

Field, Data, Access. Fieldwork among the Sámi from the Perspective of Assimilation and Ethnic Revitalization Processes

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“I am a Sámi who has done all sorts of Sámi work and I know all about Sámi conditions. I have come to understand that the Swedish government wants to help us as much as it can, but they don’t get things right regarding our lives and conditions, because no Sámi can explain to them exactly how things are. (...) I have been thinking that it would be best if there were a book in which everything was written about Sámi life and conditions, so that people wouldn’t have to ask how Sámi conditions are, and so that people wouldn’t misconstrue things, particularly those who want to lie about the Sámi and claim that only the Sámi are at fault when disputes arise between settlers and Sámi in Norway and Sweden. And there one ought to write about all the events and furnish explanations so clearly that anyone could understand. And it would be nice also for other Sámi to hear about Sámi conditions as well.”¹

Abstract: As a result of the Sámi ethnic revitalization process, not only is the right to practicing indigenous culture controlled by local communities today, but it is also heavily disputed who can access, use, perform, interpret, and shape their culture. Recently this debate has increasingly influenced academic discourse as well. By the last decades of the 20th century, the Sámi people, similarly to other indigenous peoples, contributed to ongoing scholarly activity with their own researchers. As a consequence of this, reservations as to external (foreign) researchers are more and more emphatically worded. Besides differences of the motivations and opportunities of “western” vs. “indigenous” science, epistemological problems also occur, due to varying world views and categories derived from differing practices of experiences, as well as to a scepticism as to the existence of authentic translation. In this way the relation of researcher and field site cannot be merely restricted to data collection and interpretation. Data processing, publication of findings and presentation of achievements for the scholarly elite of informants and the studied community are also of importance.

Keywords: Sámi, ethnicity, identity, national symbols, copyright, fieldwork

¹ TURI 2011:9

I chose the first few sentences of Johan Turi's 1910 work, *Mui'talus sámiid birra* / *An Account of the Sámi* (from the English version published in 2011) as the "motto" of my article. Interestingly, it is considered one of the fundamental works of Sámi literature, even though the author himself did not intend to write a literary work, but rather an "ethnographic" description. When Turi wrote his book, Scandinavian ethnographers were already carrying out intensive field research among the Sámi. Concurrently with the publication of Turi's writing, a number of monographs had been published by ethnographers.² Comparing these scholarly works with the writing of Johan Turi, a Sámi reindeer farmer, might provide many lessons – but such a comparison is not my objective. Up until the middle of the 20th century, these works were born primarily in the spirit of "let us save what can be saved", i.e., collection and documentation, regrettably hindered by political ideologies enshrining "colonialization". In the beginning (around the middle of the 19th century), Sámi research was made more difficult by the instinctive introversion of the Sámi people stemming from powerful – often justifiable – fears. Sámi introversion gradually became a conscious strategy in the second half of the 20th century. Among the motivations of this introverted behavior, the rejection of the "outsider" researcher was clearly articulated. Johan Turi's writing is a significant and unique example in this context. His description became a fundamental work for ethnographic-anthropological research. As an "informant", Turi provides a great deal of information that was difficult or impossible to access by contemporary researchers for at least two reasons: 1.) they concealed the information sought by the researchers; 2.) due to successful assimilation, they no longer possessed the necessary knowledge. However, Johan Turi is much more than an "informant"; his work very early on, as early as the beginning of the 20th century, foreshadows the ideal of the *native ethnographer* describing his own culture. The author speaks to both Sámis and non-Sámis, which is an important initiative for resolving conflicts arising from different worldviews. Particularly remarkable is the fact that his description contains a number of opinions that have only been articulated in cultural anthropology and ethnology after the emergence of postmodern criticism (e.g., the recognition of the power aspect associated with modern society's interpretative categories, as well as the scientific discourse, or the relativization of the validity of the researcher's interpretation as only one possible "reading" among many others). The work also reflects the primary motivations that have influenced and still influence the Sámi's beliefs about their own culture and way of life, and which partly explain the sometimes forced, sometimes very much desired perpetuation of the powerful us–them opposition. Fear of the effects of acculturation³ could have created favorable conditions for documenting Sámi society and culture as fully as possible, where the goals and interests of indigenous peoples and their researchers could have met. However, in terms of scientific research, credibility and/or impartiality has been called into question very early on. For Turi, the deliberate merging of his roles as informant and researcher has a dual purpose: documentation and interpretation is primarily intended to serve the interests of the Sámi (as a means

² Some of the most important of them are DONNER 1876; FELLMAN 1980 (1907); LAUNIS 1907a, b, c, 1908, 1910; LUNDIUS 1905; QUIGSTAD 1903.

³ Interestingly, Turi uses primarily the past tense instead of the long-prevailing "ethnographic present", as if sensing the evanescence of his culture, even though in the heat of the memories he sometimes switches to the present tense.

of defense against assimilation), and it is a way for outsiders to understand the Sámi point of view more deeply, instead of letting stereotypes assigned to them by outsiders dominate the frame of interpretation. In this, in fact, the role of inverse anthropologist is also articulated: “how do we articulate the meaning of experiences, rituals, and life processes to another person, which we have not only not experienced, but there is not even a suitable term for it in our own culture?” (KLANICZAY 1984:32–33).

Thus, in the introduction to my study, I referred to the writing of Johan Turi because it provides a relevant framework for giving insight to the conditions of conducting fieldwork among the Sámi covering a good century and a half: it vividly describes what the presence of an eagerly investigating outsider scholar might have meant to the Sámi in the 19th and early 20th centuries, and it is a good hallmark of their desire to retain agency in research that concerns them – which was articulated more than half a century later in the discourse of scientific policy. I first read the lines in the introduction in 1995 as a student of Finno-Ugric studies, but I only truly understood them when I got to the birthplace of the writing, Lapland, and I myself got to experience the interethnic problems, the complexes born of a minority existence, the controversial effects of globalization, the particular dichotomy of acceptance and exclusion. For a deeper understanding, I studied a lot of historical and literary resources and browsed relevant journal articles as well related to the Sámi. I tried to survey the latter as broadly as possible, that is, I was looking for Sámi in the news of the European and American press and in literary works. I also collected data published on online social networks and generally on the World Wide Web, placing more and more emphasis on visual appearances and available audio content in addition to textual information.⁴ Stereotypical instances, personal opinions expressed in private conversations and correspondence, spoken/written words, and verbally unspoken or non-communicable content (body language, silence, presence and placement of typical objects, etc.) were equally included in the “database” of my fieldwork. For me, the site and the method are thus articulated in a fairly broad spectrum. Of course, in all cultures, there are registers, public and secret data, superficial and hidden meanings that are more or less accessible, the research of which requires different approaches. Research opportunities of yoik traditions have always been greatly influenced by the interpretations of different periods, which in itself justifies the involvement of a variety of fields and research methods.

THE RESEARCH SITE IN HISTORY

The historical-political context is of great importance in understanding Sámi communities and the context of field research among the Sámi. For the Sámi, encounters with strangers and with other peoples has for the most part of their known history eventually resulted

⁴ The blog of the former President of the Sámi Parliament in Finland, which unfortunately has now been discontinued was particularly important among these sources (terrains). His writings often reflected on Sámi-related research, including a meeting with me (anonymously). Another important source group includes the official video clips and personal recordings available on YouTube, which sometimes appear in a folklore-like manner, in the form of memes, in a number of versions (with different visual accompaniments, captioned).

in exploitation, the loss of their lands, and changes to their way of life – directly or indirectly. The encounters began with the arrival of missionaries, travelers, and explorers. These encounters were initially infrequent and superficial, affecting the lives of the Sámi to a smaller extent. Later, however, with the permanent consolidation of the official state borders, the acquisition of control over the northern areas, the increasingly stringent conditions of taxation, and the permanent presence of Finnish, Swedish, and Norwegian settlers, everything changed. From the 17th century, Swedish rule encroached on the lives of the Sámi more and more drastically, often seizing their lands without compensation. Though churches were built in Lapland in the 16th century, the most successful period of proselytizing was the second half of the 19th century. According to Ole Henrik Magga, the former president of the Sámi Parliament in Norway, the most difficult period in Sámi history was from the mid-nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century. This period saw the birth of the Puritan Lutheran movement of Lars Levi Laestadius (1800–1861), which achieved considerable successes in Christianizing the Sámi. This period is of great importance for the development and research of yoik traditions, because this is when religious and secular leaders were most cruelly meting out punishment for shamanic practices. Yoiking has been blacklisted as part of a sacred pagan practice. The general idea – articulated in early sources – that the Sámi are all wizards, witches, and devils contributed to the image of the yoik. If anyone was open and interested in learning about the yoik tradition, s/he faced serious obstacles.

Jacob Fellman, who served as Pastor in Utsjoki between 1820 and 1832, provides the following picture (MEURMAN 1961:1–7):

“I’ve been living among the Lapps for six years when I learned that several folk songs were still alive in people’s memory. When I inquired whether they knew these (...), I always got the response, *what macabre joke is this, after all, it was the government itself and the strict clergy that made (the yoiks) disappear for the glory of God*. Later on, I got a chance to hear a Lapp singing a yoik, because he did not know I was nearby. (...) *Having repeatedly assured him that he had nothing to fear, he finally sang some melodies for me, these were the first ones I recorded in the Sámi language.*” (Translation from Finnish and emphases: I. T.)

Though the fear of punishment brought a diminished use of yoiks, the sermons of Laestadius, widely respected and popular among the Sámi, and the Christian revival movement he had been calling for were much more influential in the decline of the vocal tradition. Some of the Sámi stopped singing yoiks not out of fear but out of a firm belief that it truly was a sin, an instrument of “conjuring the devil”. Laestadian Sámi communities are still characterized by this belief today, as illustrated by the 2011 field experience of a Norwegian researcher, Ingrid Hanssen. The following passage presents an event that took place in a nursing home in Northern Norway:

“And she started to yoik. (...) [I]t was my father’s yoik. And one of the mentally clear patients says: ‘No, you must not sin!’ ‘Sin’, my mother says, ‘I am yoiking my husband!’ ‘Yes, yes, but you must pray for forgiveness because you yoiked.’ This did not deter my mother, however, so she finished her yoiking. And then, after a little while, she says that perhaps she has sinned. It was as if she woke up. ‘No’, I said, ‘you haven’t. You have yoiked your husband out of love, so don’t think about what the others are saying’. (...) I have still not been able to understand why

yoik is the work of the Devil. I don't get it. (...) Because when I yoik, I yoik a specific person because I am thinking of that person. When I know that they have a yoik, when I know their yoik, I yoik them. (...) To us, yoik is something happy; it reminds us of people. But here (in this town) it is very often seen as the work of the Devil." (HANSSEN 2011)

The negative ideas regarding the Sámi were reinforced by a new (political and scientific) discourse – an offshoot of evolutionism and later of racial theory – emerging in the early 20th century, distinct from the religious fundamentals, in which yoiking was defined as an inferior, contemptible, and shameful tradition, along with all the phenomena associated with traditional Sámi lifestyle (EIDHEIM 1969, 1971; JONES-BAMANN 2001; LEHTOLA 2010). The school, fulfilling the role of a “civilizing” institution re-educating the Sámi, was tasked with instilling this awareness, where, for the sake of success, the humiliation and physical abuse of the children because of symbols representing their Sámi identity (such as clothing, objects, mother tongue) were considered a well-established method. This external, ethnocentric, “stigmatizing” discourse of Scandinavian nationalism is intertwined with the above-mentioned discourse that categorized the yoik as a religious “wrong”. The two together managed to embed yoiking in a hardly disputed power-worldview concept. This complex, stereotyping image saturated with negative attitudes has also transformed the thinking of the Sámi, changing their self-image and their relationship to their culture.

The situation of researchers undertaking the description of Sámi culture was particularly difficult in the second half of the 19th century and first half of the 20th century,

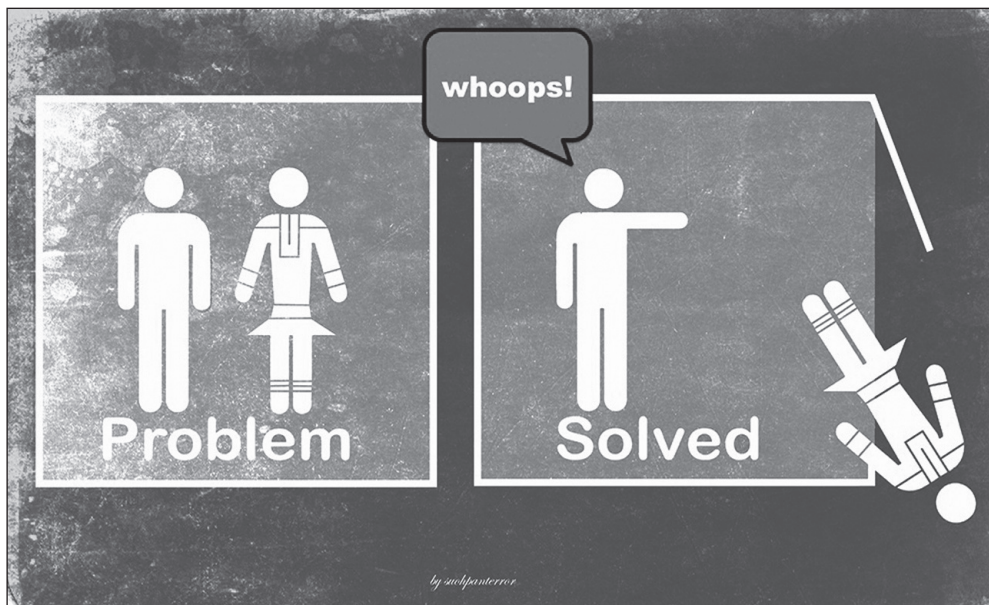


Figure 1. A poster by Suohpanterror (‘lasso + terror’), a collective of fine artists, commemorating policy measures targeting the Sámi. In their own words, using the medium of art, they object to the political and economic decisions that violate the rights and interests of the Sámi. (<https://www.facebook.com/suohpanterror/>) (accessed October 10, 2018)

as their questions were aimed at subjects the Sámi were not allowed or embarrassed to talk about. Moreover, to them, scientific research has always been closely linked with attempts to justify their inferiority. The arrival of a researcher has often summoned the horrors of medical and physical anthropological trials serving racist ideologies.

RESEARCH OPPORTUNITIES AFFORDED BY THE REVIVAL OF TRADITION

In the second half of the 20th century, democratization and the recognition of minorities had reached a stage where legal means could no longer be used to openly take action against the Sámi (BJØRKLUND 2000; MINDE 2005; GRUNDSTEN 2010). The conscious revival of the disappearing vocal tradition that some regarded with contempt while others found frightening is associated with Nils-Aslak Valkeapää (1943–2001).⁵ In the 1960s, he gathered young people from Finnmark (actually one of the areas with a continuity of the tradition) that knew how to yoik, made recordings, and presented the yoik on stage. At first, even his immediate surroundings were astonished by this. In the movie about Valkeapää,⁶ yoik singer contemporaries that have since become well-known stated that when *Ailohaš*⁷ contacted them about organizing yoik concerts and making recordings, they were all astonished and despaired. All this illustrates well that stereotypes about yoiks were still substantial in the 60s and 70s of the 20th century. They thought no one could sing a yoik in public as it would be inappropriate, or that they would be disdained by people for it. After the initial shock wore off, however, the initiative proved to be overwhelmingly successful, and in a surprisingly short time (for example, at the 1982 Eurovision Song Contest, Sverre Kjelsberg and Mattis Hætta, representing Norway, performed a song that included a yoik about the injustices committed against the Sámi).⁸ However, success is due not only to local political changes but also to the indigenous movements that unfolded at the international level. In these new, anti-colonial discourses, the old, disdained and almost forgotten cultural symbols and phenomena assumed a newly appreciated and emblematic expression (NÄKKÄLÄJÄRVI 2014). At the same time, a new situation emerged, in which the issue of copyright and ownership of cultural phenomena came more and more into the spotlight, since the revitalization endeavors raised a number of problems that to this day have no ready solutions (BROWN 2003; COLLINS 1993).

⁵ Nils-Aslak Valkeapää was one of the most versatile representatives of Sámi intelligentsia: singer and composer, poet, writer, politician, artist and actor in one person. Given the population size, his is a good example of the necessity of assuming “multiple social roles”, which is most evident in the robust engagement of representatives of the art world and the sciences in political and – in a wider context – human rights struggles.

⁶ The title of the portrait: *Váimmustan lea bieggá* [The wind is blowing through my heart]. Available on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ax8eWwrneVE> (accessed October 4, 2016).

⁷ The Sámi name of Valkeapää.

⁸ I first heard the yoik in a concert in Helsinki in the spring of 1995, in the interpretation of internationally known Sámi performers.

The main concern is the international regulation affecting rights to works of folk art.⁹ In the Sámi community, every yoik has an *owner*; and this owner can determine the criteria for using their yoik. *Although members of the community have access to it*, even performing each other's yoiks sometimes in a controlled way (e.g., upon meeting, as a form of greeting), *the primary control is not with the creator, not even the performer, but with the one it evokes* (GASKI 2003:193; HIRVONEN 2008; SOLBAKK 2007; TAMÁS 2007). The perspective that there is a very close, essential relationship between a yoik and its subject must have developed and survived in the practice of small communities. Yoiking as a cultural code representing and maintaining a social network and its controls had naturally faltered with the weakening of the tradition, and then again as a result of the new situation which was part of the revitalization process that created new forms of use by making the yoik a stage genre, by making it publicly accessible for a much wider audience through television and various media. This already complicated situation is further complicated by the existence of archives.

Nils-Aslak Valkeapää's initiative involved the repatriation of yoiks by learning and performing the materials in the archives. What started to ostensibly unfold was what scholarship commonly refers to as folklorism, but such categories are irrelevant to the revitalization of Sámi yoiks. However, in 2008, Biret Risten Sára, who had been digitizing and selecting yoiks for performance, said that certain yoiks should simply not be made public as they store a lot of personal information, the disclosure of which would give unauthorized access to content that only belongs to the most immediate environment of the yoik's owner.¹⁰ There is no better illustration of the steady survival of the traditional approach to the yoik than Biret Risten Sára's comment. Since the content of yoiks is coded in melodies and gibberish that is only interpretable by a small community of insiders, access by unauthorized persons can be inherently ruled out. The fact that the meaning of a yoik is not primarily in the lyrics but in melodic formulas and in certain syllables, and that this code changes from community to community, makes it impossible for a wider audience to perceive such "intimate" content. Still, the concept of yoik as personal property has remained strong among the Sámi, accompanied by a kind of protectiveness due to the theoretical possibility of unauthorized access to hidden content. Numerous professional performers adhere to these criteria when selecting yoiks for their stage repertoire. They ask

⁹ Even Directives 2006/115/EC and 2006/116/EC and the harmonized legal provisions of EU and associated member states do not guarantee works of folk art protection of copyright. In GILLIAN D.'s view, if anyone were to have the right to legal protection with regard to works of folk art, it would create the potential for monopoly and abuse, thereby taking away the essence of folklore: the free flow and movement, the possibility of adapting and shaping – and therefore no change can be expected in this regard (for more on this, see GILLIAN 2014:1091). One of the representatives of the Sámi Parliament in Norway, Jon Petter Gintal, holds a very different opinion and sees a possibility of cultural exploitation in the free use of works of folk art; for more on this: http://www.wipo.int/edocs/mdocs/tk/en/wipo_grtkf_ic_25/wipo_grtkf_ic_25_ref_indigenous_panel_jon_gintal.pdf

¹⁰ At the international level, the WIPO (World Intellectual Property Organization) formulates recommendations, questions, and criticisms regarding copyright. It has established an IGC (Intergovernmental Committee) where the governments of individual peoples and countries are represented in the fields of Intellectual Property and Genetic Resources; Traditional Knowledge and Folklore (for more information, see GILLIAN 2014:1092).

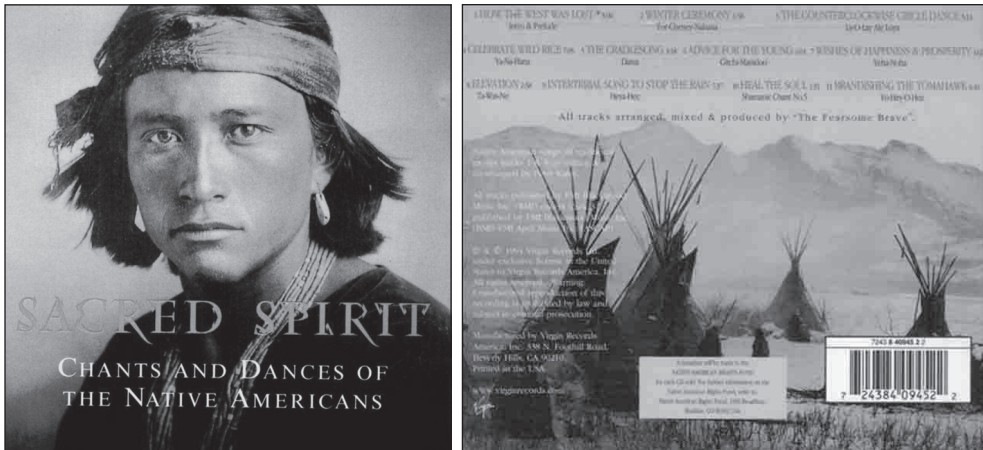


Figure 2. Cover of the Virgin Records CD. (Source: <https://www.discogs.com/Sacred-Spirit-Chants-And-Dances-Of-The-Native-Americans/master/78679>) (accessed October 10, 2018)

for permission from the owners of yoiks to be performed and do not sing certain parts on stage. In the case of archival materials, the owners are mostly unavailable, but the problems discussed above also apply to these yoiks, and they also encompass issues of tribute and heredity. Therefore, in order to keep control over the archives' yoik collections, a strict legal provision regarding access was made in 2008 (ÅHRÉN 2008).

However, the limitation of access to data is based not only on theoretical considerations; the concrete precedent is an internationally debated case of “yoik theft”, which eventually became a symbol of cultural exploitation among the Sámi. In 1994, Virgin Records released a CD called *Sacred Spirit—Chants and Dances of the Native Americans*. Among the American Indian songs on the album, there were also two yoiks, but without the specific source or the Sámi origins of the music disclosed.

The soundtrack was also uploaded to the Internet in 2007, allowing more and more Sámi to discover the yoiks on the album. One of them is a melody known as the Normo Joavna yoik, which was performed at an event of the Norwegian Parliament in the early 1990s. The event was recorded by one of the Norwegian TV companies, so the source can be easily identified. The rights to the recording were later bought by Virgin Records, that is how the yoik must have made it onto the album they released. The other yoik came into the possession of the record company in a much less transparent way. A Sámi singer from Northern Finland, Ulla Pirttijärvi, has identified it as her composition, which she performed at a Canadian seminar. She did not record the event in any way, so she could not even prove that it was hers. It has probably come to Virgin Records as a private recording from one of the participants. The case caused tremendous outrage among the Sámi, who tried to legally recover from the American record company what was theirs, that is, the corresponding percentage of the revenue for the recordings, which was 20 million USD. The lawyers of Virgin Records used the defense that works of folk art are not protected by copyright, thus they can be used freely. Since their justified claims could not be enforced, the Sámi had to face the fact that their concept of musical ownership was very different from the international legal concept. The latter was interpreted as being based on Eurocentric (not ethnocentric) thinking, making it a means of Western imperialist exploitation because it



Figure 3. Frode Fjellheim (Sámi composer) poses proudly with the *Frozen* poster. (Source: <https://www.nrk.no/sapmi/frode-fjellheim-har-opplevd-suksess-med-disney-1.12140168>) (accessed October 10, 2018)

excludes works of folk art from copyright protection (MILLS 1996; HILDER 2015:158). In fact, it transfers the yoik from the protected, personal sphere to the open, economic sphere, which makes both the art and its owner completely vulnerable. According to the “Western business approach”, works of folk art are “timeless” and authorless public goods that anyone can access. Deep Forest, Enigma and similar bands believe that they can freely use folk creations from anywhere in the world in their compositions, without specifying their sources. Following the earlier bitter lessons, and in order to avoid similar cases in the future, the Sámi sought to make the coverage of *Sámikopiija*, which was founded in 1992 and included folklore creations, much more stringent, and after the Virgin Records case, they released their own regulations regarding the use of (and access to) contemporary and archival yoiks (Traditional Knowledge and Copyright, SOLBAKK 2007), in which the international legal options were supplemented by their traditional stance on yoiks recorded in writing. Therefore, later on, when Walt Disney’s *Frozen* (2014) was being produced, for example, the Sámi had more control over the use of data relating to them. The yoik adaptation used in the opening of the movie is a copyrighted work by a well-known Sámi composer, and an entry on the yoik briefly describing the features of the Sámi folklore genre has also been added to the Disney website (<http://disney.wikia.com/wiki/Special:Search?query=yoik>).

Nonetheless, many (such as the artists’ collective *Suohpanterror*) feel that the Disney production is part of the cultural exploitation (see Figure 4).

Concurrently with the abuse of intellectual property, there are many examples from the 2000s of the unauthorized (at least seen by the Sámi as such) use of objects representing the Sámi lifestyle. In Finland, for example, Miss Finland’s Sámi outfit had ruffled some Sámi feathers (and those of the Finns, too, as a result of the Sámi reaction). Namely, the winner of the Finnish round of the 2007 Miss Universe represented the country in a Sámi outfit (but the outfit was not made by Sámi – it was mass-produced in Hong Kong,



Figure 4. Translations of the Finnish subtitles: Mulan, Pocahontas and now *Stolen*.¹² / Another example of cultural appropriation. / – a hundred years of oppression – / Never has a woman seemed more beautiful with a Four Winds hat¹³ on her head. (Source: <http://hairikot.voima.fi/tag/suohpanterror/>) (accessed October 10, 2018)

a product of the Finnish tourism industry). In the aftermath, demonstrations were held in Rovaniemi in Northern Finland, with hundreds of young people taking to the streets brandishing Sámi and English banners (bypassing Finnish on purpose), sending a message to more than just the Finns.¹¹ The mottoes of protests were “Respect my culture!”, “Not for sale!”, “This is our dress, this is our identity!”, and “Burn fake!” (HILDER 2015:159). In a statement, Sámi activist Lars Miguel Utsi argued that they are protesting because the tourism industry is flooding Lapland with “counterfeit outfits” and “counterfeit Sámi”.¹² This, in his opinion, is an unacceptable, new kind of discrimination, since tourists encounter “fake Sámi” and poor imitations of material culture in the north, and, faced with the glittering Santa Empire, they think these are the true natives. Among the demonstrators’ banners, there was one with the words “Dá lea miss Sápmi!” (‘Behold Miss Sápmi!’), held by a young girl dressed in *authentic* attire, standing next to a table upon which was laid out the counterfeit “made in Hong Kong” outfit worn by Miss Finland, as if to demonstrate the strong contrast. As the declarations show, this is not a one-off case but an issue that has much deeper roots (GRAVES 1994; MAGGA 2015; TAMÁS 2018). Finnish

newspapers, however, interpreted the case as pettiness and an unrealistic, exaggerated reaction on the part of the Sámi. Nonetheless, despite this turbulent history, the case of the Finnish beauty queen and the Sámi costume were repeated in 2015.

Disagreements over commercial use were quickly followed by the need for control over scientific use. Valkeapää’s collection of pamphlets called *Terveisiä Lapista* (Greetings from Lapland) ridicules the Sámi-related stereotypes, misunderstandings, and

¹¹ Report on the demonstration: <http://rabble.ca/blogs/bloggers/krystalline-kraus/2012/03/activist-communiqu%C3%A9-our-culture-not-halloween-costume%E2%80%8F> and <http://arran2.blogspot.hu/2007/06/can-just-anyone-wear-gkti.html> (accessed October 10, 2018).

¹² Lapland is the English equivalent of Lappi, the Finnish name of the northernmost region of Finland.

¹³ Beyond some Sámi activists claiming that the adaptation amounts to “cultural theft”, the English “renaming”, which rhymes with *Frozen*, is also referring to the Latin American-born author, Isabella Tanikumi’s demand for 250 million USD in damages from Disney, claiming that the cartoon’s story has a lot more in common with her novel than with Andersen’s tale.

¹⁴ The caption is ironic. The “Four Winds hat” shown in the picture was worn by men – never would a Sámi woman wear such a thing.



Figure 5. Carola Miller, Miss Finland, 2015 (Source: <http://rabble.ca/blogs/bloggers/krystallinekraus/2012/03/activist-communic%C3%A9-our-culture-not-halloween-costume%E2%80%8Fand> and <http://arran2.blogspot.hu/2007/06/can-just-anyone-wear-gkti.html>) (accessed: October 10, 2018)

false interpretations of researchers. A joke commonly known in Sámi land – “What does an average Sámi family look like? Two parents, three children, one anthropologist” – is a good illustration of the sense of congestion the Sámi feel regarding those wishing to study them. A stranger, even if well-intentioned, is a source of danger.

Hungarian ethnographer György Szomjas-Schiffert was conducting research in 1966 in a settlement in Northern Finland (Nunnanen). His host, with whom he stayed for weeks, was suddenly hospitalized. It soon became apparent that, in the interpretation of the locals, the cause of the trouble was the stranger who occasionally forgot to lay the broom across the entrance door when he left the house. I also had the opportunity to observe brooms laid against doors during my fieldwork in 2014, and I also experienced the distrust towards strangers in the same village. The locals initially observed me from an invisible “shelter”. In the first few days, I did not see any people in the village – the gardens, roads, fields and the lakeshore were empty, although (as I later found out) everyone knew within a day about the foreign little blue car cruising around and stopping often, and about the foreign researcher dauntlessly knocking on every door. It took several days for the settlement to “reveal itself to me”. Then, after a conversation with one of the local elderly ladies, like magic, people started coming around. My being a stranger was mitigated by the fact that I had a piece of their past: I brought back their yoiks that had been collected nearly half a century earlier; I showed them a book about their yoik singers (SZOMJAS-SCHIFFERT 1996), as well as photographs of them. Later, I recorded one of my favorite yoiks in this same village during a group interview. When one of the locals was leafing through the Szomjas-



Figure 6. Ildikó Tamás collecting among the descendants of Szomjas-Schiffert's informants. Veltto Stoor (son of Martti Stoor) browsing Szomjas-Schiffert's book. Nunnanen, Finland, July 2014. (Photo by Ildikó Tamás)

Schiffert book (Figure 6), he came upon one of his father's favorite yoiks, and quickly improvised a yoik in his father's style. Though it did not have an actual text, he later explained that the yoik meant "wow, I've just found a yoik of my father". This case is also interesting because, although Szomjas-Schiffert was still able to collect yoiks (there are photographs of the circumstances of the collection) by requesting them for his research, due to the change of attitude that had taken place during the past half a century, I was only able to collect yoiks on a single occasion, because old or new melodies would be heard only rarely, on spontaneous occasions like the above-mentioned one. I feel that this change is due to the fact that the Sámi no longer submit easily and voluntarily to be "the subject of research" (cf. HELANDER 2003:41). We must also realize that this is a completely different kind of introversion than the earlier shame or defiance stemming from contempt and prohibitions. This one stems from ethnic consciousness and pride, in which the recognition of local cultural values is followed by a – sometimes excessive – protectiveness. Naturally, the earlier bitter experiences play a role in the emergence of such protectiveness.

The rehabilitation of ethnic symbols has had numerous side effects for which the Sámi were not prepared. The appreciation of ethnic phenomena brought with it their localization, appropriation and new (non-Sámi) interpretations by others. *The struggle today is no longer for the right to exercise their own indigenous culture; the subject of the latest debates and dilemmas is who can have access to it, make use of it, perform it, interpret it, shape it.* If in theory it is conceivable that access and/or ownership belong exclusive to the Sámi, where are the boundaries of the community to be drawn then?

When in May 2017 I asked Niillas Holmberg, one of the most well-known Sámi activist poets and musicians, about this, he said that although it is very problematic to determine Sáminess, according to a view adopted by the Sámi, "one is Sámi if the Sámi community considers him/her as such".¹⁵ This tautological definition, however, does not solve the problem of the criteria by which some members of a hard-to-define community

¹⁵ Verbal communication, May 27, 2015, in Budapest, on A38 Ship, at an event organized by Finnagora.

with imaginative boundaries may form a right to determine the Sáminess of others.¹⁶ In fact, “to what extent and in what way must one be Sámi” for it to be adequate? These anomalies are sensed by the Sámi, too. In my own research site, for example, a village in northern Finland, the cornerstone of the yoik tradition today is a Finnish family who have been breeding reindeer for generations, speak Sámi, and are considered talented yoik singers in many of the surrounding villages. Others, despite being Sámi, do not yoik, having been cut off from the tradition since the time of their parents or grandparents.¹⁷ For them, yoik concerts and various music publications are very important for immersion in the tradition (in their own way), since in the absence of their own community’s yoiks, only the melodies available to the general public are at their disposal. Still others are reinterpreting the yoiks within the framework of Christian church rituals, while the majority sees it as a means of revitalizing a worldview of indigenous collaboration and their own (neopagan?) separation from the great historical churches. Additionally, the Laestadian Sámi reject the yoik tradition completely, even though their Sámi identity is very strong.

Even in the kaleidoscope of reality, it is evident that the Sámi consider the specter of cultural imperialism the latest in a line of threats to their existence. In recent years, this has increasingly influenced scientific discourse as well. *The relationship between researcher and research site is now not limited to only data collection and the learning process.* Processing, publishing the results, and presenting them at conferences to the informants and the scientific elite of the researched community also provide important lessons. By the turn of the millennium, it became possible for the Sámi, like many other



Figure 7. Niillas Holmberg, exhibition hall of A38 Ship, Budapest, May 2017. (Photo by Ildikó Tamás)

¹⁶ There is a great deal of tension between Sámi and Finnish politicians with regard to who and by what criteria can be included in the official electoral register of the Sámi Parliament in Finland (based on verbal communication by Klemetti Näkkäljärvi, former President of the Sámi Parliamentary, November 18, 2014, Budapest).

¹⁷ I interviewed an elderly lady in Kautokeino, who was an adult when she found out about her Sámi origins. Despite being 70 years of age, she gets in a car every year and travels hundreds of kilometers, so she can be in a Sámi environment, among Sámi. She is treated both as a tourist wearing Sámi costume in Kautokeino (who is a returning visitor at the campsite but does not know how to yoik, for example) and as a Sámi. There are many similar cases of people who learn of their origins or are just getting interested in their roots later in life. Their inclusion in Sámi society is not problem-free, and it throws the inconsistencies of defining Sáminess in an even sharper relief. The subject has been addressed in numerous literary works (e.g., Helene Uri: *Rydde ut*, 2013) and documentary films (e.g., *Suddenly Sámi*, Ellen-Astri Lundby, 2009).

indigenous peoples, to participate in the scientific discourse with their own research team (cf. KRISTÓF 2007; MATHISEN 2004, 2010). The interpretations of protectiveness/possessiveness regarding intellectual property are well illustrated by the experiences of many of my colleagues studying the Sámi. However, to shed light on the problem, I would like to present a case that involved me. In the mid-2000s, a Sámi linguistic symposium was organized in Northern Norway, to which some non-Sámi researchers were also invited, including me. At that time, I was studying the Lule Sámi dialect and discovered some morpho-phonological phenomena (a specific vowel harmony in one of the Sámi dialects) that were previously unknown or poorly documented in Finno-Ugrian studies. After the publication of the study in English (TAMÁS 2006), I was delighted that my research results would be discussed at an international conference, and with Sámi participants to boot. The scientific results were not negatively criticized, but some commentators did not want to reflect on the professional aspects. Their comments were limited to trying to position me as a “Western scholar” in a discourse that I was less familiar with at that time. Some felt that my results should not primarily belong to me because “I was benefiting from their culture, and I was only able to make such an important discovery at such a young age thanks to one of their *special* dialects”. My experience is not unique; claiming indigenous knowledge as a “national monopoly” is more and more pronounced, as illustrated by the following quotation from Elina Helander, a researcher at the Arctic Center in Northern Finland:

“What has Sámi research meant for the Sámi? First, in the earlier research tradition the Sámi were an object of study for outsiders, non-Sámi researchers (...) historians, pastors, linguists and many others described the Sámi culture from their point of view. (...) The existence of the Nordic Council and the Sámi Council made it possible to open a Sámi research institute in the early 1970s: the Nordic Sámi Institute (...) Through this institute, the Sámi have been able to influence the image of the Sámi and the way their history and culture is depicted and their language and society studied.” (HELANDER 2003:41)

In the continuation of the quoted article, Helander points out that the Sámi should only be studied with their consent and under their control, and only on issues that produce political, economic, or cultural benefits for them.¹⁸ Beyond the differences in the motives and possibilities of “Western” versus “indigenous” science, there are epistemological problems that address the differences of the categories arising from different worldviews and from different practices of experience, and the fact that there is no authentic “translation” between them (GRAFF 2007).

“The Sámi also possess knowledge that Western Culture does not acknowledge as valid knowledge. A person is able to comprehend things in their totality, in a flash. But (...) [it] is difficult to explain succinctly on the basis of the Western system of knowledge.” (HELANDER – KAAARINA 1998:147).

In fact, there is nothing surprising in the dilemmas of Sámi researchers when considering the epistemological questions that have repeatedly emerged throughout the history of

¹⁸ In her essay introducing the objectives of North American Indigenous Studies, Ildikó Kristóf provides an apt definition of the position of the “outsider” researcher as a “stranger to be kept at arm’s length and in check” (KRISTÓF 2007:160).

anthropological research. But the Sámi consider these issues “from the other side”, a kind of “minority nationalism discourse” unavoidably entering their considerations. In the unauthorized and inauthentic use of their cultural goods, or in the attempts to interpret them in ways that are not axiomatic to them, they see a continuation of the former negative discrimination.

CONCLUSION

Today, indigenous Sámi researchers are laying claim to the scientific achievements derived from their own culture and are attempting to monopolize it: Sámi parliaments and the libraries of research institutes are meticulously gathering relevant research findings from all over the world. Sámi scholars (and artists) are bound together by the fact that beyond the cultivation of their discipline (resp. their creative activity), political activism, public involvement, and the struggle for a “national existence (BRODERSTAD 2011) are generally important to them. It is a general occurrence that they lay claim to the possibility of the only correct interpretation in opposition to outside researchers. In more extreme cases, they may also try to limit a foreign researcher’s access to data and to the research site; however, they have yet to establish a suitable legal context for this, although there was an attempt in 2011. This is partly because Sámi society is far from unified, and there are very different interpretations poised against each other. On the one hand, they see the pillaging committed by the colonizing majority society and the researchers of foreign countries, while on the other, they throw around accusations of nationalist small-mindedness and appropriation because they consider Sámi folklore and scientific achievements a public domain in the spirit of a universal (albeit diverse) cultural field. Naturally, the researcher does not want to take a side, but maintaining a “neutral/outsider” position is also problematic because “field” players as well as the discipline have their own expectations. It must be recognized during fieldwork that there is no completely neutral role: we take a stand even if we confront the research-monopolizing aspirations of Sámi science policy and do not ask for permission or support from internal political forces.

I partly wanted to point out with the above ideas that a folkloristic collection method and experience in the traditional sense is not enough for the research, interpretation, and creation of access to the yoik tradition. The concept of research site expands according to numerous new frameworks. The acquisition of the local language and participant observation are also not enough without understanding the historical framework, the international and internal scientific, political, artistic, etc. discourses influencing Sámi thinking. Experiences with other indigenous peoples and the understanding of international legal developments in post-colonial times may bring us closer to creating effective research conditions that are less challenging of ethical principles and acceptable to both parties.

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