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**REVITALIZATION OF THE STIGMATIZED ROOTS**

**How sami yoik and shamanistic symbols appear  
in christian discourses from the early modern age**



Yoiking is a vocal singing tradition of the Sami and involves many sacred and profane symbols. Its scope of application goes far beyond the usual connotations of folk songs or ritual songs. It has numerous functions: it is a means of communication; an expression of identity; an instrument of entertainment; it is, furthermore, a system to classify and identify the society and the environment of the Sami; it is a sort of summary of the experience and knowledge acquired of the world that reflects and expresses their worldview. The primary means of sacred communication was also the yoik. This practice is the one most often referred to by observers. Medieval and early modern sources (usually authored by travelers and missionaries) all mention the yoik without exception as a symbol of paganism, as a magical, diabolical song constituting part of the shaman's ritual ceremony. Visitors could not tell the difference between the ritual songs of the shamans and the common 'folk songs'. The stereotyping (external) label of 'shamanism' was easily applied to any yoik, regardless of it having anything to do with shamanism or not. Thereby one of the external categories, the stigmatizing concept of "pagan" became firmly embedded in the notion of yoiking over the course of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. These negative undertones regarding the Sami were accentuated by a new (political and scientific) discourse unfolding at the beginning of the twentieth century (as an offshoot of evolutionism and racial theory), separated from religious institutions, in which yoiking was described as an inferior, despicable and shameful custom along with any other phenomena associated with the traditional lifestyle of the Sami. Although the fear of punishment was very successful in repressing the practice of the yoik, the sermons of the much-respected and popular Laestadius, and the Christian Awakening movement that he had launched resulted in an even stronger repression of this vocal tradition. After that it was not out of fear that many Sami did not yoik, but because they were convinced that it was a sin and an instrument for 'conjuring the Devil'. Most of the Laestadians rejected the yoik also nowadays, but many among the Christian Sami youth desire to reconnect with their culture's music, while rejecting the pagan interpretation of yoik. Some of them not only try to relieve the yoik of its pagan connotations, but they specifically invest it with new, Christian meanings. The positive reception and the feasibility of this initiative have been thus far demonstrated by certain settlements or dioceses (mostly in Sweden). In some places, the yoik has already become part of the liturgy in spite of the reluctance of conservative Christians.

*Keywords:* Sami, Yoik, Christianity, Laestadianism, Paganism, Identity.



Yoiking is a vocal singing tradition of the Sami (or Lapps, a minority indigenous group in the entire region of Northern Europe) that carries many features of sacred and profane symbols; its scope of application goes far beyond the usual connotations of folk songs or ritual songs. It has numerous functions: it is a means of communication; an expression of identity; an instrument of entertainment; it is, furthermore, a system to classify and identify the society and the environment of the Sami; it is a sort of synopsis of the experience and knowledge acquired of the world that reflects and expresses their worldview [Tamás 2007, 78–79]. The Sami believe that there is a strong bond, an essential congruity between the yoik and the subject of the yoik; they never say that they yoik ‘of’ someone or something. They always use the accusative: they ‘yoik [sing] someone/something’, since the yoik is a type of musical representation, a concept inseparable from the person or the object it is about. Once yoiking extended to all areas of life of the Sami; the present study, however, does not provide a framework in which to discuss its diverse uses, rather it highlights certain characteristic functions.

It was possible to become part of the community through the yoik: after birth children were immediately assigned an individual yoik (*mánnávuodaluohiti*, or ‘childhood yoik’) that accompanied them into their adulthood until they received their personal yoik. Only those having a personal yoik could become fully-fledged members of the community. Yoik played a crucial role in everyday communication as well. This form of expression so different from ordinary talk operated primarily through rhythmic and musical means; aside from a few syllable-like elements (or panels, such as *loi-lo*, *nu*, *nun-nu*, *go*, *lei*, etc.) there were no ‘real’ lyrics. If two people met they usually sang each other’s yoik as a form of greeting. Due to the particularity of its vocalisation, the yoik can be heard from a great distance, and on the Tundra the herders would communicate with one another with yoiks. One could use yoiks as a means of education, of reprimand, and as a way of signalling location. It is also clear that yoiking was central to special occasions, such as weddings, for which new yoiks would be composed. It was basically a fundamental expectation for everybody to be able to compose a yoik. The primary means of sacred communication was also the yoik; this practice is the one most often referred to by observers. Medieval and early modern sources (usually authored by travellers and missionaries) all mention it without exception as a symbol of paganism, as a magical, diabolical song constituting part of the shaman’s ritual ceremony. Giuseppe Acerbi, for instance, describes this song form as resembling more the song of the birds, the bellowing of reindeer or the moaning of the wind, than human singing [Acerbi 1802, 73]. In addition to the image of the yoik there was the general belief already articulated in early sources that the Sami were all sorcerers, witches and devils. In 1555, Magnus Gothus wrote: “Among the population of Pohjanmaa and Peräpohjola there are wise men and shamans... They are especially talented illusionists who can transform their own faces and that of others, thereby masking their true image with false appearance. They can also see into the future.” [Author’s translation from the Finnish publication, Järvinen 1999, 123.] In the following description from more than two centuries later, yoiking appears as part of the initiation ritual for shamans: “The young men who were shaman candidates received visions from the gods in different ways: sometimes in the form of a *Saivo* creature [the

collective, emic denomination of the helper spirits of the shaman], or sometimes in the form of a dream, etc. [...] The shamans gathered [...] The young shaman started yoiking, he sang his shaman yoik and was beating his drums.” [Author’s translation from the Finnish publication. After Erik Johan Jessen 1767 In: Pentikäinen 1998, 185.]

Similar stereotypes even filtered down into twentieth-century literature. In Henryk Sienkiewicz’s, *The Deluge*, one finds the following:

“*Sadovski gave explanations as they passed, saying:*

– *This is the Smaland regiment of the royal guard. This is the infantry of Delekarlia, the very best.*

– *In God’s name, what little monsters are these? – cried Zagloba on a sudden, pointing to a group of small men with olive complexions and black hair hanging on both sides of their heads.*

– *Those are Laplanders, who belong to the remotest Hyperboreans.*

– *Are they good in battle? It seems to me that I might take three in each hand and strike with their heads till I was tired.*

– *You could surely do so. They are useless in battle. The Swedes bring them for camp servants, and partly as a curiosity. But they are the most skilful of wizards; each of them has at least one devil in his service, and some have five.*

– *How do they get such friendship with evil spirits? – asked Kmita, making the sign of the cross.*

– *Because they wander in night, which with them lasts half a year or more; and you know that it is easier to hold converse with the Devil at night.*

– *But have they souls?*

– *It is unknown; but I think that they are more in the nature of animals.*

*Kmita turned his horse, caught one of the Laplanders by the shoulders, raised him up like a cat, and examined him curiously; then he put him on his feet, and said:*

– *If the king would give me one such, I would give orders to have him dried and hung up in the church in Orsha, where, among other curiosities, are ostrich eggs.”* [Sienkiewicz (1886) 1969, 706. English translation by Jeremiah Curtin]\*.



Fig. 1. Samuel Rheen’s illustration of a Sami shaman from 1671\*\*

The ‘incomprehension’ experienced many outsiders when confronting the genre of yoik is reflected by Szomjas-Schiffert, who wrote in the middle of the last century:

“When recording [...] the yoik series of Näkkäljärvi, Stoor and Ruotsala I had the painful feeling – as someone having studied solo singing and being a practicing singer at the time – that I would not be able to sing these melodies with my voice as my Lapp singers did. [...] As a professional of vocal studies I

\* <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/37308/37308h/37308-h.htm> (downloaded 2016.06.09).

\*\* <http://ansatte.uit.no/rune.hagen/shaman.html> (downloaded: 2018.01.20).



have suspected such *fioritura*, florid embellishments, that are particularities of vocal technique, which seemed extremely complex. [...] *I was able to understand all of a sudden why Scandinavians and even the Finns were unable to grasp and to learn these songs of the Lapps.* [emphasis added] [...] The problem left me restless, and during one of the bright nights listening over and over again with a tape recorder lowered by an octave I managed to learn a section of a Lapp yoik from Martti Stoor, which sounded like the howling of a wolf and the lyrics of which was “*Wo*” [Szomjas-Schiffert 1996, 26].

It was not the lyrics of the yoiks (if they can be called lyrics at all) that provoked Szomjas-Schiffert’s reaction, rather it was the sound, the peculiar way of singing and the real or imagined context. Since the rituals of the *noaide* (Sami shaman) were also accompanied by yoiking, it seemed logical to associate the two. An uninitiated audience would have trouble comprehending these dissonant melodies performed with a distinct vocal technique and which seemed to be ‘unmelodious’ compared to the songs they would be familiar with. Visitors could not tell the difference between the ritual songs of the shamans and the common ‘folk songs’; moreover, both were referred to with the emic denomination: yoik. The stereotyping (external) label of ‘shamanism’ was easily applied to any yoik, regardless of it having anything to do with shamanism or not. Thereby one of the external categories, the stigmatising concept of “pagan” became firmly embedded in the notion of yoiking over the course of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

The negative stereotypes surrounding the Sami and their songs were not only fabricated in the everyday, informal discourse of the people living nearby or settling in on their territory. The official ecclesiastical and lay authorities, besides the stories enriched with various beliefs, deliberately transformed the image of the Sami, and thus, the Sami people themselves. Driving all of this were political and economic interests. Until the early eighteenth century, the Sami populated a large territory, which reached further to the south than their current territory; they never formed an independent state, however. [For more on the reasons behind it see: Tamás 2015, 415–445]. Over the course of their history, due to cyclical migration trends and border crossings due to their nomadic lifestyle they often had to pay taxes to more than one state; aside from this their way of life has remained comparatively undisturbed. From the seventeenth century, nevertheless, the Swedish state’s influence and interference in the Sami people’s way of life grew; as well as this settlers started to flow into the northernmost regions, usually appropriating lands cultivated by the Sami; there was no compensation. By the mid-nineteenth century the area over which the Sámi could roam freely had shrunk to a fraction of what it had been, this state of affairs extended to the farthest territories and had an even more drastic impact on the reindeer-herding Sami groups; they were unable to follow their former migration routes. The Sami recognised private property but when it came to land they always determined their borders in terms of natural phytogeographical and climatic factors. As the Swedish and Norwegian settlers pushed them further northward, the Sami had to confront new circumstances such as having to pay fines for reindeer wandering onto a settler’s land. The general attitude of the Sami towards these conflicts is reflected in the words of Johan Turi:



“The Sámi have much the same nature as the reindeer. Both want to be on the move east and west in the manner that they are accustomed to. And both are sensitive. And because of their sensitivity they have been scared away from everywhere. And because of this, the Sámi today have to live in places where no one else is living besides Sámi...” From the work of Johan Turi, a Sami reindeer-herder written at the beginning of the twentieth century *An Account of the Sámi*, [Turi 1960, 38. English translation by Thomas A. DuBois]\*.

The greatest changes in the life of the Sami came in the period between the mid-nineteenth and the mid-twentieth centuries. Although churches had begun to be built in the sixteenth century in Lapland, the most intense period of missionising occurred in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. During these times the practice of shamanism and yoiking, which was considered diabolical by outsiders, were prohibited and punished by both the religious and the lay authorities, in both an arbitrary manner and within a legal framework. The fact that the yoik, besides its other functions, was also part of the Sami shaman’s rituals was enough to see yoiking declared prosecutable under official ecclesiastical law.

The Sami did not even attempt to protest against the political and religious limitations, intimidation and economic paralysis; the only significant uprising (although, it involved only a small number of people) was suppressed and the participants either executed or imprisoned. This augmented fear and made the Sami even more reserved. The fact that the death penalty could be imposed on anyone singing a yoik the practice fell into decline and those brave enough to who continue did so ‘underground’. All of this meant that by the beginning of the twentieth century, when folk music researchers started to collect and study the vocal folklore of the Sami they realised that there were barely any regions where yoiking could still be found. Amras Launis, an ethnomusicologist who for years collected among the Sami at the turn of the century, was convinced that as a result of the decades of intimidation the current generation of elderly Sami and *sorcerers* [sic!] would take the yoik to the grave with them:

“Once you have heard this type of singing it rings in your ear as the swan-song of a prehistoric age. The melody, however, seems much too distant to have an effect on a contemporary Lapp child. The *nocturne* of past times is not consistent with the song of tomorrow. But if you listen to it intensely an irresistible desire awakens in you to go back to yesterday evening. You are captured by the magic of this ancient song. You want to listen to it over and over again, because you can feel its evanescence. You can suspect that once the sorcerers will no longer be around the door on this mysterious world will be closed for good. Because, even if we succeed in preserving these for posterity, we will not be able to reconstruct and reproduce their spirit, their internal intensity with the help of inanimate and expressionless notes. The singer will take the magic power of his melodies to the grave” [Cited by: Keresztes 1983, 512].

These negative undertones regarding the Sami were accentuated by a new (political and scientific) discourse unfolding at the beginning of the twentieth century (as an offshoot of evolutionism and racial theory) divorced from religious foundations, in which yoiking was described as an inferior, despicable and shameful custom along

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\* <http://www.tadubois.com/varying-course-materials/Muitalus-translation-without-articles.pdf> (downloaded 2016. 06.10).





with any other phenomena associated with the traditional lifestyle of the Sami. School served the purpose of raising awareness of this, becoming an institution to re-educate and ‘civilise’ the Sami; here, in order to achieve their aim the children were often physically abused in order to humiliate them for wearing or demonstrating any ethnic sign or symbol (such as owning traditional Sami clothing, Sami objects or speaking in their native language). This external, ethnocentric and ‘stigmatising’ discourse, which can also be considered an instrument of Scandinavian nationalism, went hand in hand with the above discourse, which had placed the yoik into the category of religious ‘evil’. The two discourses together embedded the yoik into an ideological and political context. This complex, stereotyping imagery charged with such negative connotations saw a shift in the Sami people, a desire to change their self-image and their relationship with their culture.

The above has primarily examined the outside factors that sought to suppress a once robust identity-shaping cultural practice: yoiking. However, what is also of key importance in terms of the demonisation of the yoik is the development of an internal movement that appeared among the Sami in the middle of the nineteenth century.

The Christian doctrines were initially received rather positively by the Sami; albeit, seventeenth- and eighteenth-century sources reveal that only the elements fitting into their worldview were retained and spread. A significant change was introduced thanks to the activities of a charismatic Lutheran pastor, Lars Levi Laestadius (1800–1861) who was of Sami origin on his mother’s side. The formal or pretended Christianity characteristic until the nineteenth century was gradually replaced by a Lutheran faith based on deep experience and conviction. The success of Laestadius’ puritan movement was partly down to his efforts to contain the increasingly destructive alcoholism prevalent at that time; and partly because he managed to successfully ‘resolve’ the alien nature of the Christian worldview by using elements and natural symbols of Sami mythology in his sermons. Because of his origins he was familiar with the ancient shrines of the Sami: the *seitas*, therefore he was able to draw parallels in order to illustrate that drunkenness is nothing but idolatry: “he who drinks, has taken his stomach as his god”, and he compared the person who persisted in his abuse of alcohol to a wild reindeer pursued by the wolf [Laestadius 1988, 28, 24]. Laestadius managed to convince the Church that a positive response by the Sami to the Christian message would require its modification, thereby intimating that he wished to create a Sami variant of Christianity.

This commitment was also manifested in the efforts by Laestadius to establish and to propagate Sami literacy, the earliest example of which is his work written in the north Sami language: *Tåluts Suptsasah, Jubmela pirra ja Almatji pirra* [Laestadius 1844, Ancient Tales of God and Men]. While the contemporary Lutheran view generally advocated eradicating Paganism and eliminating “the works of the Devil” [Hallencreutz 1987, 174–175], Laestadius had a more nuanced attitude towards the worldview of the Sami; moreover, he hoped to learn more about their worldview. “Laestadius’ working method was not only characterised by the study of Lappish mythology, but lived wholeheartedly in their ‘inner household’ – as he aptly called the mentality and the religion of the Lapps” [Pentikäinen 2001, 21]. In his monumental work on Sami mythology written in the 1840s, the *Fragmenter* [Laestadius 1997,



2002], he tried to describe the phenomena and investigate their origins all the while employing the rigorous academic standards of the age. (The manuscript was written between 1840 and 1845, yet, they had to wait more than a hundred and fifty years for its publication, in 1997 in Swedish and in 2000 in Finnish, and in 2002 the English critical edition was published.)

Alongside his proselytising, Laestadius criticised the Church and the foreign settlers, which engendered him to the Sami. He contrasted the puritan lifestyle of the Sami (who exploited the goods given by nature only to satisfy basic needs) to the uninhibited, profit-making endeavours of the settlers. His manuscripts reveal that he actually appreciated the Sami more than he did the Swedes and Norwegians living around them [Laestadius 1988, xii]. His sermons were mostly given in the Sami language; he also considered it important for the other ministers to adapt to the migrating lifestyle of the Sami. The popularity of Laestadius had also to do with how he highlighted the role of women. In Protestantism, the figure of the Virgin Mary is peripheral; Laestadius, however, included in his concept of Christianity the (mythological and real) Sami female figures who played a significant role in his life and who were generally important characters among the Sami. In Laestadius' theology, the mother or "heavenly parent", whom he also calls "the reflection of the Redeemer" is set in the centre. He had already discussed female deities in *Fragmenter*, divine figures who in Sami mythology fulfilled the functions of protectors, leaders and life-givers. He linked his own religious awakening to an encounter with a young woman named Milla or Maria Clemetsdatter. The strong faith of the pietistic girl, her deep repentance had such an impact on him that he later referred to her as the "Lappish Mary" who "sits at Jesus' feet" and who was the "spiritual mother" [Laestadius 2002, 29] of his creed.

In light of how strongly the Sami worldview influenced the movement of awakening it might seem inexplicable why Laestadius would forbid yoiking. The real reasons for this have not been discovered, neither in the works of Laestadius, nor in the literature about yoiking and the Lutheran theological texts. It is possible that Laestadius shared the official view on yoiking of the Church; and it could have been a compromise with the ecclesiastical leaders, since his 'infringements' were often frowned upon (although the effectiveness of his work meant they left him in peace). His writings only reveal that he did not think much of yoiking in a musical sense [Hirvonen 1999, 143–144]. Another possible explanation could be associated with the frequent ecstatic manifestations occurring in Laestadian groups. Considering that not that long before shamanistic techniques were actively practiced (and, in some cases, still were but in secret) among the Sami, the trance state and the manifestation of the supernatural were naturally (and customarily) associated, thus it was integrated as a familiar phenomenon into the new (Christian) religious practices. Moreover, for some of the Protestant Awakening movements forming in the nineteenth century the practice of inducing altered states of consciousness (ASC) or ecstasy were not unfamiliar. Within the Christian context (such as during the service) it was considered as the individual and collective manifestations of deep faith. In Scandinavia, the activities of peasant prophets (such as Paaavo Ruotsalainen, 1777–1852) also shaped the ideas of people about faith and made them susceptible to accepting certain phenomena that



were formerly alien to Protestantism. Laestadius himself had visions; he often entered an emotionally heightened state during his sermons. Emilie Demant-Hatt describes Laestadius' sermons like this:

“He introduced the public confession of sin into practice: the sinner had to repent his or her sin, the sin had to be confessed publicly, loudly and the sinner had to ask for absolution from the community. It was done in a trance-like state and the community, the believers of the parish entered an ecstatic state and mutually forgave the sins of their peers; as a sign of this atonement they embraced each other and rocked back and forth, as if they were dancing, for hours” [Demant-Hatt 1983, 280].

A possible reason for Laestadius being so reluctant to accept the yoik might also have been – and here it must be emphasised that this is but an assumption – to draw a clear line between ‘sacred’ and ‘diabolical’ ecstasy. While the yoik was ‘generally regarded’ as the shaman’s means of attaining ecstasy; in the Christian interpretation the state of ecstasy should be a manifestation of repentance and of experiencing faith. Although the fear of punishment was very successful in repressing the practice of the yoik, the sermons of the much-respected and popular Laestadius, and the Christian Awakening movement that he had launched resulted in an even stronger repression of this vocal tradition. After that it was not out of fear that many Sami did not yoik, but because they were convinced that it was a sin and an instrument for ‘conjuring the Devil’.

In a sense the strength of the Laestadian movement has provided a sense of security for the Sami within the borders of the congregation. In the public sphere, however, from the end of the nineteenth century those who insisted on keeping their Sami identity had to fear loss of prestige and discrimination. They were not allowed to use their native tongue in public, and everything associated with the Sami existence, such as the yoik, became stigmatized [Eidheim 1971]. All this was underpinned with concrete measures, such as sterilisation. In the territories inhabited by a mixed population, especially where the Sami were in the minority, the native language, yoiking, and Sami traditional clothing became things that had to remain exclusively within the walls of their private homes, carefully hidden from view.

A significant change came in the last third of the twentieth century when a few Sami intellectuals began to revive the yoik tradition, and more and more people joined them in their endeavour of ethnic and cultural revitalisation. In order to establish effective and meaningful communication they had to locate central symbols that could be used to assist in the process of Sami nation-building. Since the Sami lived on the territories of four countries and their linguistic and cultural divisions were significant, the establishment of these symbols involved highlighting linguistic and cultural features of certain regions. This is how an almost forgotten genre, the yoik, could come to occupy a central position in attempts to raise cultural and ethnic consciousness among the Sami. Since in the southern regions the assimilation was stronger, and the rights of the Sami in Sweden, Finland and the Kola Peninsula were very limited (the institution of minority rights had not yet become part of a significant international discourse), the instigators of this push for a ‘Sami society’ were the northern Sami of Norway who were the best informed about political advocacy and whose economic situation was the most advantageous (the largest Sami population lived on the territories of Finnmark Vidda County forming a majority in the region). Thus, the revival





and the symbols attached to nation-building first emerged from this central region, and the most important symbol of it all proved to be the yoik, but initially there were issues. Giving the yoik so fundamental a role in bringing the Sami together faced numerous obstacles, primarily within the Sami communities themselves. However, by the early seventies a change in the legal environment in Scandinavia was a serious opportunity for progress: democratisation, secularisation and the recognition of minorities had become such widespread ideas that one could no longer take legal action against the Sami. The revival of a vocal tradition that some condemned and that others considered an abomination, is linked with the name of Nils-Aslak Valkeapää (1943–2001). He gathered around him youth who could yoik, recorded them and put yoiking onto the stage. In the beginning even his Sami environment was also shocked. In the film ('Váimmustan lea bieggá') about Valkeapää, the yoik singers said that when *Áilohaš* (the Sami name of Valkeapää) had asked them to help organise a yoik concert and to take part in recordings they all fell into despair. They thought it would not be appropriate, nobody sang yoik in public, they were afraid the people would despise them. After overcoming the initial hostility, the initiative proved to be very successful and in a surprisingly short time (for instance, in the 1982 Eurovision Song Contest the Norwegian Sverre Kjelsberg and Mattis Hætta entered the competition with a song about the abusive acts carried out against the Sami, which included a yoik). The scheme's success, however, was not only due to political changes, but also to indigenous movements simultaneously developing at the international level. In these new, anti-colonialist discourses old, almost forgotten and disparaged cultural traits and phenomena were restored to their former positions as cultural and identity markers.

It was in the 1970s that the yoik was reintroduced into the public consciousness and, over time, it became once again part of everyday Sami life and celebrations. Moreover, the style of singing once disparaged and considered irritating in a religious or aesthetic sense gradually became a phenomenon worthy of admiration and respect in non-Sami circles as well. This is well illustrated by the 2014 *Talang Sverige* competition (Swedish musical talent show); in the preliminary auditions a Sami boy wearing traditional clothes was among the contestants. Jon Henrik Fjällgren was of Indigenous Latin American origin and he had been adopted as a baby by a Swedish Sami family. From the introduction before his performance, we learned that as a child he had been scorned and mocked for the colour of his skin and for being a member of a traditional, reindeer-herding Sami family. Despite all this he was proud to present the values of the Sami culture to the Swedish public, and performed a yoik. During the rendition it was as if the studio had been filled with magic and everyone was paralysed; both the audience and the jury was overwhelmed with emotion. After the song the audience and the jury gave a standing ovation with tears in their eyes and were rendered speechless. A few weeks and episodes later Jon Henrik left the show as the winner of the national competition. In 2015 he yoiked in front of the royal family under the Swedish flag, accompanied by the Swedish military orchestra on the festival day of *Nationaldagen* [the day of the nation] (In recent years the event had several Sami guests of honour: Sophia Jannok in 2013, Ingá Máret Gaup and Juuso Loreen in 2014). It has become a tradition to have a Sami performer at the Swedish national day celebration, and after Jon Henrik's success several other Sami singers have become



famous at the international level. These events have contributed to the revival of this threatened minority's position in Scandinavian states.

The uncertainty and differences of opinion surrounding the yoik, however, have not passed from view. The reason for this is not straightforward: on the one hand, the yoik itself has gone through considerable changes over the course of the past few decades; on the other, although the genre was relieved of the stigma of poor and low-level epithets, the association of the yoik with shamanism remained; moreover, despite some transformations it even became stronger. (I have to note that according to the unanimous views of the scientific literature shamanism had disappeared from the Sami culture by the mid- to late nineteenth century, thus the various ecclesiastical and social discourses only used the memory, or more specifically the image constructed of it.)

The attitude towards the yoik divides people to this day: the Sami and the Finns, the Norwegians and the Swedes. Although the yoik was once a practice that had significance and meaning for many cultural activities, today it is largely known through its close association with shamanism (as it is in the historical sources, or in the time of missionaries and early Laestadianism). The designation of the practice as 'pagan' which had previously provoked contempt, perhaps because of the social memory of stigmatisation, took on a new meaning and became the new symbol for national identity construction, paradoxically reinforcing the former stereotype itself. This interpretation of yoik is manifested in the performances of 'celebrity' yoik singers, in movies and in literary works. All this is linked to the expanding discourse that connects those already possessing indigenous status with those trying to obtain that status; a discourse that was in direct opposition to the mentality of the 'conqueror majority society'. The concept of 'indigenous people' was still strongly associated with the image of the pre-modern, 'pagan' man living in harmony with nature. From this perspective Christianity often appears as an imperialist, vanquishing power. The 'natural worldview', which was almost a compulsory connotation of the indigenous status, not only drew upon historical discourses, but is also validated in the contemporary global discourse that condemns the achievements of modernisation and the pollution of the natural environment, as well as in the neo-pagan knowledge register [Hilder 2015, 109–148]. This provoked adverse feelings from the majority of the Laestadian Sami who did not agree with the dominant symbolic language (that is, focussing on 'shamanistic' symbols incompatible with Christianity) and had doubts concerning its long-term success. This is well-illustrated in an interview published in the Sami journal, *Sáogat*, with the provocative title: "*The Sami Flag is Ugly and Full of Occult Symbols*". The interviewee, a Sami pastor, condemned the imagery on the flag: a circle representing the Sun, the Moon and a shaman drum; he stated that it would be preferable to see the crucifix on it as the Sami have not been pagans for long; and that he thinks that people should be made aware that not everyone sympathises with shamanistic symbols and mythical/esoteric interpretations of the Sami. There are some who think Christian symbols are missing from the process of Sami identity construction. This opinion, however, based on the author's experience in the field, does not reflect the views of the majority due to the very controversial role Christianity has played in Sami history\*.

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\* Original source of the article: <http://www.sogat.no/hovednyheter/2013/02/16/29982/> (downloaded: 2016.01.15.). The interview was published in several Norwegian newspa-

It seems that the increasing popularity of the yoik was able to change the rigid religious frame of resistance. Many among the Christian Sami youth desire to reconnect with their culture's music, while rejecting the pagan interpretation of yoik. Some of them not only try to relieve the yoik of its pagan connotations, but they specifically invest it with new, Christian meanings. The positive reception and the feasibility of this initiative have been thus far demonstrated by certain settlements or dioceses (mostly in Sweden). In some places the yoik has already become part of the liturgy in spite of the reluctance of conservative Christians. Johan Mårek, a priest from Jokkmokk employs a liturgy which includes the yoik, while the leader of the Sami Church Council in Sweden, Tore Johnsen has called for the rehabilitation and reintroduction of yoiking in Norwegian Sami churches [Hilder 2015, 117]. Official approval of this initiative is still pending, but if we look at the program of the annual Norwegian "Church Days" (yoik concert, sports events, museum exhibitions, drum performances, etc.) it is evident that attitudes are softening.

Other central pagan symbols which occur in the yoik discourse, such as the Sun, and ancient (mostly female) deities, are placed in new contexts by the Christianised Sami. In the etiological myths of creation there is a recurring topic according to which the Sami are the sons of the Sun, and they live their lives following a cyclical migration pattern corresponding to the Sun's path [Gaski 2003]. The lyrics of the *Sámi soga lávlla*, or 'Sami national song (anthem)' draw partly upon this tradition when the Sami are described as "the Sun's sons".

We have numerous other examples illustrating how pre-Christian cultural elements were Christianised and rehabilitated. There are Lutheran churches in which motifs typically found on shaman drums (most frequently the sun and the *áhkkás*)



Fig. 2. The organ of the Sami church in Jukkasjärvi, decorated with the symbol of the Sun set within a circle recalling the shaman drum. Made by Lars Levi Sunna\*\*

are displayed on the building's images and sculptures: from the church gates, to the organ and the entire altar. Often the building of the church also evokes pre-Christian times, or at least traditional Sami culture; such as the *goahte* (earth hut) church built on a cultic site in the Swedish Padjelanta National Park related to *Stállu*, a figure of ancient belief; or the giant tent church in Mo i Rana, Norway, with a capacity of 800. (*Stállu* is a figure of the pre-Christian Sami belief system. He was a hideous, anthropomorphic creature of great strength who was both evil and stupid. He often appears in folklore texts, attempting to kidnap a girl

pers, e.g.: <http://www.vl.no/troogkirke/pastor-h%C3%B8ster-storm-etter-kritikk-av-same-flagget-1.59464> (downloaded: 2015.11.25.) and <http://thornews.com/2013/02/16/pastor-the-sami-flag-is-ugly-and-full-of-occult-symbols/> (downloaded: 2015.10.26).

\*\* <http://ojs.tsv.fi/index.php/temenos/article/viewFile/7508/6496> (downloaded: 2018.01.20).



for himself, but the Sami typically outwit him. Johan Turi commented on the popular *Stállu*-stories published in his book: “*The stállut are now almost all gone, but some Sámi are still related to them.*”) [Turi 1960, 108].

Among the most renowned and popular yoik singers there are many who have grown up in Laestadian families (for instance Marie Boine Persen and Wimme Saari). Since yoiking and secular music were forbidden at home and in the religious community they were mostly exposed to ‘non-ecclesiastical’ music as teenagers and/or adults [Lehtola 2010, 160–110]. Although their choice of career led to their being condemned by their religious community, these singers still maintain ties with their families and religious traditions. On their albums they usually have both yoiks and psalms, which aims to represent their concerted efforts to resolve the conflicts. Perhaps surprisingly, even they situate yoiking in shamanistic context, as is reflected in the visual world of their concerts and videos. This recalls the times when Christian symbols were included among the drawings on shaman drums: in the upper segment of the drum representing the ‘world above’ the deities worshipped by the Sami were juxtaposed with crucifixes; this, obviously, was not sufficient for the Church to accept shamanism.

The integration of this ancient-modern tradition of yoik into the Christian worldview will most likely have to face further obstacles. Minority existence, the fear of assimilation, the threat of a globalised culture provokes the same counter reactions over and over again: the discourse of ‘primordality’ that was inevitably merged with the definition of an authentic Sami lifestyle. The elements evoking the imagined times before ‘colonisation’ are enhanced and become part of an invented tradition [Kristóf 2007, 153–172]. In this postcolonial discourse everything that arrived with the conquerors, including Christianity, is necessarily bad, and everything that is ethnic and ancient is good. This homogenising approach, however, creates tension among the Sami.

It seems as if today the most important goal of Sami society is to maintain cultural (and thereby ethnic) singularity. The framework for this is provided, on the one hand, by Christianity and, on the other, by the shamanistic worldview; attempts to forge these two into one (or at least, to reconcile them) are more and more part of contemporary discourse. Outside observers (Norwegians, Swedes, Finns) see the advocacy efforts of the Sami in all this; as well as a world very different from theirs that they treat with a curiosity hungry for the exotic and fanaticism, with sympathy, or with disapproval.

Laestadianism, just as in the tradition of yoiking and the pre-Christian worldview, kept the specificities of Sami culture in the public eye. Perhaps this is the reason why the consistent separation



Fig. 3. Áhkkás (Sami female deities) next to the communion table. In the scene in the tent the Christian symbols are in the sacred place across the entrance. Work of Lars Levi Sunna\*

\* <http://www.terre-des-sames.com/les-cent-ans-de-leglise-de-kiruna-2/> (downloaded: 2018.01.20).



of ideologies is so hard to achieve (despite the efforts to this end), as the examples here have illustrated. The fear of assimilation is still present in the Sami mind set, and the need to preserve their cultural and ethnic singularity and independence will perhaps tie the seemingly separate links.

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## **И. Тамаш**

### **Возрождение стигматизированных корней: саамские йойки и шаманские символы в христианских дискурсах с раннего нового времени**

*Йойк* – это вокальное пение в традиции саамов, включающее в себя множество священных и обыденных символов. Сфера его применения выходит далеко за рамки обычных коннотаций народных песен или обрядовых песен. *Йойк* имеет множество функций: он является средством общения, выражения индивидуальности; выступает как инструмент развлечения; служит для классификации и идентификации общества и окружающей среды народа саами; это своего рода краткое изложение опыта и знаний, накопленных в мире, что отражает и выражает их мировоззрение. *Йойк* был также основным средством Священного общения. Эта практика чаще всего упоминается наблюдателями. Средневековые и ранние современные источники (обычно созданные путешественниками и миссионерами) все без исключения упоминают *йойк* как символ язычества, как волшебную, ритуальную песню, составляющую часть ритуала шамана. Посетители не могли отличить ритуальные песни шаманов от обычных «народных песен». Стереотипный (внешний) ярлык «шаманизм» легко применялся к любому *йойку*, независимо от того, имеет ли он какое-либо отношение к шаманизму или нет. Таким образом, стигматизирующее понятие “язычник” стало прочно входит в понятие «исполнение йойк песнопений» в течение XVII– XVIII веков. Эти негативные оттенки в отношении саамов были подкреплены новым (политическим и научным) дискурсом, развернувшимся в начале XX в. (как ответвление эволюционизма и расовой теории), в рамках которого исполнение йойков было описано как отсталый постыдный обычай, наряду с любыми другими явлениями, связанными с традиционным образом жизни саамов. Хотя страх наказания за исполнение йойк песнопений был велик, проповеди уважаемого и популярного Лестадия, а также инициированное им христианское движение Пробуждения привели к еще более сильному подавлению этой вокальной традиции. После этого многие саамы отказались от традиции исполнения *йойк* песнопений не столько из страха преследования и наказания, а в силу того, что они были убеждены, что эти песни – грех и инструмент для колдовства. Большинство последователей Лестадия отвергают традицию *йойк* песнопений и в наши дни, но многие из представителей христианской саамской молодежи желают воссоединиться с музыкой своей культуры, отвергая языческую интерпретацию этого жанра. Некоторые из них



не только пытаются избавиться *йойки* от языческих коннотаций, но и специально вкладывают в него новые христианские смыслы. Положительный прием и осуществимость этой инициативы были показаны некоторыми поселениями или епархиями (в основном в Швеции). В некоторых местах *йойк* уже стал частью литургии, несмотря на нежелание консервативных христиан.

*Ключевые слова:* саами (саамы), йойки, христианство, лестадианство, язычество, идентичность.

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