenous identities into a monolith. And indeed, acknowledging indigenous identity as multifaceted and multifarious exists in an epistemological realm entirely separate from the idea of colonialism, which endeavours to essentialise and devalue aspects of minority cultures in favour of normalising and

championing a particular majority center. Film is able to counter this essentialisation by privileging the perspectives of individual creatives, who may highlight concepts related to cultural cohesion in film while also articulating stories through their own respective individual lenses.

In my thesis, I have discussed how media “can be...used to disturb...the dominant system of power, challenging the ideologies in place with the production of new meanings, images, and narratives” (Sonza 2018, pg. 3). I have addressed how the confluence of concrete policies and ideologies reflecting the interests of majority cultures over indigenous cultures continues to devalue indigenous interests with stereotyping and reductive imagery and narratives. This process has resulted in a pervasive issue of visibility, or perhaps more appropriately, invisibility for indigenous peoples and their works. I have thus addressed the politics of representation and how they are embedded in indigenous media, and how indigenous creatives do or do not consciously engage with this paradigm. Furthermore, I have explored how techniques of self-making in film have contributed to the process of, as Sunna Nousuniemi put it at *Skábmagovat*, “reintroducing us to us.” To put it simply, I have investigated the “why and how” related to indigenous filmmakers telling their own stories, and, based on my observations and conversations, I conclude that that the expression of indigenous perspectives through film and other forms of media is the root incentive for the existence of indigenous media. Indeed, whether the intent of the filmmaker is to “persuade, entertain, celebrate, criticise, inform, or combine these goals,” the film manifests the perspective of the creator (Leuthold 1998, pg. 57). And it is this access to the perspective of the indigenous creator that is inherently decolonial.

### **Implications for the Anthropology of Film**

While, as mentioned previously, the perspective of the Sámi creator was and is the principal focus of my thesis, my work is also partially an analysis of and argument for the greater consideration of fictional stories (to be more specific in this case, fictional film) as viable ethnographic data in anthropological discourse. I manifested this argument principally through example; i.e., by analysing the “why and how” of indigenous film by exploring the testimonies of individual creators and then assessing their creative works. However, I believe it may also be useful here to revisit the idea of fictional film as

anthropological data in terms of theory and explore some conclusions I have drawn in this regard based now on the wholeness of my research.

Baxter claims that anthropology and film ethnography are fundamentally incompatible, based on the assumption that they “fundamentally differ in methods and aims” (as quoted in Taylor 1996, pg. 64). He continues, asserting that while anthropology is “detached and open-minded,” film is the opposite: “Substituting a single glass lens for our two human eyes is imperious and monocular...it tries to simplify and disarm, as well as to impose” (as quoted in Ibid 1996, pg. 64). As could be surmised from my discussion of positivism and objectivity in ethnographic research (which is primarily addressed in Chapter 1), I believe Baxter is perhaps overestimating the idea of impartiality in anthropological practice. I don’t mean to suggest here that endeavouring to be as observational and non-biased as possible is a useless or dishonest venture in ethnographic research. Instead I would argue, as I did in Chapter 1, that robust anthropological research exists in a somewhat paradoxical epistemic realm in which awareness of the anthropologist’s cultural vantage point and possible biases (essentially, reflexivity) actually offers more room for a conscientious experience of the culture being studied. I will discuss my own use of fictional film as emic data to clarify my meaning. I am a European-American scholar, studying in the United Kingdom, interested in studying the lingering impacts of colonialism on contemporary Sámi culture and how Sámi creatives are utilising the arts to conceptualise their cultural identities in light of this legacy, in ways both direct and indirect. By acknowledging that I am not a Sámi or, for that matter, a Norwegian, Swede, or Finn, I am also stating that there are several aspects of being an indigenous person and a Nordic state citizen that are unfamiliar and perhaps difficult for me to understand and thus express in writing. I have engaged with the idea of fictional film as emic data *because* it, as Baxter states, “imposes” and layers the lens of a Sámi narrator over my own, offering myself and my readers greater understanding into a Sámi perspective.

I will return here to a quote I used in Chapter 1; in the words of Fanon, “for the native, objectivity is always directed against him” (Fanon 1963/2005, pg. 77). This statement challenges the idea of objectivity in social science research in the first place, insinuating that, historically, ethnographers have – sometimes unwittingly – imposed their own value judgments on particular aspects of indigenous cultures while operating under a false pretense of impartiality. In response, both non-indigenous and indigenous researchers have

advocated for a new, decolonial methodology that places “indigenous peoples at the center of our/their research and its consequences” (Ritskes & Sium 2013, pg. 5). In the context of my own research, I have argued throughout this thesis that the analysis of indigenous fictional film and filmmaking fits compatibly into this kind of research framework, as it places the perceptions of indigenous makers and narrators at the core of the investigation.

According to McLuhan, “film [is] an enlargement of our own physical ability to see and hear the world” (as quoted in Escobar 2017). It seems that Baxter perceives something opposite to this in film when he states that it is instead “imperious and monocular” (as quoted in Taylor 1996, pg. 64). From my perspective, and within the context of anthropology, I believe both scholars are making legitimate observations. I will again use my own research as an example to clarify my statement. When viewing and analysing a Sámi film, I am consuming a narrative from a highly specific lens that overlays my own: that of the Sámi filmmaker, whose story may not be about him/her specifically, but whose artistry goes through a filter of him/her both as an individual and as a member of a particular culture. My observations garnered from these films are similarly specific; though I will never truly see the world through a Sámi person’s eyes (or any other individual’s eyes for that matter), film offers me a filter through which I can borrow a closer gaze to the creator. In that sense, film (*especially* fictional film) is indeed quite monocular. However, at the same time, it is this highly particular lens that expands my perspective beyond my own and yields greater insight into the culture I am studying. This is because indigenous film is based on “indigenous concepts, analytical systems, and cultural frames of reference” (Asino & Semali 2013, pg. 26). In other words, film allows me to extend outside of my own frame of reference and access cultural concepts external to my own. As an anthropologist, this is precisely my objective.

### **Film as a Cultural Artefact**

I have emphasised throughout this thesis that my interest lies primarily within the “why and how” of indigenous fictional filmmaking. This statement may initially seem to insinuate that I am disinterested in the actual product being created. Turner suggests as much, stating that indigenous media production is ““most important not for the products generated, but for the process which empowers its producers” (Turner 2002, pg. 80). He

continues: “The real issues are not the preservation of ‘culture,’ non-Western or Western, but the empowerment of social actors, whatever their degree of cultural ‘purity’ as defined by whatever standard, to produce their own cultural mediations” (Ibid 2002, pg. 81). I am in agreement with Turner’s assertion that the “empowerment of social actors” is a vital element of creativity, particularly for indigenous artists (Ibid 2002, pg. 80). I will note here that, when speaking of empowerment in the context of my thesis, I am referring to a process that enables indigenous peoples to engage in activities that directly and indirectly further self-determination and intellectual and practical sovereignty. I also agree with his secondary point, which implies that stories from indigenous peoples who might be on the “margins,” or more disconnected from their native language and culture than others, are important alongside those who fit a standard of cultural “purity.” However, in contrast to his statement, I suggest that the cinematic product itself is also central in terms of individual and collective empowerment, as well as in the “production of cultural mediations” (Ibid 2002, pg. 81).

Turner maintains that the process of creating imagery can be a source of empowerment for indigenous artists, and it is the process that overshadows the product in importance. Conversely, I have argued throughout this thesis that indigenous media is a powerful driving agent at the forefront of the struggle for self-determination both in terms of praxis and product. More specifically, in Chapter 6, I discussed native films in terms of indigenous aesthetics, and followed up this enquiry with an analysis of three Sámi short films in Chapter 7. I will iterate here that I believe a thorough anthropological assessment of Sámi film necessitates an understanding of the media project being produced; without this, the assessment is incomplete. Both context and creation are relevant in terms of ethnographic inquiry. As I previously mentioned, I am chiefly interested in the “why and how” of indigenous film. I suggest that the intent and social empowerment of the indigenous filmmaker falls under the theoretical umbrella of “why,” and the film itself falls into the sphere of “how.”

Consider my conversations with Anders Sunna and Inga-Wiktoria Påve, for example. These two creatives have both emphasised the ways in which their arts provide a catalyst for discussion in terms of Sámi history, identity, and politics. Anders, for example, described the film as a call to “make the people [referring to the Sámi people] wake up” and embrace their culture in the face of prejudice and discrimination. Inga Wiktoria validates that “every



Sámi community has their own...political battle in some way,” and that the Sámi audience will be able to “relate” to the themes of the film. These comments take on particular weight when we analyse the contents and narrative of the film *Morit Elena Morit!* The stop-motion animated film chronicles the arduous and often frightening journey of Elena, a young Sámi woman named for Anders’s daughter, as she pushes forward along with her reindeer through a series of threatening characters and circumstances, most of which represent significant events in Sámi history or contemporary social and environmental concerns in *Sápmi*. During her travels, Elena is accompanied by the omnipresent voice of an elder’s spirit, who encourages her to continue onward, raising her kin, protecting her environment, and honouring her culture despite the obstacles she may face (Påve & Sunna 2017). Surely the content of this film itself is contributory to the “[empowerment] of its producers” and other “social actors” as Turner suggests, in the sense that its message is one of endurance and cultural sovereignty (Turner 2002, pg. 80-1). With that being said, I suggest here that the film is also a product of culture (as well as, of course, the product of two individual artists’ converging efforts), in the sense that one can glean much about Sámi cosmology and philosophy from this film if one complements the viewing of the product with textual and/or oral material and knowledge. For example, it was through this film that I was first introduced to the concept of *saavja*, an upside-down realm in the Sámi mythos in which traveling individuals are able to attain wisdom. In a sense, indigenous films have the potential to be visual and narrative artefacts of culture, within which mythologies and knowledge can be housed.

To sum, while I agree with Turner’s intimation that indigenous films serve as potentially powerful sources of empowerment for both creators and consumers, I believe that a thorough ethnographic analysis of indigenous films and filmmaking must necessarily consider and evaluate the content of the products being made. Otherwise, the examination is question will be rather restricted, and exclude vital categories of meaning as they can be accessed within the films themselves. As Asino and Semali put it:

The rationale of critically analysing global media texts is based on the multiplicity of values, meanings, or messages encoded into the form and content of visual images, Internet sources, textbook pages, or audio sources. These media sources contain a wealth of meanings; their images function in contexts, with meanings evolving in

terms of narratives, sequences, and resolutions (Asino & Semali 2013, pg. 29).

### **“Nothing About Us Without Us”**

Roughly around 2018, Canadian First Nations peoples adopted a slogan that summarily dictates the most ethical approach to issues related to outsider research, public policy involving indigenous peoples and their multifarious interests, and issues of representation more generally: “Nothing About Us Without Us” (Cizek & Uricchio 2019, pg. 1). This mantra initially emerged from a disability activist movement that began gaining momentum during the 1990s, but in recent years it has been embraced by indigenous peoples working in various spheres of activism (Callus & Zahra 2017). The slogan has featured prominently in discussions regarding indigenous media and indigenous peoples *in* media as well. The fundamental idea behind “Nothing About Us Without Us” is that outsider-produced films addressing indigenous interests or portraying indigenous characters should always have meaningful input from indigenous consultants, and that, as Anishinaabe filmmaker Lisa Jackson frankly states: “indigenous films need to be made by indigenous peoples” (as quoted in McCue 2018, pg. 2). Indeed, throughout this thesis, I have argued that indigenous control over their portrayals in film is not simply a matter of desirable or undesirable representation. Instead, indigenous art, stories, and film are essential for the survival of these communities. Jesse Wenthe, broadcaster and Director of Film Programmes for the Toronto International Film Festival, agrees:

Our stories are our survival. That is why it is so important to us that we get a chance to tell them ourselves. That is why some of us are lobbying – hard – for dedicated funds to tell our stories. Because for us, this isn't about making a movie deal or getting a network series, this is about our survival – because if you think this nation [author note: he is referring to Canada in this instance] can exist without Indigenous people, then you just haven't been paying attention (Wenthe 2017, pg. 3).

In previous chapters, I explored and elucidated the importance of storytelling in the indigenous, and more specifically, Sámi, lifeworld. I have argued that, while storytelling is “a basic foundation for all human learning and teaching,” it takes on particular weight when

we are discussing the Sámi tale-telling tradition (Iseke 2013, pg. 559). This is because the Sámi people have been historically and systematically disadvantaged in ways that are developmental, political, and cultural throughout the various nations they occupy. Specifically, I described the ways in which the Norwegianisation paradigm that determined Norwegian politics between the years of 1890 and 1980, roughly, framed the Sámi people and their culture in terms of lesser overall value to the majority state in Chapter 2. The continuance of indigenous storytelling is imperative in light of this history, in part because the tale-telling tradition houses Sámi philosophies, ethics, and practical knowledge; essentially all the intangible materials that make up culture. Thus, storytelling becomes a source of survival and empowerment, particularly in light of a longstanding colonial legacy.

Alongside its empowering qualities, I have come to understand that indigenous storytelling also relates intimately to healing in the Sámi context. In this thesis, I exemplified what this means through interviews with filmmakers and through fieldwork expeditions at film festivals, which made it clear that part of the incentive and outcome of telling stories through film is to heal the consequences of colonial activity in Sámi communities through empathy and humanistic representation:

Hearing someone else's story can provide hope to the broken... When you understand the story you're part of and the role you are capable of playing, you can heal the wounds of the past and focus on the challenges and joys of the present (Native Hope 2018, pg. 2).

Finally, I believe that indigenous filmmaking, storytelling, and art are all potentially part of a wider decolonial project that champions indigenous intellectual sovereignty. As I explored more thoroughly in Chapter 6, Sámi films offer a window into a multiplicity of indigenous perspectives in a general sense, but more specifically, they also contain indigenous thought paradigms, philosophies, and theories of aesthetics, beauty, and value. An analysis of and appreciation of Sámi film from an indigenous paradigm necessarily involves a greater understanding of indigenous art terminology, aesthetics, and critical theory overall. While the colonial legacies of Norway and Sweden, for example, have historically devalued Sámi art and aesthetic philosophy and dismissed these aspects as primitive or simplistic, contemporary Sámi film and art offer foundations for more

thoughtful and complex conversations regarding the intentions, metaphors, philosophies, and symbols inherent in their cultural media.

All these factors collude to create a sort of “reintroduction” to what it means to be indigenous, sometimes in direct opposition to, but also potentially in liberation from, colonial thought paradigms that have simplified and devalued indigenous lives and cultures. To borrow from a quote I have referenced several times throughout this thesis, Sunna Nousuniemi elucidates that, through film, “we [Sámis] are reintroducing us to us.” Anna Lajla Utsi, the Director of the Sámi Film Institute, echoes and expands upon this sentiment:

Film for indigenous people is about empowerment; it’s about survival, it’s about continuing our traditions, our culture, and our language, it’s about being visible because we have been invisible for a long time (as quoted in Radio New Zealand 2019).

To conclude, through empathetic, humanistic representation and the championing and conservation of indigenous knowledge, philosophy, cosmology, and theory, Sámi film, which is inextricably related to both indigenous storytelling and visual art, has the potential to be an essential component of the principles of self-determination that are inalienable and essential for indigenous peoples. Self-determination necessarily allows indigenous peoples to “freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social, and cultural development” (International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights 1976). I have argued throughout this thesis that filmmaking lies within the aspect of cultural development and is thus linked to concepts such as “cultural heritage, traditional knowledge, and traditional cultural expressions” (Martinet 2019). As an additional theoretical aspect, I have also argued that fictional stories as they are exemplified in Sámi film are viable and productive sources of emic data in terms of indigenous research. Overall, my contention is that the celebration of and access to indigenous perspectives through film is part of a broader decolonial project, both in research and in terms of the cultural lives of contemporary Sámi communities.

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