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Ethnostress: Colonial Expectations of Authenticity and Everyday Politics in Sápmi

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ABBREVIATIONS AND GLOSSARY

Authenticity	Socially constructed expectations of what constitutes a “proper” Sámi identity.
Birget	A Northern Sámi word meaning “to manage”, “to endure”, or “to survive”. In the dissertation, it is used to describe a cultural ethos of resilience under pressure that can also become toxic when difficulties are endured rather than addressed.
Coloniality	Following Aníbal Quijano (1992) and Walter D. Mignolo and Catherine Walsh (2018), coloniality refers to the enduring matrix of power, knowledge, and identity that persists beyond formal colonialism. In this dissertation, coloniality shapes how Sámi identity is evaluated, legitimised, or denied.
Decolonisation	Processes aimed at dismantling colonial structures, relations, and epistemologies.
Duodji	Traditional Sámi handicraft and craft knowledge, including textile work, silversmithing, and the making of traditional clothing. During the Sámi ethno-political revival movement, <i>duodji</i> became a politicised marker of Sámi identity and has featured prominently in ethnostress experiences.
Essentialism / Strategic essentialism	The reduction of identity to a fixed set of supposedly authentic characteristics. Strategic essentialism (Spivak 2008) is the deliberate and temporary use of an essentialised identity for political purposes. The dissertation argues that Sámi ethno-political movements adopted strategic essentialism as a survival strategy, which paradoxically generated ethnostress.
Ethnostress	Psychological and social strain arising from coloniality and expectations of “authentic” Indigenous identity; the central concept developed in this dissertation.

Finnicisation	Assimilation into Finnish language, culture, and dominant societal norms.
Gákti	A traditional Sámi clothes that varies by region and serves as a marker of Sámi identity, origin, and kinship. The inability or reluctance to make or wear <i>gákti</i> is a recurrent source of ethnostress. In other Sámi communities living in Finland it is called <i>mááccuh</i> in Inari Sámi, and <i>määccač</i> Skolt Sámi.
Indigeneity	The social, cultural, and political condition of being Indigenous, including the collective rights and identities associated with Indigenous peoples.
Noereh	A Sámi youth organisation in Norway that represents Sámi youth and promotes Sámi identity, culture, and youth participation.
Reconnection (cultural reconnection)	The process by which Sámi individuals raised outside Sápmi or without access to the Sámi language and practices seek to rebuild their cultural ties. Reconnection is analysed as both a site of ethnostress and a coping strategy.
Sajos	The Sámi Cultural Centre in Aanaar (Inari) that houses key Sámi institutions, including the Finnish Sámi Parliament, cultural organisations, and administrative bodies.
Sáminess (Northern Sámi: Sámevuohhta)	A constructed concept that refers to the qualities, practices, and attributes associated with being Sámi. In the dissertation, Sáminess is analysed as a contested and politically shaped identity category rather than a fixed or primordial essence.
Sámi Council (Sámiráddi)	An international Sámi non-governmental organisation founded in 1956, that represents Sámi organisations across Norway, Sweden, Finland, and Russia, and works to promote Sámi rights, culture, and political cooperation.

Sámi Parliament (Sámediggi)	The elected representative body of the Sámi people, established in Finland, Norway, and Sweden. In Russia, a Sámi Parliament is not recognised by the state. The Finnish Sámi Parliament is located in Aanaar.
Sápmi	The traditional homeland of the Sámi people, spanning northern Norway, Sweden, Finland, and the Kola Peninsula in Russia. Sápmi is used both as a geographical term and as a political and cultural concept central to Sámi self-determination.
Settler colonialism	A form of colonialism theorised by Patrick Wolfe (2006) and Lorenzo Veracini (2011), whose logic is the permanent acquisition of land rather than the extraction of labour or resources. Its defining feature is the elimination or erasure of Indigenous presence through assimilation, displacement, or cultural dispossession.
Siida	Traditionally, a Sámi local community and social organisation; today it is also used in the names of Sámi institutions.
Siida (museum)	The Sámi Museum and Northern Lapland Nature Centre in Aanaar, Finland, the main institution dedicated to documenting and presenting Sámi culture and natural history.
Suoma Sámi Nuorat	The Finnish Sámi Youth Association, a non-governmental organisation that represents and promotes the interests, culture, and participation of Sámi youth in Finland.
Yle Sápmi	The Sámi-language broadcasting branch of Finland's national public broadcaster Yle, operating in Northern, Inari, and Skolt Sámi. It produces news, radio, and digital content, including the comedy programme <i>Sohkaršohkka</i> , referenced in the dissertation.
Yoik / Joik	A traditional Sámi vocal expression, often described as a form of singing that evokes rather than describes a person, place, or animal. Yoiking was prohibited during periods of assimilation contributing to cultural loss and ethnostress.

Note on place names

Throughout this dissertation, Sámi place names are used as the primary geographical names. Finnish, Norwegian, Swedish, or Russian equivalents are provided at first mention where relevant.

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INTRODUCTION

Ethnostress refers to the psychological and social strain associated with ethnicity-related stress experienced by Indigenous peoples as a consequence of colonisation. Originally developed by Indigenous scholars in North America to describe the effects of colonial trauma and cultural disruption, the concept was later adapted by Sámi scholars to capture the particular tensions of living “between two worlds.” In the Sámi context, ethnostress arises from expectations to perform “proper” Sáminess, both in relation to majority society and within the Sámi community itself, giving rise to feelings of inadequacy, fragmentation, and a sense of not being “authentic enough.” The concept therefore describes the affective consequences of negotiating Indigenous identity under ongoing settler-colonial conditions.

In this dissertation, I develop ethnostress as an analytical lens for examining how colonial histories, identity politics, and everyday experiences intersect. Rather than treating ethnostress solely as a consequence of discrimination, stigma, or cultural loss, I argue that it emerges through the relational processes by which ethnic identities are constructed, contested, and authenticated. The concept connects macro-level processes of coloniality and nation-state formation with micro-level experiences of identity, emotion, and belonging. At the same time, ethnostress is not only a symptom of settler-colonial structures but also a site of agency, where individuals negotiate, redefine, and creatively rearticulate pressures surrounding Sámi identity in their everyday lives.

The purpose of this dissertation is to analyse how experiences of ethnostress are connected to broader settler-coloniality logic of essentialization of identity, and what strategies individuals and communities adopt to respond to expectations of authenticity. While identity formation is shaped by a wide range of historical, social, political, and economic processes, this dissertation focuses specifically on ethnostress as one analytical lens through which these processes become visible in everyday life.

This doctoral research addresses a gap in scholarship by providing the first in-depth ethnographic analysis of ethnostress among the Sámi in Finland, a phenomenon that has been acknowledged but not systematically examined. While settler-colonial and decolonial theories often focus on structural and historical dimensions, this study reveals how mechanisms of authentication and essentialisation operate in everyday life, producing ethnostress through expectations of “authenticity.” By highlighting bottom-up experiences, it challenges the assumption that essentialisation is merely a nationalist project. Instead, it demonstrates how it can function as a survival strategy within

settler-colonial conditions, while simultaneously producing ethnostress and the need to find a way to deal with it and to renegotiate their identity. In doing so, the dissertation bridges personal experiences and broader colonial power structures, contributing, on the one hand, to theoretical debates on settler colonialism, coloniality, and the agency of community and individuals and, on the other hand, to a more nuanced understanding of Indigenous identity struggles and resilience.

Problematisation of the Research: Colonisation, Decolonisation and Expectations of Authenticity

The Sámi people are Indigenous to Europe and inhabit the very northern regions of Norway, Sweden, Finland, and the Kola Peninsula in Russia, an area called Sápmi. In the 15th century, interest in Sámi lands grew, leading to settler colonization that displaced the Sámi people northwards and brought settlers to the region as agricultural labourers, loggers, miners, and builders, eventually contributing to the Sámi becoming a minority in most areas. During the 20th century, strong assimilation policies were implemented in Sápmi. With the growth of the welfare state and the introduction of compulsory Finnish school education, cultural normalisation had a strong influence on Sámi culture. In Finland, as in other Nordic countries, children were punished for speaking Sámi, or yoiking (traditional form of Sámi singing). As a result of Finnization, a generation of Sámi speakers was lost (particularly affecting smaller Sámi languages such as Inari and Skolt Sámi). Being a Sámi became something to hide and often shameful. However, following a long period of colonization and assimilation, a strong cultural revival of Sámi people in the Nordic countries started in the 1970s. *“And suddenly it was good, not that bad to be a Sámi”* (Interview 2018-08, female aged around 50), a friend once explained to me. *Sáminess* was shaped into a new modern political identity. From *“localised village-centred identities [it] has been articulated into a new collective Sámi identity that reaches across borders and is marked by the symbolic construction of a Sámi nation [and] Sápmi [Sámi land]”* (Pietikäinen 2008, 183).

Today *Sáminess* is celebrated and Sámi people have organized themselves politically and continue to do so. There are Sámi Parliaments in every country with a Sámi population (although in Russia, it is not recognised by the state), and there is the Sámi Council, an international Sámi organisation consisting of representatives from four countries (since 2022 due to public support by Sámi organizations to Ukraine, Russian Sámi membership in the council has been temporarily suspended). Numerous annual events celebrate

Sámi people and culture, including Sámi National Day (6 February), music, film festivals and so on. Significant efforts have been made to revive Sámi culture, especially the languages. Although Sámi languages today have an official status in the Sámi homeland, a generation of speakers was lost because of assimilationist policies, preventing them from passing their languages on to their own children. Consequently, many people do not know the language, and instead learn it as adults, or as mother-tongue at special day-care centres for children.

The assimilatory history, and practices that have been forbidden or associated with shame, have been reclaimed and transformed into symbols of pride in the Sámi revival movement. According to Sámi studies scholar Sanna Valkonen, *“stigmatized difference and otherness have become the basis and justification for resource and political demands”* (Valkonen 2009, 24, my translation). These differences entered the pan-Sámi ethno-political movement and Sámi identity building process as one nation. Symbols of the nation became the Sámi languages, Sámi traditional dress and *duodji* [handicrafts], and connection to nature through livelihoods such as reindeer herding, fishing, or other practices (Valkonen 2009). However, in the living aftermaths of cultural assimilation, the loss of language skills and the absence of other attributes considered traditional, like handicrafts (for example, making traditional clothes on your own), traditional livelihoods such as reindeer herding and fishing, and in general living from nature today, can make people feel “not proper” Sámi.

Dealing with the generational trauma of assimilation, loss of language and culture, and questions of identity in the community, especially among younger generations, is referred to as “ethnostress”, the feeling of being not “good enough” or “proper” Sámi when one does not fit into the image of traditional Sáminess. The term was introduced by Mohawk (First Nation in Canada) educator and healer Diane Hill, along with her colleagues Antone and Myers (Antone, Hill, and Myers 1986) and later raised by scholars Antone and Hill (1992); Cajete (1994); (Sanchez, 2003) (La Duke, 2005); Merskin (2010); Wallace (2012); Pilon (2020), and Sámi scholars Kuokkanen (1998); Valkonen (2009); and Lehtola (2015). According to Hill & Antone, among many tensions that people experience, they carry cultural trauma for multiple generations. Ethnostress also encompasses the issue of “culture under glass”, which is freezing Indigenous culture in history and expecting Indigenous people to match this image (Antone and Hill, 1992). Although the term originally referred to colonial trauma and cultural loss caused by assimilation, I argue that ethnostress is a broader consequence of ongoing settler-coloniality. It emerges from systems that continuously reproduce images of

Indigenous peoples as cultural “others” and demand the performance of “authentic otherness” as a condition for recognising their autonomy and political status.

Anthropologists have written about expectations of authenticity and accusations of inadequacy in relation to Indigenous identities. For example, Elizabeth Povinelli (1998a, 1998b) wrote about the case in Australia describing what she calls “cunning for recognition”. The author drew attention to the legal requirements to show the ties to their pre-colonial cultural traditions and worldviews in order to be recognised as Indigenous. Luisa Steur (2010; 2011) worked with Adivasi in Kerala, India, and showed how class and economic struggle shifted to a “liberal-culturalist” discourse of indigeneity. In Latin America, Laura R. Graham (2002) showed a Western audience’s expectations of the authenticity of Indigenous people in Latin America through language use in identity politics. Meanwhile, Alcida Rita Ramos (1994) introduces the concept of “hyperreal Indian” to describe how NGOs and their advocacy work to create the hyperreal Indians, an image that the bureaucratic process needs. Megan Moodie (2015) explores how the Dhanka tribe in India negotiates its Adivasi status. The anthropologist captures this tension in the phrase “we were adivasis,” which reflects the interplay of socioeconomic advancement and expectations of authentic indigeneity. My research among Sámi shows how such expectations are internalised, making people feel “not proper” Sámi.

The expectation of “authenticity” and the ethnostress it produces can be understood as an expression of unequal identity power relations, through which minority identities are shaped, regulated, and internalised. However, these processes are not necessarily unidirectional or passively experienced. This raises important questions about how individuals and communities engage with such expectations in their everyday lives, and the extent to which they reproduce, negotiate, or resist dominant constructions of Sáminess within a (post)settler-colonial context.

In this dissertation I address four main analytical questions:

1. How can the phenomenon of ethnostress be understood within the historical context of settler colonialism in Sápmi?
2. How do expectations of authenticity function as a key mechanism through which settler-colonial power continues to shape Indigenous identity?

3. How is experience of ethnostress articulated in the Sámi context through the concept of ethnostress, and how does it manifest in everyday life?
4. How do individuals and communities respond to ethnostress, and how do these responses contribute to the de-essentialization of Sámi identity?

Theoretical framework

This study builds mainly on settler-colonial theory together with critical Indigenous studies, the anthropology of ethnicity, postcolonial and decolonial studies¹ and everyday agency studies. The main research object of this dissertation is ethnostress, which I approach as both an outcome of and a response to ongoing Finnish state settler-colonial processes and decolonisation. I argue that ethnostress is not merely a personal or psychological state but a form of internalized coloniality, shaped by both historical and present-day discourses of authentication and essentialization. It reflects the pressure to conform to externally and internally (by community) imposed expectations of “authentic” Sámi identity while simultaneously

¹ To further refine its theoretical basis, this dissertation engages critically with both postcolonial and decolonial scholarship, examining their divergences and articulating how each informs the present analysis, but ultimately adopts a decolonial orientation. Postcolonial scholarship has been essential for analysing the historical, cultural, and political legacies of colonialism (Ashcroft, Griffiths, Tiffin 1998), yet its framing of the “post” can imply temporal rupture or completion, an assumption that does not adequately reflect Indigenous contexts shaped by ongoing settler colonial structures. As Patrick Wolfe (1998) argues, settler colonialism is not an event but a structure. This perspective aligns with my understanding of ethnostress as embedded in a continuous colonial condition. Critics such as Jace Weaver (2000) further note that postcolonial theory, closely intertwined with postmodernism, remains grounded in European intellectual traditions and risks depoliticising identity struggles through its rejection of essentialism and emphasis on hybridity. While I draw on postcolonial insights, decolonial theory, particularly as articulated by Walter Dignolo, Catherine Walsh, and other decolonial thinkers, provides a more suitable framework for this study. Decolonial thought foregrounds the coloniality of power, challenges the myth of modernity as emancipatory, and insists that colonial domination is constitutive of modernity itself rather than an external to it (Dussel 1993; Dignolo 2011). Epistemologically and politically, it moves beyond critique toward delinking from Eurocentric knowledge systems and centring lived struggles, collective agency, and transformative action. Politically, this difference is decisive: while postcolonial approaches aim to reform modernity from within its epistemic and institutional horizons, decoloniality is oriented toward organized action that dismantles the colonial matrix of power and moves beyond modernity/coloniality itself, articulated as a decoloniality for rather than merely a decoloniality from (Walsh 2018; Gordon 2021). This orientation enables the dissertation not only to analyse ethnostress as a product of colonial structures but also to examine how Sámi individuals and communities negotiate, resist, and rearticulate identity, positioning practices of coping with ethnostress as forms of decolonial effort rather than mere adaptation.

negotiating agency, resistance, and everyday practices of redefining Sáminess. The main theoretical background is settler-colonial theory, starting with Patric Wolfe (2006), and Lorenzo Veracini (2011), and the concept of coloniality by Anibal Quijano (1992) more recently expanded by Walter D. Mignolo and Catherine Walsh (2018). Together they form settler-coloniality, as experience and everyday pressures Indigenous people live in. Rather than simply applying predominantly Western theoretical models to the Sámi case, the present analysis places them in dialogue with Sámi scholarship and with concepts emerging from Sámi public discourse and lived experience, most notably the concept of ethnostress itself. In this way, Sámi experiences are approached not merely as illustrations of existing theory but as a source of theoretical insight into the relationships between coloniality, authenticity, and Indigenous identity.

According to Wolfe (1994; 2006), settler colonialism sees Indigenous peoples as obstacles to the acquisition of land and resources, which constitute its main objective. Veracini argues that the main goal of settler colonizers is to make Indigenous people “go away” whether by assimilation, physical displacement or elimination, erasure of cultural practices, or other forms of disappearance. (Veracini 2011, 1–2). Following this logic, the goal of Indigenous peoples is resistance to settler colonialism in order to stay a distinct group. Distinctiveness is negotiated and is based in part on what is understood as distinctive cultures by the dominant society. When Indigenous groups fail to conform to these externally imposed images, they are often perceived as disappearing or already extinct. As Veracini (2011, 4) notes, Indigenous peoples have long been framed as inherently vulnerable to extinction, imagined as “dying” cultures for over two centuries despite their ongoing presence and revitalization (Coates 2004, 20). Settler colonial expectations of “authenticity” are a part of the ongoing coloniality (Mignolo 2017; Mignolo and Walsh 2018) understood as a “matrix of power”, which largely points to the ongoing epistemic power structures of colonial logic. *Coloniality* (Quijano, 1992) is not easily visible; it is rather a matrix of worldviews and ideologies, influencing the mechanisms that govern the minds of both the coloniser and the colonised. Expectations of “authenticity” become oppressive insofar as they are structured through colonial dichotomies – such as traditional versus modern, past versus present, “real” versus “mixed,” and “pure” versus “contaminated” – which function as epistemic mechanisms for controlling the knowledge and representation of Indigenous existence. Not only the coloniser but also the colonised may internalise such expectations which is addressed in the present study as ethnostress.

For Walter Mignolo (2017, 42), decolonisation entails delinking from the imposed dichotomies articulated within Western epistemologies, such as authentic/inauthentic, Western/non-Western, traditional/modern, historical/contemporary, or living/dead Indigenous cultures. These classificatory divisions are not neutral analytical tools; they structure recognition and legitimacy, thereby reinforcing settler-colonial logics that marginalise Indigenous peoples and sustain the myth of “authenticity” as a condition for their political and cultural validation. As Sámi scholar in Indigenous and Sámi studies Jelena Porsanger (2011, 226) argues, the very question of how tradition and modernity can be separated is a “mission impossible”, grounded in non-Indigenous epistemologies that direct attention to distinctions often foreign to Indigenous ontologies and value systems. Such problematisations emerge from a long philosophical tradition rooted in Western thought, including Cartesian theories of knowledge, where categorisation through binary opposition has been central. While these distinctions may function coherently within that intellectual tradition, they can become confusing and inadequate when imposed onto Indigenous populations. In this sense, coloniality operates not simply because these dichotomies are “Western,” but because they have been historically sedimented and universalised, shaping global regimes of knowledge and authenticity that continue to regulate Indigenous existence.

In addition, this study approaches ethnostress not only as an internalised effect of coloniality, but also as something actively negotiated in everyday life. Drawing on approaches to everyday agency and practice (Scott 1985; de Certeau 1984; Bayat 2010), I examine how Sámi individuals engage with, reinterpret, and at times challenge expectations of authenticity through routine social and discursive practices. This perspective shifts the focus from viewing individuals as passive recipients of stress to understanding them as active agents who navigate, accommodate, and potentially rearticulate dominant constructions of Sáminess. In this sense, the analysis also draws on the concept of narrative imagination (Meretoja 2018) to explore how alternative understandings of Sámi identity are articulated alongside, and in tension with, dominant normative frameworks.

While the dissertation is primarily grounded in settler-colonial theory and theories of everyday agency, it also draws on anthropological approaches to ethnicity and identity as relational, situational, and historically constructed processes. Since the publication of Fredrik Barth’s (1969) influential work on ethnic boundaries, ethnicity has increasingly been understood not as a fixed cultural essence but as a product of social relations. From this perspective, what defines an ethnic group is not a set of immutable cultural traits, but the

boundaries through which distinctions between “us” and “others” are produced and maintained. Building on Barth, Eriksen (2010a) argues that ethnicity emerges through interaction and comparison, becoming meaningful precisely in contexts where groups encounter one another and negotiate difference. Ethnicity is therefore a relational process that is continuously reproduced, contested, and transformed rather than a property that individuals possess.

This relational understanding of ethnicity has been further developed in studies of identity, which emphasize that identities are neither singular nor stable, but are negotiated through social interaction and shaped by broader historical and political processes (Jenkins 2004; Hall 1990). Rather than viewing ethnic identity as primordial or self-evident, these approaches highlight how identities are performed, recognised, challenged, and redefined in everyday life. At the same time, critical scholarship has shown that ethnicity and indigeneity are embedded in relations of power and are often mobilised within wider political projects, including nationalism, state-building, and Indigenous self-determination (Anderson 1983; Gellner 1983; Comaroff and Comaroff 2009). Such perspectives are particularly relevant in the Sámi context, where contemporary identity formation has been shaped both by settler-colonial histories and by Indigenous political mobilisation.

These approaches inform the present study by providing a framework for understanding Sámi identity not as a fixed cultural condition but as an ongoing process of negotiation. Ethnostress, as examined in this dissertation, emerges within these processes of identity-making and boundary maintenance, particularly where expectations of authenticity define who is recognised as a “proper” Sámi. The concept therefore builds on anthropological conceptions of ethnicity as relational and dynamic, while directing attention to the affective and experiential consequences of negotiating belonging under conditions shaped by settler-coloniality.

Contribution

In the Nordic region, colonialism and coloniality has long remained underexamined, partly due to dominant narratives that portray Nordic countries as peripheral to European imperialism and inherently egalitarian or humanitarian. Such narratives have obscured both the region’s participation in overseas colonial ventures and its internal colonisation of Sámi lands by Denmark-Norway, Sweden, Finland, and Russia. Recent scholarship, including *Coloniality and Decolonisation in the Nordic Region* (Groglopo and Suárez-Krabbe 2023), has challenged this exceptionalist framing by

demonstrating that Nordic colonialism must be understood not only as a matter of formal empire but as an ongoing structure of coloniality. In this perspective, colonial power persists through racialisation, extractivism, knowledge production, education, media, and state governance, shaping hierarchies of belonging and legitimacy while maintaining Eurocentric epistemologies. Despite important contributions to race and whiteness studies, Nordic academia has often hesitated to situate the region within broader analyses of racial capitalism, imperial power, and decolonial thought. Understanding colonialism in the Nordic context therefore requires confronting both historical imperial entanglements and contemporary structures that continue to marginalise Indigenous Sámi communities and other racialised groups. This dissertation contributes to that ongoing effort by examining how such colonial dynamics operate affectively and socially through the phenomenon of ethnostress.

Most importantly, this work contributes to the theory of settler colonialism and decolonization theory by exposing the mechanism of authentication and essentialization driven by settler-colonial logic, especially in the Nordic context. This work shows in detail how essentialization is a strategy to survive as a separate group, rather than a product of Indigenous nationalist movements, like some scholars tend to argue, and most importantly by showing bottom-up practices of people who have to deal with ethnostress produced by such expectations, and community ways to redefine Sáminess. Such contribution, I hope, is valuable for theory as well as activists to better understand the Indigenous movements and identity struggles of peoples, and the way they themselves are dealing with it. I think that a bottom-up approach can generate its own strategies to decolonise settler-colonialities. For Sámi people, I hope this dissertation can show how such a personal feeling of ethnostress is not a personal failure but systematic historical and contemporary injustice. I further hope that if someone reads this, or hears about this research, it may offer them a moment of relief from many of their wounds and grievances they carry because of comments from dominant Finnish society, tourists, or in their own Sámi community.

Ethnographic research in Sápmi has a long history, and several well-known scholars, including Robert Paine, Hugh Beach, Pertti Pelto, and Müller-Wille, have conducted important studies in the region.² Well known

² Early ethnographic and historical accounts were produced by researchers such as Toivo Immanuel Itkonen (1948), whose work documented the Sámi language, settlement patterns, and traditional ways of life in Finland. Later anthropological studies focused more closely on livelihoods, social organization, and economic change. For example, Robert Paine (1994) and Hugh Beach (1981) examined Sámi reindeer herding societies and pastoral economies,

Sámi scholars, such as Veli-Pekka Lehtola, Rauna Kuokkanen, and Sanna Valkonen, have written about Sámi political mobilisation and decolonisation. This dissertation addresses a gap in existing scholarship by exploring the literature and phenomenon of ethnostress, which has rarely been examined in depth. Sámi ethnostress experiences, even though mentioned in writings (Kuokkanen 1999, Valkonen 2009, Lehtola 2015a), have not been documented and explored in detail. While previous studies often focus on structural or historical aspects, I provide ethnographic descriptions of everyday practices and the ways in which people actively respond to and negotiate ethnostress, as well as theoretically try to bridge them with other scholarly texts from various Indigenous parts of the world. By emphasizing agency, rather than portraying individuals merely as passive recipients of colonial pressures, this research shows how Sámi communities create strategies of resilience and redefinition. In doing so, it offers a new perspective that connects the personal and collective dimensions of ethnostress with broader settler-colonial and decolonial dynamics.

Although this dissertation focuses on the Sámi in Finland, the analytical framework developed here has broader relevance for understanding how identity-based pressures operate across different social and political contexts. The mechanisms of authentication, essentialisation, and internalised inadequacy examined through the concept of ethnostress are not limited to Indigenous settings. Similar dynamics can be observed among national minorities navigating competing state narratives, for example, in comparison between Indigenous Sámi in Finland and the Polish national minority in Lithuania (Starkutė and Pilarczyk-Palaitis 2026), as well as in post-Soviet and post-socialist regions framed as “insufficiently Western” (Buchowski 2006), and in postcolonial societies shaped by developmentalist hierarchies and internalised discourses of under-developed (Rodney 1972, Escobar 1995, Prashad and Zinn 2007, Soekoe 2020). Beyond ethnic contexts, comparable

while Pertti Peltto (1987) analysed technological and social transformations among Skolt Sámi communities, particularly the effects of snowmobile adoption on reindeer herding and social relations. Similarly, Ludger Müller-Wille (e.g. 2001; Müller-Wille and Thannheiser 2003) contributed to studies of Sámi land use, cultural landscapes, and environmental and political changes in the Arctic. While these works have provided valuable insights into Sámi livelihoods, land relations, and socio-economic transformations, questions of identity formation, lived experiences of marginalization, and what is conceptualised in this dissertation as ethnostress have received comparatively less focused anthropological attention. However, they were not entirely untouched topics, for example, Paine’s article “*Trails of Saami Self-Consciousness*” (1987) on Sámi internal diversity and political mobilisation. Müller-Wille wrote a dissertation on Sámi and Finns ethnic lines in Ohcejohka (1971 [1974]), but later focused more on Sámi livelihoods topics. Beach published material on Sámi definition in Sweden (2013, 2007).

processes appear in gendered and ableist regimes of normativity, where individuals come to evaluate themselves through externally imposed standards of authenticity, normality, or legitimacy (in gender studies e.g., Simone de Beauvoir 1949, Gilligan 1982, Butler 1990, Allan 2017; in disability studies Campbell 2008, recently by Jóhannsdóttir et al. 2022, Aunos 2022). By conceptualising ethnostress as a product of broader power structures that regulate recognition and belonging, this research opens possibilities for comparative inquiry across colonial, postcolonial, and other normative orders. While grounded in settler-colonial theory, the study thus contributes to wider debates on how hegemonic expectations shape self-perception, collective identity, and strategies of negotiation and resilience in diverse marginalised contexts.

Methods

This dissertation is based on long-term ethnographic fieldwork conducted primarily in Aanaar³ (Fin. *Inari*) on the Finnish side of Sápmi, with additional visits to Norwegian and Swedish Sápmi for observations, museum visits, and cultural events. My engagement with the region began in 2016, when I spent four months working in the Sámi Archives and familiarizing myself with local communities and archival materials, including ethnographer Juha Pentikäinen's private collection. I returned for my master's thesis fieldwork in June–September 2018 and conducted my main doctoral fieldwork from September 2023 to June 2024. The research data combines participant observations and hundreds of pages of field notes, formal interviews (nine life-story interviews and eight semi-structured interviews), numerous informal conversations and interactions on the topic, a diverse range of materials, including media sources, blogs, social media, art (movies and literature), and revised 35 Finnish high school books of geography, society science, and history books looking at representations of Sámi. During the fieldwork, I have participated in language (Finnish, Inari Sámi, and Northern Sámi) and handicraft (sewing, silversmith) courses, community events (festivals, dissertation defences, markets, discussions). Everyday activities also informed the analysis, which is further supported by local scholarly works.

In this dissertation, I approach *ethnostress* both as an emic and an analytical concept. I first encountered the term as an emic expression circulating within Sámi society, used to describe various stressors associated

³ I use the names of villages, towns, and cities in the Sámi language, primarily used in the area or originating from there.

with being Sámi. I then traced its intellectual genealogy, examining how the concept was originally developed in North American Indigenous scholarship to describe the psychological strain caused by colonisation and cultural disruption, and how it was later adopted and rearticulated within Sámi academic and public discourse with somewhat transformed meanings.

In the Sámi context, ethnostress refers to the pressures arising from questioned identity, expectations of authenticity, and the experience of being evaluated against normative images of “proper” Sáminess. Literary and artistic works, such as the poetry discussed by Kuokkanen, portray Sáminess as both a source of strength and a site of tension, suggesting that ethnostress is not only oppressive but also generative in opening space for identity redefinition. Media narratives similarly reveal how ethnostress circulates publicly, often articulated through concerns about language loss, insufficient cultural knowledge, living outside Sápmi, or the burden of representing Sámi people to outsiders in a context where Sámi history remains marginalised in Finnish education.

Ethnographically, I observed that feelings of “not being a proper Sámi” emerged repeatedly in everyday conversations. Over time, I came to understand these recurring expressions of inadequacy, self-questioning, and exhaustion from constantly explaining Sámi history and identity, while one does not have any topics in the Finnish education system on Sámi history, as manifestations of ethnostress. In interviews, I asked participants directly how they understood the term, while also analytically identifying its dimensions through observation and informal discussions. Rather than offering a rigid definition, I conceptualise ethnostress as a dynamic and contextually shaped experience that captures the affective consequences of living under ongoing settler-colonial expectations. As I argue in Chapter 5, naming this feeling is itself significant: it allows individuals to recognise that what may appear as personal inadequacy is in fact structurally produced, thereby opening possibilities for collective reflection and decolonial response.

Although this dissertation focuses empirically on the Sámi in Finland, I draw on Sámi scholarship and public discourse from across Sápmi. I do not treat the Finnish, Norwegian, and Swedish contexts as entirely separate analytical units, as Sápmi constitutes one Indigenous homeland and many of the identity discourses, authenticity debates, and colonial dynamics circulate across state borders, albeit with internal variations shaped by different national policies. Nevertheless, the primary empirical material and ethnographic analysis presented here concern the Finnish context. It is also worth noting that parallel phenomena are articulated differently elsewhere; for example, in

Norway, comparable experiences are often discussed under the term “minority stress” rather than ethnostress.

Chapters

This dissertation is structured as a cumulative argument that moves from structural conditions to lived experience and, finally, to everyday practices of negotiation and agency. Chapter 1 outlines the methodological and ethical framework of the study, situating the research within anthropological and decolonial approaches and reflecting on the researcher’s positionality, fieldwork relations, and knowledge production. This provides the foundation for an ethnographic analysis that prioritises lived experience and Indigenous perspectives.

Chapter 2 establishes the broader structural context by examining the history and ongoing dynamics of settler colonialism in Sápmi, including processes of land dispossession, assimilation, erasing of cultural objects and Sámi signs from landscape, and the regulation of Sámi identity. This chapter presents the “pillars” of settler-colonialism dispossessing colonized people in various ways. Building on this, the Chapter 3 identifies expectations of authenticity as another “pillar” and a key mechanism through which settler-colonial power continues to operate, showing how Sámi identity has been constructed relationally in opposition to the majority society and shaped within ethnopolitical movements. Chapter 4 introduces the concept of ethnostress and develops it as an analytical tool, combining existing literature with ethnographic material to demonstrate how these structural and discursive processes are experienced in everyday life. It shows how expectations of authenticity produce tensions around belonging, cultural competence, and identity, often resulting in feelings of inadequacy and fragmentation. Finally, Chapter 5 shifts the focus to agency, examining how Sámi individuals and communities respond to and negotiate these pressures through everyday practices. Drawing on theories of everyday resistance and practice, it demonstrates that ethnostress is not only a condition imposed by settler-colonial structures, but also a site where identities are actively reworked and rearticulated. Taken together, the chapters show how ethnostress connects processes of settler colonialism and coloniality at a macro-level with experiences of identity and belonging at a micro-level, while also highlighting the active role of individuals and communities in navigating and transforming these conditions.

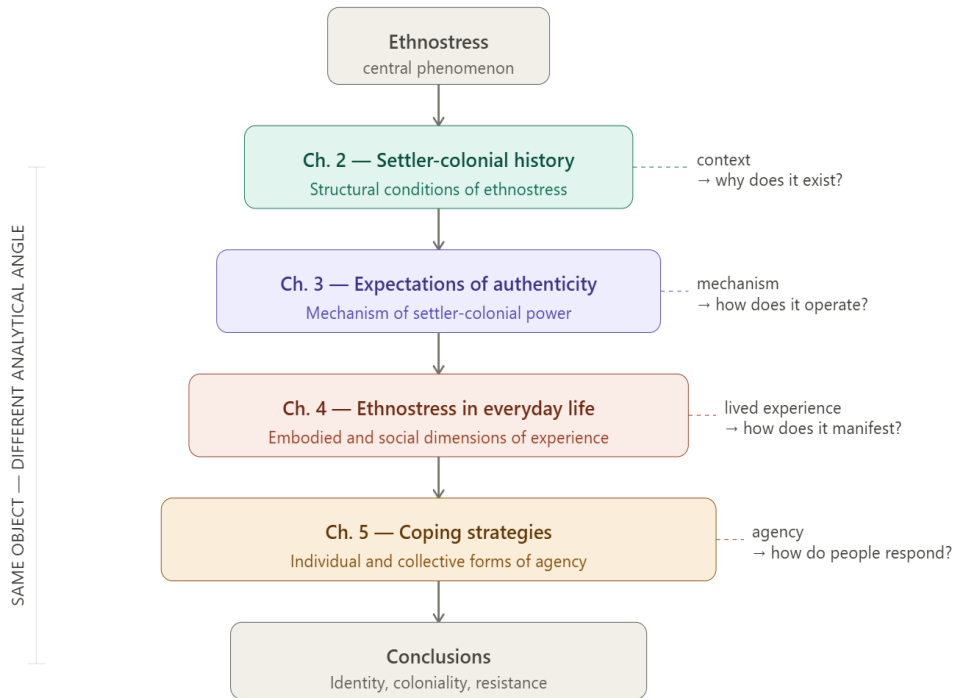


Figure 1. The scheme of analysis. Generated with the AI tool Claude

1. FIELDWORK: METHODOLOGY AND ETHICS

1.1. Relationship with the Field

I was driving my old Renault, the one I had got here in the north, back to the cabin in Kaamâs (Fin. *Kaamanen*) where I had lived during my fieldwork, following the summer months spent in my home country, Lithuania. Tired and sleep-deprived, I had already driven 1,600 kilometres with very little rest. About 130 km further on, having just passed Suoločielgi (Fin. *Saariselkä*), I was driving through the fell, along the E75, towards Avveel (Fin. *Ivalo*) and Annar (Fin. *Inari*), and finally to my cabin in Kaamâs. This time, I was driving there not so much for research purposes but to enjoy my time there and write. However, I still felt somewhat reluctant to return, even though the most intensive phase of fieldwork had already ended. For the first time in a long while, I felt that I could enter Sápmi primarily as a visitor and a friend rather than as a researcher. Returning without the immediate demands of fieldwork therefore felt unexpectedly liberating.

I reached the top of the fell and a magnificent mid-August view of the meeting point of taiga and tundra landscapes opened before me. My fatigue and the feeling that I was again here in Sápmi whelmed me. Warmth and excitement filled my chest and even my eyes welled up with tears. I guess I was happy to be back. It was a feeling of grandness, freedom, calmness, peace and at the same time adventure and the fullness of life. It did not take long, however, for reflection to follow. Driving through these landscapes again reminded me how attached I had become to this place, despite the fact that living and working here had often been challenging. I just started thinking of that, when the scenery changed. In less than 30 km after I had crossed the fell, I suddenly felt immense fear, anxiety, and misplacement. I was approaching places I knew well, people I knew well, and various memories I associated with these places. I had no idea why I suddenly had such fears nor why they would emerge. The relationship with a fieldwork site is rarely straightforward; over time, places become intertwined with responsibilities, memories, relationships, and ethical obligations. What began as fascination with Sápmi gradually became a far more complex emotional attachment, shaped by both personal experiences and the demands of long-term ethnographic engagement. My anxiety was not simply a private emotional reaction, it emerged from my specific position as a non-Sámi researcher working in a highly researched Indigenous context, where academic expectations, ethical responsibility, personal attachment, and fear of causing harm had become inseparable.

The researcher's emotional responses are not merely autobiographical details but part of the conditions under which ethnographic knowledge is produced. Emotional responses do not stand outside ethnographic knowledge production: they influence where the researcher goes, the questions they ask, the relationships they pursue or avoid, and how they interpret what they encounter. For ethnographers, reflecting on the fieldwork process is such a crucial chapter since it gives so many insights into the field, data collection, and all possible ways data could be shaped by one's actions, background, positionality, and ethical choices. At the same time, it is a very intimate chapter since one has to show the inner discussions, doubts, considerations, joys and hardships. It is quite hard to figure out how and where to start this chapter. I could hide behind technicalities and step-by-step explanations of my methods, but that would not be an honest account as it is also a very emotional journey that never ends. I have never truly left the field, and if I did, I always planned to return. However, from the point of view of a researcher and ethnographer, I formed a contrasting and controversial love-hate relationship with it. From the best moments as a human finding connections and most memorable, dear, and lasting relationships with people to insecurity and sometimes quite fearsome and repulsive over-researched place fatigue, where one starts to doubt all one's choices and the very grounds of the work.

This research has been filled with ethical dilemmas and searches for my own position, preparations, and answers to those dilemmas before and during the dissertation fieldwork in 2023–2024. From the perspective of contemporary ethnographic practices, one could say I chose a very stereotypical path of being a foreign anthropologist in a small Indigenous community. However, this experience was filled with a lot of contemporary debates and politics of research ethics and restrictions from the Indigenous communities. While I describe these issues in further paragraphs, I would say that it took a long time to form my personal stand and position, and a need to grow and mature as a researcher and anthropologist. I still do hold many doubts. Yet now I am enjoying the luxury of taking distance and writing down all the thoughts that have occupied my mind and sharing them with colleagues and readers.

I was 23 when I first came to live in Aanaar in 2016 to do my post-graduate internship at the Sámi Archives. Ten years have passed. This place has grown on me over the years and in many ways formed who I am. I guess it happens to many anthropologists – the field gets written into us. It becomes a big part of one's life and self. Some may argue that I do not have sufficient distance methodologically, and I agree with it beforehand. However, times have changed in our research too. Expectations for involvement in the field

are much higher too. Therefore, I do consider it an advantageous and ethical position. Nonetheless, I recognise the whole set of drawbacks coming with it, such as emotional investment and fears. I hope that I will succeed in elaborating on both in the following pages.

In 2023, I started my dissertation fieldwork. However, my work in Sápmi started much earlier. The first time I came to Aanaar was in 2016, and I spent more than 4 months there from August to December. I worked at the Sámi Archives, becoming familiar with the places, people, and research topics. I was working with ethnographer Juha Pentikäinen's private collection. From June to September 2018, I did fieldwork research for my master's thesis, and from September 2023 to June 2024 – I conducted fieldwork research for my PhD. In addition, I made shorter visits and have continued to live and travel between Sápmi and Lithuania.

In the following subchapters, I will explain the research process step by step. I will start with the research region and its environmental, urban, and linguistic landscapes. I will then continue with questions of ethics, positionality and how they are shifting in the field. Subsequently, I will turn to the preparations for the fieldwork – from skillsets to obtaining ethics boards' permissions. After that I will focus on the field itself, describing where research took place, what research materials I collected and how I made decisions on that. I will pay more attention to the reflection and description of the interviewing process. I will conclude the chapter by weighting the possible benefits and risks of the research.

1.2. Research Region and Field Sites

The research took place on the Finnish side of Sápmi. My primary fieldwork was conducted mainly in the municipality and village of Aanaar. However, during my fieldwork visits, I also made trips to the Norwegian and Swedish sides of Sápmi and engaged with Sámi contexts beyond Finland, through travel, conversations, observations, and reading related to the Swedish and Norwegian parts of Sápmi, visits to museums and cultural events. While I approach Sápmi as a transnational cultural and historical whole, I remain attentive to how state borders, distinct colonial histories, and differing national policies shape local conditions and experiences. Therefore, this dissertation is grounded in Finnish Sápmi, while drawing selectively on insights from other parts of Sápmi where relevant.

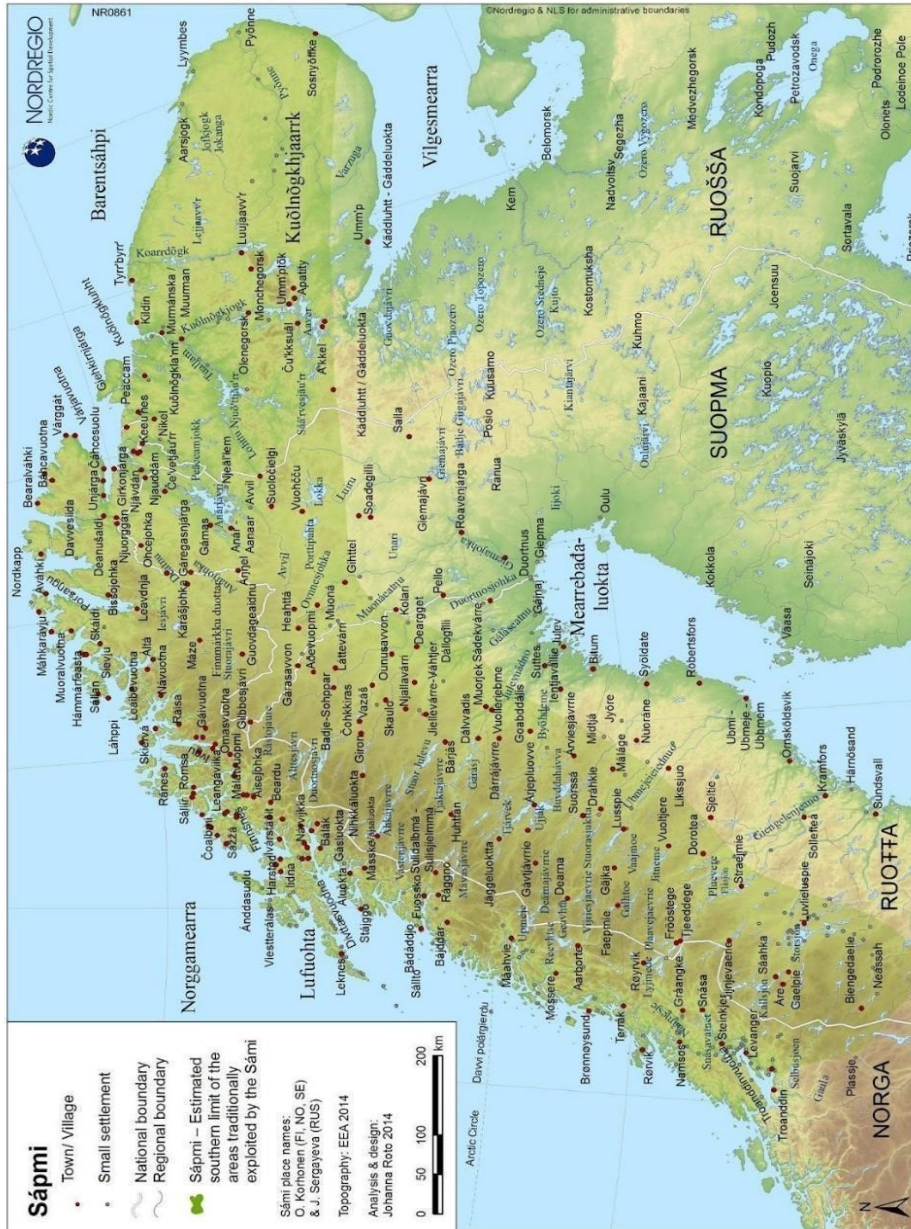


Figure 2. Map of Sápmi by Nordregio. Cartographer/designer Johanna Roto. Source: <https://nordregio.org/maps/sapmi/>

The greater part of Sápmi lies north of the Arctic Circle, within the subarctic climate zone. It is a cold and relatively dry region where temperatures rise above 10 degrees Celsius for no more than three months of a year. The dominant biome is taiga – a boreal forest of forests of pine, spruce, and birch – although the relief and landscape vary considerably across the region. In northern parts, where mountainous and hilly areas are common, trees gradually disappear and tundra starts. Vegetation there remains low-growing, often close to the ground in shrub-like forms. The lowlands are covered with coniferous forests. In the west, striking fjords, valleys, and glaciers shape the landscape. Owing to the mountains and the Gulf Stream, the climate there is milder, though also more humid. The Swedish part is rich in rivers, while the eastern part in Finland is characterized by numerous lakes. The western and northern edges of Sápmi are bordered by the Arctic Ocean. As elsewhere in northern Europe, the terrain of Sápmi is rocky, creating a distinctive subarctic landscape shaped by trees, stone formations, hills, and moss-covered ground.



Figure 3. Hills and tundra in Sapmi. Personal Archive. 2024.



Figure 4. Hills and forests in Sápmi. Personal Archive. 2025.

The northern parts of Fennoscandia are among the least populated regions in Europe. For example, the municipality of Inari (Inari Sámi: *Aanaar*; North Sámi: *Anár*; Skolt Sámi: *Aanar*) is the largest and most sparsely populated municipality in Finland. Only about 7,000 people live in an area roughly equivalent to one quarter of Lithuania's territory. Residents live in small towns, villages, or in isolated houses scattered throughout the forests. At the same time, Sápmi also includes larger urban centres. On the Russian side lies Murmansk (Russian: *Мурманск*), the largest city in the Arctic region, with approximately 300,000 inhabitants.

Tromsø (Norwegian: *Tromsø*; North Sámi: *Romsa*) located between fjords along the Arctic Ocean coast in Norway, has around 76,000 residents and is the third-largest city in the region. Although situated outside the formal boundaries of Sápmi, Rovaniemi, in Finnish Lapland on the Arctic Circle, is the largest city in northern Finland and attracts numerous tourists each year who come to visit the “home” of Santa Claus. Meanwhile, Kautokeino (North Sámi: *Guovdageaidnu*) and Karasjok (North Sámi: *Kárášjohka*) are often regarded as the Sámi “capitals” of Norway; Other important Sámi centres include Gällivare (North Sámi: *Jiellvárri* or *Váhčir*; Swedish: *Gällivare*) in Sweden and Lovozero (Russian: *Ловозеро*; Kildin Sámi: *Луяввьр*; Skolt Sámi: *Luuǰäu'rr*; North Sámi: *Lujávri*) in Russia.

During my first stay in Sápmi in 2016, I lived in a family home in the village of Aanaar, where I rented a room. The family became very close and dear to me. They introduced me to places, people, and local ways of life. In the summer of 2018, I lived in a small cabin in Siggávuonâ (Fin. *Sikovuono*) in a family household. I cycled every day about eight kilometres each way to Aanaar village to work at Sámi Cultural Centre *Sajos*. Since it was a friends' family, I had a beautiful time living there and sharing everyday life. The dissertation fieldwork lasted from September 2023 to June 2024. In October, I stayed at a friend's house in Aanaar village until I found accommodation of my own. I moved to a cabin in Kaamâs (Fin. *Kaamanen*) for the rest of my fieldwork. I was very pleased to find the cabin and have an opportunity to live alone in the woods, by the river, with my own yard and in peace. This way of living came with its challenges. The cabin without a lock was sometimes scary when tourists occasionally drove into my yard, once even in the middle of the night. The cabin also had only an outdoor toilet and in minus 30 degrees Celsius temperatures was not much fun or comfort to use. I had only an outside sauna instead of a shower, which meant carrying buckets of water and piles of wood. In extremely cold temperatures, such a seemingly romantic process took way longer than one would like after long workdays. Once, I was terribly tired and angry and had an interview the next day, so I had to heat the sauna to be more presentable for an interview. It was cold, I was carrying firewood and buckets of water to the sauna and back to my cabin, and it was snowing again after I had just cleared the snow from the big yard and the road. That made me even more frustrated. As I carried those buckets I found myself muttering swear words. Suddenly, the northern lights illuminated the sky. I, however, did not stop to admire them, and they did nothing to improve my mood. I merely looked up and thought, "*Oh, great, now the tourist will probably come to my yard looking for a better place to watch them*" (it had happened before). Still angry and grumbling, I went on with my household chores. As I stood by the porch of the sauna, I realised how funny the situation actually was. I was engrossed in daily life, got used to everything and localised myself to the point that, like everyone else, I was not paying attention to the northern lights, I was tired of tourists, and snow meant only more shovelling and more money spent for a snowplough as the area was just way too large for one person to manage. Tourists would be coming to my yard to see the lonely little cabin thinking they had found an "authentic" Sámi woman, who, unfortunately, is just another tired anthropologist.

During the last 10 years, I have visited quite a few places around Sápmi, and took the observations and gathered materials there in connection with the research. During my stays in 2016 and 2018, I did not have a car or

a driving licence, so I took opportunities when I could to travel with friends, hitchhiked across a region with very little traffic, and cycled. During these years, I attended many events such as the famous watercross snowmobile competition in Avvil, Finnish and Sámi karaoke-dancing evenings, annual markets such as ones in Vuonnabahta (Nor. *Varangerbotn*), and Jåhkâmáhkke (Sve. *Jokkmokk*), a famous annual winter market since 1605 in Lule Sámi lands. I volunteered at music festivals such as local Ijahis Idja Indigenous music festival in Aanaar; a Sea Sámi music festival Riddu Riddu, which took place in Olmmáivággi (Nor. *Manndalen*), in the Gáivuotna Municipality (Nor. *Kåfjord*), and visited the Indigenous movie festival Skabmagovat many years in a row. I also visited many places and museum for research interests around the Arctic Ocean coast like Girkonjárga (Nor. *Kirkenes*, Kven: *Kirkkonieni*), Vuonnabahta (Nor. *Varangerbotn*), Davvenjárga (Nor. *Nordkapp*) and places around them. I travelled to the Swedish side through the most beautiful Sápmi areas on the Swedish and Norwegian sides along mountainous roads from Giron (Sve. *Kiruna*) to Ábeskovvu (Sve. *Abisko*), a coastal Áhkánjárga (Nor. *Narvik*), Bådåddjo (Nor. *Bodø*), visited settler history sites such as Gammelstad Church Town in Luleju (Sve. *Luleå*), and important centers of Jiellevárri (Sve. *Gällivare*) in Sweden, Kárášjohka (Nor. *Karasjok*), Guovdageaidnu (Nor. *Kautokeino*) in Norway, in Ohcejohka (Fin. *Utsjoki*) and Skolt Sámi village of Če'vetjäu'rr (Fin. *Sevettijärvi*) in Finland. I also visited the old rock paintings in Álaheadju (Nor. *Alta*, Kven: *Alattio*), sacred rocks in Skárfaváhki (Nor. *Skarsvåg*), or Ailigas in Utsjoki. In addition, I paid visits to museums, such as Siida in Aanaar in Finland, or Ájtte in Jåhkâmáhkke (Sve. *Jokkmokk*) in Sweden or to a small family museum, such as Sea Sámi Museum in Porsángu (Nor. *Posanger*, Kven: *Porsanki*). I picked cloudberries in friend's family areas, other berries, and mushrooms, hunted, and visited and helped in roundups.

However, the primary site of this research was the village of Aanaar. Aanaar is a centre of Finnish Sápmi where most Sámi institutions are located, including the Sámi Parliament, a branch of the National broadcaster in the Sámi languages, *Yle Sápmi*, cultural institutions such as the Sámi Museum Siida, the Sámi Archives, and the Sámi Educational Institute. As a result, the village attracts many people from other parts of Sápmi and Finland to work and study there. I conducted interviews with the research participants mainly in the village of Aanaar; however, not all participants were originally from areas around Aanaar. Most of them came from the municipality of Aanaar, the largest municipality in Finland, covering 17,333.65 sq. km, and were living in Aanaar village at the time of the interview. Some grew up in the municipality of Ohcejohka (Fin. *Utsjoki*), particularly around Gáregasnjárga (Fin.

Karigasniemi). Three Sámi participants were born and raised in the areas of metropolitan Helsinki, Oulu, and Rovaniemi with family ties in Vuohčču (Fin. *Vuotso*) in the municipality of Soadægilli (Fin. *Sodankylä*), and to the municipality of Ohcejohka (Fin. *Utsjoki*).

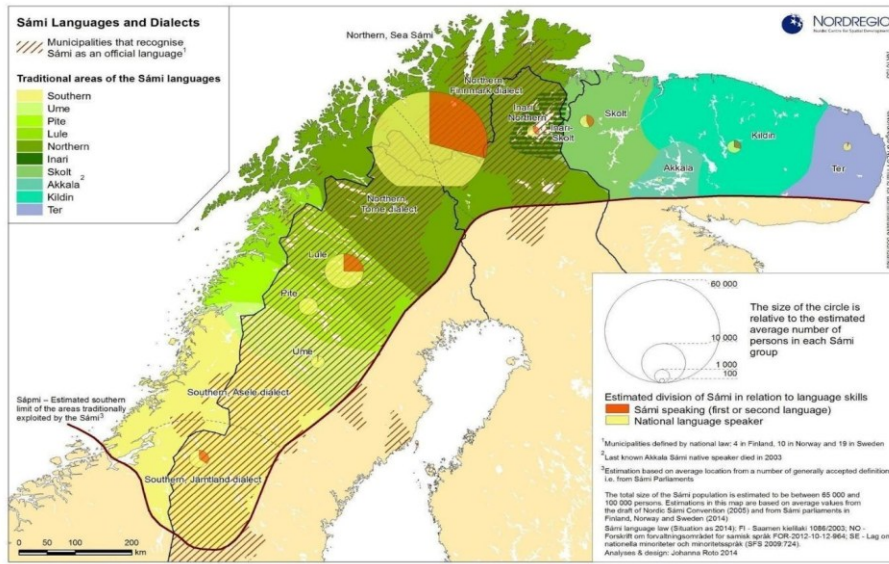


Figure 5. Linguistic map of Sápmi by Nordregio. Cartographer/designer Johanna Roto. Source: <https://nordregio.org/maps/sami-languages-and-dialects/>

The idea was to have a variety of research participants, including geography, which reflects various ethnostress experiences rather than collect data from a single village or a particular geographical area. Some participants had grown up in predominantly Sámi villages where Sámi was the main language spoken and Sámi people formed the majority of the population. Others were raised in cities and did not learn Sámi. Still others grew up and lived in Aanaar, where Finnish is the dominant language and the majority of the population is Finnish. The geographical area in Sápmi matters a lot when talking about ethnostress. Participants often mentioned the differences between various parts of Sápmi.

For example, Kautokeino or Karasjok in Norway are known to be “very” Sámi towns where everyday language is Sámi. On the Finnish side of Sápmi, the most common comparison is between Avveel and Aanaar. Although only 40 km apart, they are described by their differences in the Sámi culture. While Aanaar is considered the capital of Finnish Sápmi, Avveel is a municipal administrative centre. Many people pointed out Avveel as being a very Finnish town in comparison with Aanaar, which is a Sámi village, as one

Finnish resident of Aanaar comparing two towns noted in a group discussion involving a person from southern Finland (Fieldwork notes, 2023). Racism, according to some participants, is most vivid in “very Finnish” Avveel. Even though Sámi-language daycare and language services are available, Finnish remains the dominant language. The Sámi Truth and Reconciliation Commission has documented testimonies on everyday racism as part of its report. Hostility towards Sámi people and language in Ivalo was mentioned: *“According to many interviewees, Ivalo, the administrative centre of Inari, has been a difficult place to live and grow up as Sámi, because Sámi people have been treated there with hostility. Interviewees describe how even today parents are reluctant to speak Sámi to their children there because their own and their parents’ negative experiences remain in memory”* (Sámi Truth and Reconciliation Commission report, Part II, 2025, 98, my translation). Another research participant who grew up in a Sámi-dominant village made a similar comment. She reflected that, for Sámi people who had been raised and lived in cities, dealing with ethnostress was much more difficult in comparison to her who has grown up in more Sámi-centred environments:

But I don’t know if I was in a big city and or if I did not know how to speak Sámi, it might be, like, harder. Or more ethnostress for me. Because I think they are the biggest things, especially the language people stress about. But yeah, I am lucky enough that it’s my mother-tongue so I yeah. It has never been like a problem for me. (Interview 2023, Aanaar, alias Biret, aged about 25)

This is a very important aspect since a bigger proportion of Sámi people live in urban centres in the south of Finland. As Pirita Näkkäläjärvi noted in a media article about returning Sámi people suffering from ethnostress: *“Helsinki is called the largest Sámi village in Finland”* (Salomaa 2012, my translation). Overall, the geography of the study is mainly the municipality of Aanaar; however, it extends to other nearby regions of Sápmi, as well as Sámis living in cities in Southern Finland. Research participants also come from different backgrounds in the Sámi area. Some come from Sámi-dominant villages, others from more Finnish-dominant ones. Such a diversity of research participants helps to understand how the geographical background affects the participants’ experiences of ethnostress.

1.3. Ethics, Positionality, and Research Sensitivity

Ethics

Although my master's research (2019) raised questions I wanted to explore further—particularly around expectations of authenticity and the internalised feeling of being “not proper” Sámi, I hesitated for a long time and initially chose a different direction for my PhD. I began with a project focused on representations of authenticity in international Indigenous advocacy NGOs, before eventually returning to the questions that had first emerged from my fieldwork. The idea behind it was that I felt I had grown too personally invested in Sápmi and people, something in my previous ethnographic training seen as personal and scholarly risk, and my position as both a friend and a researcher felt unclear and emotionally challenging to manage. Therefore, in the beginning I decided to shift my field to advocacy strategies and research broader structural processes between NGOs and states and how their negotiations for Indigenous rights in advocacy processes create certain strategic discourses.

However, I did not feel invested or comfortable with this new field and took academic leave to reconsider it. This led to changing my topic and fieldwork site back to Sápmi. I faced yet another ethical dilemma with both research topics as to whether I was the appropriate person to do such research being a non-Indigenous researcher, the question circulating in the Indigenous studies. Moreover, since we now know that research is not “helping the humankind” (Smith 2005, 2), but is instead political and *“research is not an innocent or distant academic exercise but an activity that has something at stake and that occurs in a set of political and social conditions”* (Smith 2005, 5), such choices become more morally pressing on the ethnographer and require justification of one's choices.

I share the position that native voices and Indigenous or any local small group researchers have to have prominent voices because of the domination of colonial countries. Big and economically and academically influential countries have dominated academic discussion and theoretical frameworks for a long time. Such problems can be seen particularly clearly in Indigenous contexts, where the history of research has in many cases been appalling and dehumanising. Comparable, though historically distinct, problems have also characterised research in other parts of the (post)colonial world, including the Global South and post-Soviet countries, where colonial and developmentalist discourses have shaped research practices and knowledge production. In response to this, Indigenous scholars and

communities increasingly shape discourse around Indigenous research. At the same time, recognising the importance of local and Indigenous voices does not mean that outsider perspectives have no place in social research. Particularly within post-objectivist approaches, multiple positions can offer different perspectives and interpretations. Research can thus be understood as one contribution to a broader discussion, offering valuable insights without overshadowing local voices. Besides, the more radical proposition that only members of a particular group can understand that group's experiences also raises concerns. George Hull (2022) calls this “epistemic ethnonationalism.” Such a position assumes that a group possesses its own epistemic system and ontology that cannot be fully understood by those situated outside that group and its systems of knowledge. While there is considerable value in recognising the limits of understanding across different epistemic and cultural positions, taken to its extreme, this logic risks essentialising groups and denying the possibility of shared human experiences and mutual understanding. Essentialist understandings of human groups also have troubling historical precedents in colonial and racial thought, even though contemporary assertions of epistemic difference can themselves be understood as reactions against precisely these legacies. From a political perspective, therefore, a radical rejection of the possibility of understanding across group boundaries risks obscuring both connections between people and the possibility of shared human experience.

In my view, the purpose of anthropology as a discipline is precisely that in researching differences and similarities of human societies we understand patterns of human behaviour and common experiences. It correlates with what Tim Ingold (2017) describes the difference between ethnography and anthropology in that ethnography is the faithful description of lived experiences within specific contexts, while anthropology is a broader, speculative discipline that explores the conditions and possibilities of human life more generally. However, what Ingold emphasizes is that while anthropology should maintain intellectual freedom to engage critically and openly with human life it is philosophical and speculative. Ethnography, on the other hand, is an educational and conversational process involving people from whom we learn in the field. An anthropological dissertation as such is a mix of both, documentation of ethnography *with* people – things one learns in the field about the subject of matter, and interpretation which ultimately is a speculation about human life, or in other words, an engaged public conversation conducted in accordance with academic principles. But “speculation” is an important exercise, a meeting of different cultures, groups, and knowledge systems where self-social critique forms and alternative ways

of imagining social life become possible (Marcus and Fisher 1999, 1-6). While for groups we research anthropology might provide study and critique of dominant power structures, and tools and weapons for advocacy, it offers cultural critique of dominant ways of understanding and conceptualising the world and opens new ways of seeing. However, this is a dichotomous way to see researchers and the researched reminiscent of twentieth-century anthropology when Western researchers would travel to Indigenous communities. Today, we converse in a much broader amplitude of cultures, backgrounds, positionalities, and research places, whether with small communities or global corporations. Research can be understood as a process of dialogue and what Ingold (2017, 4) describes as “correspond”⁴ rather than representing. I approach anthropology as a practice of thinking alongside others, a reciprocal practice, where outcomes are not predefined interventions, acknowledging the speculative and open-ended nature of anthropological inquiry.

Most importantly, I mentioned these common human experiences because, during the academic break, I slowly started connecting Sámi’s ethnostress and the feeling of being “not proper” to my own post-Soviet experiences and, later, to broader (post)colonial experiences. This brought new clarity and purpose to my research, connectedness to the people I would hope to work with, and a broader theoretical interest. It was precisely this postcolonial experience of Lithuania, marked by cultural revival alongside a persistent sense of peripheral inadequacy vis-à-vis “the West,” that formed both the emotional and analytical basis for my interest in examining how colonial legacies shape the boundaries of Sámi identity and the experience of being “not Sámi enough.” I was born shortly after Lithuania restored its independence. It was the time of growing revitalisation of various Lithuanian cultural traditions, which were no longer forbidden, with a lot of manifestations of ethnic culture, such as the revival of old Indigenous Lithuanian religion as well as ethnic tensions. As an adult, I am part of a generation that has not experienced colonial traumas – from killings, rapes, and tortures to silence, anonymity, double facades, surveillance, and mistrust – our grandparents endured and our parent’s generation grew with. Discussions of these traumas and silence around them started to uncover. In such a way, I felt I could at least in some way relate to other relatively recent (post)colonial experiences of colonized people. At the same time, it was a

⁴ Ingold uses the term “correspond” to describe participant observation as a way of engaging with people by attentively noticing, responding, and learning with them, rather than studying them as objects. It emphasizes mutual interaction and education rather than objectification.

period of economic deprivation and rising poverty, crime, and suicide rates. Even though people believed in freedom, democracy, and a better future, the 1990s in many ways were an unfair and dangerous transformation time, leaving many people disappointed, followed by the global economic crisis in the early 2000s and the constant threat of colonisation again since Russia continued to pursue its expansionist policies towards Ukraine, Georgia, and Chechnya. I was in school when Lithuania joined the EU and at university when the country adopted the euro. Those were remarkable achievements; however, since Europe was always a goal and a way to make up for lost decades in occupation, we grew up with a feeling of inadequacy, the feeling of being lesser Europeans, not enough Westerners, sometimes referred to in Lithuanian context as an inadequacy complex. This background made me interested in the similarities and differences between the Lithuanian and the Sámi case – our cultural revival started at a similar time. In the Lithuanian case, the statehood was restored; in the Sámi case, they remained Indigenous living in settler-colonial states with growing autonomy, revival of many cultural traditions, discussions what was “ours” and at the same time what the legacy of colonialism, reconfigurations of ethnic boundaries, and feelings of pride and inadequacy were.

These reflective comparisons, made me think what inadequacy means in broader terms of coloniality. Inadequacy embedded in coloniality can be observed across other settler colonial and postcolonial contexts such as in other indigenous groups, the Global South, or Eastern Europe. Indigenous people struggle with expectations of authenticity, “real” and “proper” Indigenousness imposed on them from outside and often are perceived as inadequate if they do not meet such expectations. Similarly, Eastern European countries and their populations are often discursively understood as “not enough” Western or European. At the same time, the postcolonial Global South or previously the “Third World” grapples with the consequences of long criticised developmental policies and perceptions of “not enough developed” and “poor”, an image that their residents have also internalised (Escobar 1995; Soekoe 2020). It therefore appears that all previously called “Third”, “Second”, and “Fourth” Worlds experience the feeling of inadequacy as a result of the domination of the “First World”. The concept of inadequacy can also be observed in relation to normativity, again pointing to an important lens through which to see power relationships. In gender studies it can be seen through the expectations of gender performance, and through internalised ableism in the context of ability/disability. Returning to my fieldwork choices, it became important for me to situate my research on Sámi ethnostress within a broader analytical purpose. I came to understand ethnostress not simply as

an individual experience, but as a concept with wider potential for examining power dynamics between regions, social groups, and identity formations, particularly as these dynamics are internalized and experienced through feelings of inadequacy and not being “enough.”

After long and slow considerations during academic leave, I decided to continue my fieldwork in Sápmi. There were several reasons behind this decision. I could not leave or use material I collected about “not feeling proper Sámi” during my master’s research without researching it deeper. While the material was not sufficient, my curiosity was too strong. Secondly, it felt unfair to the people who already participated in interviews and trusted me with their time and energy. Thirdly, connecting experiences between various (post)colonial contexts, let me untap the important potential of this study to research the broader theoretical phenomenon of “inadequacy”. So, the combination of these factors seemed to be a strong reason to go back to Sápmi as a fieldwork site. To make my research align with the expectations of the Sámi people, I read many guidelines and Indigenous research methodologies, kept the importance of the benefit for the community in mind, and adapted my research methods to heavily-researched context.

Dynamics in Positionality

It is worth considering the dynamics of positionality that shape relationships with research participants. The positionality of an anthropologist, a foreigner, a Lithuanian female in her early 30s, and my personal characteristics, all shape my relationship with research participants. At the same time, it is not only my position in the researcher’s role that is important to consider when analysing the data and reading this dissertation, but also the positionality of research participants. Their roles change depending on the situation. Friends become informants when a recorder is turned on; lay people become representatives of the Sámi community during the interviews in their capacity as politicians, mental health professionals, media persons, and reindeer herders. Most participants come from both Sámi and Finnish backgrounds, but since the interviews were about Sáminess, their position in the interviews was that of being Sámi. This affects what is said, how it is said, and what is left unsaid during conversations. These effects are difficult to identify. It is more important to keep that in mind and understand that in different circumstances and with different people and researchers, the data gathered could be different.

After outlining these considerations, it is possible to reflect on some noted dynamics of positionalities. During the interviews, I introduced my

research and the broader context of my interest to understand the relationship between coloniality and feelings of inadequacy. I also shared my background as a Lithuanian and my feelings of inferiority associated with coming from a post-colonised post-Soviet country. The introduction always took quite a long time, but I believe it was important to make people more relaxed and open to talk about their insecurities. This approach not only showed my ability to relate, but it was also an intimate gesture of sharing my insecurities before asking research participants to share theirs. On the other hand, I encountered quite a few jokes in different settings in casual interactions, for example, when helping people or doing them a favour, and about being a “cheap Lithuanian labour”. The positionality of informants played on West/Finnish/Nordic and Post-soviet/Lithuanian/Baltic states dynamics and providing the background for the humour. In a few exceptional cases, I encountered references to Lithuania and the Baltics as “developing” countries or “fake all Russian speaking” small countries. I do not try to pour my moments of bitterness and inferiority during fieldwork. Such remarks were usually made jokingly. What it rather shows is that the dynamics of positionality are changing and affecting both the researcher and the research participants. It shows that the categories and dichotomies of white/West vs Indigenous, previously so-called First vs Fourth World, and minority vs dominant group are not so black and white in reality or in research ethics and methodologies. These categories are situational and positional. They change depending on the situation, just as the vulnerabilities of both the researcher and the researched shift and move from one to the other. As a researcher, I was taken seriously. Participants expressed expectations regarding my work, or denied interviews because of the abundance of researchers and public discourse on the topic. Sometimes people were pleased with sharing their thoughts, other times they were scared or even joking about the abundance of the researchers conducting research in Sápmi.

Reflecting of positionality and on Māori scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith’s thoughts about imagination in academic writing (Smith 2005, 37), I came to realise that my understanding on how Sámi are dealing with ethnostress and of “narrative imagination” is based on my own limited imagination defined by my background. For example, even though I come from a country with a postcolonial history, however, in today’s Lithuanian society, I belong to the ethnic Lithuanian majority on both sides of my family. As a result, it may be more difficult for me to understand or empathise with people from Sámi backgrounds. Being from a small country and belonging to the majority ethnicity in a very homogeneous nation-state, it may be very hard to understand why Sápmi seeks autonomy rather than separate nationhood. My intention here is not to engage in the discussion on autonomy vs

nationhood. I rather wish to point out that even though now I understand the various nuances of ethnicity and state relationships much better, I might be blind to them to some extent because of my positionality and my experiences or my limited imagination in the ways I think about cultural revival, decolonisation, resistance, taking back power, or sensitive identity questions. Lithuania, like Finland, is a relatively young nation-state whose modern identity is shaped by histories of foreign domination, and both countries carry strong narratives of having been victims of colonisation. In Finland, this self-understanding has long complicated the recognition of its own settler-colonial relationship with the Sámi, since colonialism is imagined as something that happened to Finns rather than something enacted by them. Similarly, I may also be blind or less empathetic in the understanding of the majority-minority dynamics coming from dominant society backgrounds. In this case, I can only acknowledge this limitation, keep it in mind, and remind the reader that it is just one of many possible analyses, from one perspective, and from one positionality on the topic of ethnostress. Like any analysis it can be full of both flaws and insights. I have only elaborated on a few positionalities mainly related to my national background, however, there are so many more, which are often more challenging to identify clearly during the research process.

What these reflections demonstrate is not merely that positionality matters, but that the research relationship itself is inherently dynamic and mutually constitutive. It is not only research participants who are exposed, categorized, or made vulnerable in the research encounter; the researcher, too, becomes subject to stereotyping, positioning, and shifting hierarchies. The field is therefore not a stable site where knowledge is extracted from fixed identities, but a space in which both the researcher and the participants are continuously negotiating who they are in relation to one another. Acknowledging this dynamism does not invalidate the analysis; rather, it situates it as one situated interpretation among many possible ones, produced through a specific constellation of backgrounds, imaginations, asymmetries, and moments of vulnerability.

Academic Sensitivity

The sensitivity of research in Sápmi must be understood against the backdrop of a colonial research history, including the period of “Lappology”, when Sámi communities were objectified through racial science and anthropometric practices. These experiences have left lasting traces, informing contemporary efforts toward epistemic self-determination and cautious engagement with external scholars. Since there are still many

researchers coming to Sápmi, people also feel what is called “research fatigue”. The first time I heard the joke about anthropologists was in 2016. They say the true Sámi family consists of a mother, father, four children, and an anthropologist. Ironically, at that time I was living in precisely such a family.

Not only were various decolonial theoretical, methodological, and ethical dilemmas occupying my thoughts, but once I made up my mind to continue with the topic, I encountered a lot of considerable and alerting comments as well as questions within academia. These kept me alert and highly aware of the sensitivity of the topic I was planning to research. However, at the same time, I unreasonably mistrusted myself as a researcher, was fearful of doing something wrong, and I was self-judgmental and self-policing on research-related ideas, questions, and themes. A friend in Helsinki once told me that people were surprised when she mentioned that I would be conducting fieldwork on the Sámi topic. She said she could not do it as a Finn, but maybe I would be accepted as a foreigner. On other occasions, I felt at times my research was not always taken seriously by non-Sámi academics who at times appeared dismissive, rolled their eyes, questioned my background, and suggested that this might explain my lack of understanding of where I was heading. Many times, I was reminded in academic circles that Sámi identity was a very sensitive topic and that this topic could lead me to academic “suicide”. Others referred to legal cases making me cautious about possible psychological issues because of a very harsh environment for early career researchers. Other students would talk to me after conference presentations on my project, asking how I felt about researching in Sápmi. It only increased the pressure, and I often thought I might be doing something bad and wrong without any clear reason. I knew that people only try to prepare me for possible hardships and ensure I understood what I was getting myself into. I understood and appreciated that they had not been ignorant but wished to support me. However, I felt some dissonance about all this situation, a weird paranoid feeling that I did not know something or somebody did not tell me why the topic was so impossible to research. Similarly, the comments about research of Sámi topics were discussed in the book *Vastatuuleen* (2019) by Kukka Ranta and Jaana Kanninen. They share doing their research as Finns on Finnicization processes, and receiving comments and questions from other Finns about why they got involved in Sámi disputes and that Sámi people just were upset about everything.

Only later in the field, when my fears with every month and every meeting or interview lessened, did I realise that the reason for it was that there was a mismatch between what I heard in academic circles and what I never

heard in the Sámi community. I have never felt any direct hostility towards me because of doing my research. Of course, I always discussed the ethical aspects of the research and ensured I followed Indigenous research ethics guidelines as closely as possible. I had many supportive comments on the topic, too. Nevertheless, I kept a critical eye on these experiences and recognized the possibility that the Sámi modesty and reluctance to offend others might have discouraged them from expressing criticism. My takeaway from this experience was that, interestingly, in academia, it was enough to mention keywords “Sámi” and “identity”, and people’s reaction was one of scepticism. It seemed that people could only imagine the most popular, scandalous, and over-exploited topic of who was and who was not Sámi. Sámi people are tired of the subject since it has received considerable attention in Southern Finland through the media, court cases, and activist texts, and Sámi people have to explain the issue repeatedly. They are often asked about it by Finns from the south, academics, and journalists. There have been many books and research papers on the topic of who is considered a Sámi person legally and about the alternative Sámi movements such as Forest Sámi (*metsäsaamelaiset*), Sámi without Status, neo-lapp, or self-indigenised movements (Lehtola 2015a, Sarivaara 2012, Sarivaara, et al. 2019, Junka-Aikio 2022b). However, there was never a question about what I was and was not researching when I would say “ethnostress” up north in Sápmi. For them, as well as for me, it seemed to be a different topic. I think this shows the sad part of academic research, that the prominence of one highly controversial topic can overshadow all other critical topics that may be more beneficial to the Sámi community. The very mention of a Sámi topic related to identity would automatically make other scholars think only of the definition question and caution before trying to understand it. When it comes to Sáminess and definition debates, I adopted the position that this interested me only to the extent that such debates affected legally recognised Sámi people and their ethnostress. For example, Lehtola suggests that since the debate started in the ’90s, the entire generation grew up hearing discussions about who can and cannot be recognised as a Sámi (Lehtola 2015a, 264–265), and even for those who are legally recognised as Sámi, these debates can give rise to doubts and stress. However, apart from providing a short description of the issue as the context in the following chapters, I do not touch the debate, as I do not consider it my place as an outsider. Rather, it is the matter of the community itself.

1.4. Preparation, Fieldwork, and Methods

Preparation

Once I finally crystallised my position on various ethical dilemmas to myself and answered questions about what this research meant for the parties involved, I started the preparation for the fieldwork. This involved training language competences, obtaining a driving licence, securing funding, and arranging fieldwork permissions.

I started to learn Finnish a long time ago. However, it was not consistent, and with long breaks. I started studying Finnish during my bachelor's studies for two years (2012–2013) with half a year at the University of Helsinki as an exchange student. Then, no further courses were available at my university, therefore I was unable to continue. Only in the spring of 2022, during my PhD studies, did I resume my studies of Finnish. I took online lessons with a private group, and later joined classes of the Finnish Philology programme at Vilnius University. By the time I began fieldwork, my language skills level allowed me to read, understand conversations on various topics, and hold basic conversations. Once I arrived in Sápmi, I registered for a Finnish language course, and a Sámi language course with instructions in Finnish. However, my language skills were not yet sufficient to hold proper conversations and I was conducting interviews in English. All research participants had an excellent command of English, which is common in Finland, and especially within the multilingual Sámi community. I had expected that by the end of the fieldwork, I might be able to conduct interviews in Finnish with people who spoke little English, especially those from the older generation. In the end, however, I decided against doing so because of the sensitivity of the topic, and I did not want to have any misunderstandings. Furthermore, to do interviews in English felt appropriate, since English was not a mother tongue either for me or for research participants. In this way, we maintained quite equal power dynamics in terms of language use.

During my language studies, we had a visiting lecturer from Helsinki who told me about the funding possibilities offered by the Finnish National Agency for Education (Fin. *Opetushallitus*) for international researchers focusing on the Finnish language and/or culture in their research. I applied and received the funding with the host institution, the Arctic Centre, at the University of Lapland. I also hoped it would be much more reliable and trustworthy for the research community if the research were approved and funding was granted by a local Finnish institution, considering the sensitive nature of my research topic. At the same time, it allowed me to establish

important contacts, make my research known in broader academic circles in Finland, and receive support from the anthropologist community for consultations at the Arctic Centre. Finally, I think this also strengthened the credibility of my research in the eyes of the research participants, since the application had to go through not one but three institutions.

Despite that, there were additional applications to continue with fieldwork. In total, I prepared four ethics and research approval proposals, which shows again the academic sensitivity of the research in the Sámi community. I prepared a proposal and was granted permission by the ethics committee at Vilnius University. Later, I learned that permission was required from the Sámi Parliament. The Parliament page stated that permissions were required not only for research concerning cultural heritage and traditional knowledge, but also for other topics. Since the description was inconclusive, I decided to apply in any case. I prepared the application text and sent it to the given address in February 2023. After some time, I contacted the Parliament, and I was informed that, in my case, I did not need permission. Later, I received an email explaining that the Parliament would not have human resources to process applications for a while, and it was only a recommendation that would not prevent the continuation of the project:

*Dear Ugné,
as I implicated on phone, the Sámi Parliament has no possibility the upcoming weeks, until the third week in May, to handle your application as we deem that it does not directly touch Sámi cultural heritage or Sámi traditional knowledge. The giving/withholding of the applied permission by the Parliament is a recommendation and lacking the permission does not prohibit you from advancing the planned project. Wishing you successful work (email exchange, 2023 April)*

I interpreted it as a “green light” for my research project and only then started to apply for fieldwork funding. Once I finally arrived at the Arctic Centre at the University of Lapland, where I was taking care of documents and preparing to depart for fieldwork in Spami, I was filling out the ethics committee application for research at the University of Lapland. However, after it was submitted, the committee raised the question about whether I needed it if I was a visiting PhD scholarship student. We discussed it with the Finnish National Agency for Education and the University of Lapland’s lawyer and concluded that I did not need a permit from the University of

Lapland. The ethics review by Vilnius University was sufficient for visiting researchers.

After spending some time in the field, I was advised by a friend that it might be worth for my topic to examine the Skolt Sámi case more closely, since ethnostress may be shaped by their migration history and different position within Finnish Sámi society. The Sámi Parliament's website page on research permits mentioned that researchers needed a separate permit to conduct research with Skolt Sámi communities. The permission had to be given by the Skolt Sámi Village Council. For this reason, I applied for permission from the Skolt Sámi Council. However, after 3–4 months, I received the answer that permission had not been granted. I contacted the Council to ask for reasons so I could be transparent with other research partners and be more accurate in describing it in the ethics chapter of my dissertation. The explanation was that it was a sensitive topic and seemed a significant burden for a small community:

*Dear Ugne Barbora Starkute,
thank you for your message, I'm sorry that my answer has delayed
due to busy work schedule.
The decision itself was written down with no feedback, but I can
shortly describe the matters that were brought up during the
conversation. The study method was considered intensive, and the
topic was considered distressing. Therefore, the research seemed be
more of a burden to a small community.
If you have granted an agreement from Sámi Parliament, it would be
good inform them, that Skolt Saami Siida Administration did not grant
an agreement. Great, that you are planning to explain the situation to
other participants. Good luck to you in your studies! (email exchange,
2024 May)*

The reply reflected the fears of bringing more ethnostress to people, hence I respected their decision. I decided not to conduct specific research in the Skolt Sámi area, and explained the situation to Skolt Sámi who participated in research. I had already spoken to them and asked if they wanted to stay or withdraw from the research. The participant stayed in the research.

Overall, it was a long and consistent preparation process. It took a lot of effort, many documents to fill, many procedures to navigate, and well-weighted ethical decisions to make. Ultimately, I think I managed to stay transparent and honest about my research. Today, there are new Sámi research guidelines, and more work has been done to establish a clearer framework for

researchers what ethical decisions are expected from them by the Sámi community. The preparation for the fieldwork was challenging and a huge ethical burden with every little detail, word, or action, and could easily affect my motivation and making me stop and hesitate.

Research Process and Collected Materials

This research was based on ethnographic fieldwork, consisting of long-term participant observations, fieldwork notes, formal and informal interviews, and the analysis of media, artistic and educational material. The research drew on hundreds of pages of fieldwork notes, numerous informal conversations and observations, eight life-story and eight semi-structured interviews, and around 650 media posts, media articles, fiction literature and films, and various museum materials such as brochures and books, and high school textbooks. The main focus was on interviews where the topic of ethnostress could be addressed directly with informants. However, during the research other materials, such as observations, media materials, and even art started to play a more important role as the number of interviews was limited due to the sensitivity of the topic and research fatigue. In this section I will provide detailed information on the data collection process, my adaptation to an over-researched place, and some reflections on interviews.

My first visit to Aanaar was in August-December 2016, when I came for a traineeship at the Sámi Archives after completing my bachelor's degree. Although not designed for systematic data collection, the 2016 stay was significant in establishing contextual knowledge through immersion in Sámi culture, everyday life, and local environments. At the Sámi Archives, I worked with ethnographer Juha Pentikäinen's private collection and gained access to all other collections I was organising. This opportunity let me become familiar with Sámi culture through old photographs of places I would later visit. Through photographs of people and places with names, I started to connect Sámi's last names – kin groups – with specific areas, which is a very important aspect of Sámi cultural life.

I had the opportunity to read various manuscripts and books on Sámi history and culture. However, my learning did not come only from books and documents, but also by living with the family from whom I rented a room. They took me to places, became my close friends, told stories, and shared their lives. Since the Sámi Archives are located in the Sajos Sámi Cultural Centre, where many other Sámi organisations are located, including the Finnish Sámi Parliament, I had the opportunity to meet various people working for different Sámi organisations, listen to public Parliament discussions or presentations,

and visit cultural events at Sajos. I wrote many pages of field notes mainly on my first impressions (which are now very interesting to compare with my current understanding). I also made plenty of photos from various visits, read literature on Sámi-related research, learned about the area and Sámi culture, attended main cultural events in Aanaar, and made a lot of contacts and friends that have continued over time.

I started to collect empirical material more intensively in 2018, and the topic of ethnostress showed in talks and interviews. I briefly visited Aanaar in the winter of the early 2018 for the Indigenous film festival *Skábmagovat* and met with friends. I observed the festival, kept fieldwork notes, and became more familiar with the Sámi film scene. Later in the summer of the same year, I returned to conduct my fieldwork for my master's thesis and work as a trainee at the Sajos information desk as a tour guide. My stay lasted slightly more than two months. As a master's student undertaking fieldwork training, I collected many pages of fieldwork notes following the strict methodology of thick descriptions emphasised in methods books (although, in retrospect, it was not always necessary), visited places and travelled, and collected nine life-story interviews lasting between one and three hours each. However, one interview was not used, and the participant withdrew from the study. After the fieldwork, while working with data and transcribing interviews, I noticed repeating words and phrases of feeling "not proper" Sámi. I returned to the field again in autumn 2019. However, after the COVID-19 pandemic began in 2020, I was unable to return for almost three and a half years.

During my dissertation fieldwork in 2023–2024, I made a preparatory visit in the summer before the start of fieldwork to Rovaniemi, the University of Lapland's Arctic Center, where I would be affiliated during my fieldwork. At the same time, I visited Aanaar to reconnect with people, renew contacts, and visit places and museums. In September 2023, I returned to the north and started fieldwork with a scholarship grant from the Finnish National Agency for Education (Fin. *Opetushallitus*). After spending the first weeks in the Arctic Centre, becoming familiar with it and working on various documents for migration, social security, and research permits, I arrived in Aanaar at the end of September, with the first snow. I registered for many courses that the municipality organized in various villages across the area. It was my way to broaden my social circles and learn and practice languages. I first started to attend an Inari Sámi language course and a sports class in Aanaar village, a sewing course in Kaamâs, and a Finnish language course in Avveel. Later, I enrolled in a short ceramics course in Avveel, another intensive sewing course in Aanaar, an intensive Sámi silversmithing course at the Sámi Education Institute SOGSAKK, and, finally, an intensive Northern Sámi language course, followed by continuation courses. During these courses, I had fears

and struggles about how to introduce myself. I wanted people to know that I was a researcher so that they would be aware of my presence as someone who observes and listens. I did not plan to collect data specifically in those settings, but things seen and heard cannot be undone. However, with limited language skills, the lack of appropriate moments, the pressure when trying to find the right words, my brain would go blank from stress. I decided to introduce my research when I have an opportunity, or when talking to people in a class one on one, but not force it in situations, especially not directly connected to research. I did not directly meet people there who I would interview, but it definitely gave me valuable connections in the community, let me engage with and learn a lot of cultural things, and understand Sámi culture better.

Figure 6. Overview of fieldwork visits and main empirical materials collected

Visit	Duration	Location(s)	Role / Context	Empirical Material Collected	Interviews
Aug–Dec 2016	~4–5 months	Aanaar (Sajos Sámi Cultural Centre)	Traineeship, Sámi Archives	Fieldwork notes (first impressions), photos, archival materials (J. Pentikäinen's collection), contextual immersion	—
Summer 2018	~2–3 months	Aanaar	Fieldwork for MA thesis; trainee, Sajos info desk	Fieldwork notes (thick description), travel/site visits	9 conducted (8 used; 1 withdrew)
Sept 2023–2024	~9 months	Aanaar and around Sápmi	PhD fieldwork (Opetushallitus scholarship)	Fieldwork notes, diary/reflections, language and skills courses, cultural event attendance, textbook review, media materials, museum materials, art/literature/film	8 conducted

Visit	Duration	Location(s)	Role / Context	Empirical Material Collected	Interviews
Throughout doctoral project	—	Finland and wider Sápmi	Collection and analysis of supplementary materials	Media posts (approx. 650), news articles, social media screenshots, blogs, webpages, films, literature, museum materials (brochures, books), 35 school textbooks, local scholarly publications	Informal conversations throughout

In total: hundreds of pages of fieldwork notes and observations, 16 interviews (life-story and semi-structured), extensive informal conversations, and diverse textual, visual and educational materials.

I was always trying to reciprocate people offering my time, and in this way give back to the community and people who have always been so lovely and welcoming. I helped people in various ways, for example, taking my friend to courses in another town, driving friends to attend concerts in another town, helping to take a boat from the lake for winter to my friend's father, building a wood shed for my acquaintances, and planning a terrace for a friend. Throughout the year, I also attended all cultural events available to me – concerts in the local bar Papana, where the old good method of drinking beer and meeting people worked best, visited Skabmagovat Indigenous Film Festival, Jáhkâmáhkke (Sve. *Jokkmokk*) annual winter market, the defence of Sámi scholar Áile Aikio's dissertation, exhibition openings at the Siida museum, municipality strategy meetings at the Sajos Sámi Cultural Centre, and later in the summer I returned for the Ihajis Idja Indigenous Music Festival for third or fourth time. In total, I gathered an additional eight semi-structured interviews; reviewed 35 Finnish high school textbooks of geography, social studies, and history looking at representations of Sámi; engaged in numerous informal conversations; collected media material (news articles, social media screenshots, blogs, web pages), artistic material (films and literature), researched local scholarly work, and collected hundreds of pages of fieldwork notes and observations, and personal diary reflections documenting an emotional rollercoaster during the fieldwork.

During the dissertation research and writing processes, I used Atlas.ti for my fieldwork data coding, and the Zotero software for literature reviews. In addition, various AI tools assisted me in the writing process. For paraphrasing, rewriting in concise and clear ways, or summarizing, I used Chat GPT, Claude and Humata.ai. Grammarly was used for English language corrections.

Notes on Interviews and Research Participants

While interviews I conducted in 2018 were in-depth, unstructured life-story interviews with preliminary guidelines on a person's biography and Sáminess, the interviews conducted in 2023–2024, were semi-structured. In 2018, I chose participants in random order. I tried to maintain gender symmetry, and the informants I chose were both Sámi and non-Sámi. The common snowball method for reaching possible research participants was not suitable for such a sensitive topic and an over-researched place. My strategy was to approach people based on their professional background and roles in the community. Since I had a long-lasting relationship with the field, I relied on my contacts and made new ones, participating in various events and through friends. I was exploring life stories, and it was important for me to gather various stories to see people's lifelines, positions and opinions regarding Sáminess and even Sámi politics. In 2023–2024, I chose participants based on their background. I approached people who are Sámi, but I also conducted one repeated interview with a non-Sámi participant because of her Sámi children and the aspects of raising them. I contacted people I had interviewed in 2018 and with whom I wanted to have further conversations to see how their thoughts had changed over the five-year period. I conducted three repeated interviews and asked two more participants to repeat the interviews. However, one person declined, explaining that her words had often been misunderstood and had led to some negative experiences, so she decided not to give interviews anymore. With another participant, communication simply stopped with no reasons. The repeated interviews were beneficial and much deeper than previous biographical interviews because I already had known people's backgrounds. Other participants were new people, whose stories and opinions I was interested in exploring because of their diverse backgrounds. Some participants were reindeer herders, mother-tongue Sámi speakers; some did not speak Sámi or learned it later in life; some lived in Sápmi, and others in cities in Southern Finland. I also approached people for interviews because of their professional background, including a Sámi politician, a mental health professional, and a

media representative. There were more professionals with whom I agreed to do interviews, such as filmmakers and teachers. However, communication stopped for reasons unknown. To reduce the stress of an over-researched place, when contacting people to participate in an interview, I would always emphasise that I would understand if they did not want to participate, that Sápmi was over-researched, and that declining was completely acceptable. I think that sometimes I may have over-emphasised it, or if communication with potential participants stopped, I generally did not contact them again as I did not want to burden them. However, in retrospect, such fear of burdening people may have had a negative side, because sometimes people may have simply forgotten to answer and by not following up, I may have communicated that I was no longer interested in speaking with them.

In most cases, I agreed to have interviews in restaurants over lunch or dinner so people's time would be saved for preparing food, and also, in this way, my treat was my way of expressing gratitude for the time shared with me. I also always had small gifts from Lithuania, such as chocolates, honey, sweets, and liquor. Before an interview, I would update the questions depending on the person's background and our previous interactions in an interview or informal conversation. I would review interview transcripts and fieldwork notes and adapt the general guidelines to specific cases. At the beginning of each interview, I asked for permission to record the interview. I recorded interviews with a recorder that did not have Wi-Fi, so the data was safe. Then, I explained my research topic, how I decided to research it, and my future plans in connection with it. I also introduced the broader context of the inadequacy feeling and the relationship between feelings of inadequacy and coloniality, as well as my personal relation to the feeling of inadequacy and my background (as explained in the subchapter above). After that, I explained anonymisation and the possibility of being identified if a person chooses to. I would inform them that we would come back to this question after the interview. I also explained where the data would be kept and when the dissertation was expected to be completed. Following this introduction, I proceeded to interview questions. If it was a new participant I first focused on biographical details, asking where the person had been raised, where their parents and grandparents came from, etc. If the interview was about a participant's professional activities, I would ask them to tell how they chose this career path and to describe their work in more detail. After establishing this background, I moved to the topic of ethnostress. I reminded myself to stay within my research topic of ethnostress and asked the participants if they had ever experienced ethnostress. Then we would go deeper into their experiences: the situations, times when they felt "not proper Sámi", where they thought

these feelings originated from, whether they perceived expectations of Sáminess and experiences of ethnostress as differing depending on gender, whether they noticed such experiences more or discussed them with friends or family, what their language learning process was like to them (if the person learned it later in life), what their experiences in language courses often held at the Sámi education institute and discussions with other people there were like, whether the person's feelings of ethnostress had changed over time, how the person tried to deal with it, and what had helped in this process (if stronger experiences were in the past). Later in the interview, I moved to two different topics related to ethnostress. The first topic was representations of Sámi in Finnish school textbooks and expectations of Finns and foreigners about Sáminess. I would ask what people remembered learning about Sámi in school since the lack of dominant population knowledge on Sámi and by Sámi people was often mentioned as a reason for ethnostress. I also asked what kinds of questions they were asked in Southern Finland once people learned they were Sámi and what experiences they had with tourists. The second topic was about development projects – people's feelings and opinions about various mining, forestry, wind power, and railway projects, which often are understood to affect reindeer herding and Sámi identity, and also show research participants' relationship with the Finnish state and opinions on its policies concerning Sámi people. If the conversation allowed, I also asked about what indigeneity was for them and how they understood it. It helped me to better understand the common discourse of indigeneity in Sámi society. At the end of the interview, I asked participants about their age, gender, and pronouns, their preferences regarding anonymisation, and their right to withdraw from the study at any time.

One exchange with a potential research participant, gave a lot of thought on the circumstances under which people agree to talk on such sensitive matter. I did not know the person well. We met once several years ago, on a bus. I was going from Aanaar to Helsinki; the person was heading South, too. When I started the research, I decided to contact this person. However, I received a warm and polite answer saying that the topic was interesting and something the person had been thinking about lately. However, the person felt that such thoughts were still very personal and was not ready to share them for academic purposes. What seemed very informative to me was that the person did not feel ready to share experiences with me. I then compared this situation with the interviews I had taken. My previous conversation was easy because the person wanted to share her thoughts, seemed to have her narrative figured out and told me that she had been talking about it with other people in the community. Based on this experience, I

concluded that people may be more willing to talk once they have their Sáminess narrative clear, figured out, and their ethnostress issues worked upon. As the message rejecting the interview shows, for people who still have things to figure out, those thoughts feel very personal, and they do not want to share their experiences easily since their narrative is not yet ready either for themselves or others to share. Yet, this is an observation from one case of rejection of an interview. There could be other interpretations, as well as a person's motivations. Nevertheless, this experience made me see interviews I had conducted from another perspective, and to look at how people present their narrative, how confident they feel about their opinions, to see if those who agreed to talk have their narrative about Sáminess figured out.

Overall, during both periods of fieldwork, I conducted 16 interviews with 13 different people (3 were repeat interviews). Two participants were non-Sámi but with Sámi children and 11 were Sámi people. Three participants lived in cities and 11 lived in Sápmi. Two participants were reindeer herders, others were media representatives, managers, scholars, a mental health professional, politicians and activists, an artist, a chef, handicraft practitioners, a musician, a language master translator, and cultural workers. Some participants occupied multiple roles. At the time of the interviews, most participants were between their 20s and 40s. One person was in their 50s, and one was in their 60s. There were eight women and five men, none of whom identified themselves as non-binary. Most of the Sámi participants had mixed backgrounds, with one of the parents being Finnish. However, it is important to note that in Sámi society one is Sámi if one of their grandparents spoke Sámi as their mother tongue. Therefore, mixed Sámi and Finnish family backgrounds do not mean anything less, though they often can impact a person's ethnostress experiences. Of all participants, two did not speak or learn Sámi, and the other 11 spoke Northern (7), Inari (3), or Skolt Sámi (1). Six participants spoke Sámi as their mother tongue.

Research participants were anonymised in order to protect their privacy and confidentiality. Pseudonyms are used throughout the dissertation, and identifying details have been altered where necessary. However, in a few cases, individuals who contributed in a professional capacity and who explicitly expressed their wish to be identified are not anonymised.

Adaptation to Research-Intensive Place

Since Sápmi is a historically and contemporary research-intensive place, where community activists and members have raised concerns about research fatigue in daily talks and the media, I needed to adapt my

methodology and data collection accordingly to minimise the negative impact. Many recommendations encourage people not to do research by interviewing without examining other material available for research, understanding the needs of the community, giving back to it and making research results available, and, most importantly, avoiding unnecessary interviewing. In my case, adaptation involved minimisation of interviews, collection of other available materials that had initially played a secondary role in my plan, and focusing more strongly on observing the life of the community, public discussions, and moods, something that, again I would have relegated to a secondary role, however, in this situation they became some of the most crucial data, giving depth to the researcher. I suppose this was only available because I had a long-term connection with fieldwork; for example, my social media feed was always full of posts by Sámi activists and politicians, Yle Sápmi news, and friends' posts. I have been following public discussions even without being in Sápmi for many years.

When preparing for the fieldwork, my original plan was to base my research primarily on interview material. I thought that I could not research such a highly private feeling of insecurity about one's own ethnic identity in another way. However, the importance of other methods such as observations, media materials, and artistic works soon became clear. I was planning to conduct more life-story interviews focusing on Sáminess to see if the topic of "feeling not proper Sámi" was repeating. However, since I already carried out life-story interviews in 2018, I decided to focus on semi-structured interviews on ethnostress and various pressures from inside and outside the community. During the fieldwork period, I contacted a range of Sámi community leaders, activists, public figures, artists, and researchers. With some, I conducted interviews; with others, I exchanged emails that offered valuable insights into the topic. Several individuals declined my requests due to lack of time or wish to talk to researchers. Many inquiries, particularly those addressed to NGOs, remained unanswered. Such refusals and silences are not exceptional but rather characteristic of a research-intensive context. In all my email exchanges, I made it explicit that I understood the place was experiencing research fatigue and that declining would be fully respected, as I sought to avoid placing additional pressure on already burdened people. At the same time, this experience has revealed a tension: while there are increasing calls for collaborative and community-responsive research, the researcher should check with the community what is needed and create opportunities for their input, the cumulative weight of past and ongoing inquiries can make these attempts difficult. Navigating this contradiction required recalibrating my expectations and adapting my research strategy, however, I also treated such

declines or silences to my emails as part of research material. At the same time, I tried not to overburden with inquiries, and after several interviews and correspondence with some official and public figures, shifted my focus to talking with people from the community I already knew.

As the fieldwork progressed, some more interesting observations emerged. While I had originally thought interviews would be my main source of the data, I gradually started to recognize how many things such as jokes about researchers and tourists, and alternative stories in the media about Sáminess are part of the way to negotiate ethnostress. Consequently, following the media, public events, and observations of other community life became equally important sources of data. At the same time, this reduced the need for interviews and helped minimise adding to already existing research fatigue in the community. Eventually, I incorporated media research for context on how ethnostress was used in public discourse. I searched for articles available in Finnish main media outlets (Yle, and some others) in which ethnostress was mentioned. During the fieldwork, I found other social media sources that did not have a systematic analysis but were important in understanding the role of social media and ways people negotiate ethnostress. Among these was the Yle *Sohkarsohkka* programme, which has an Instagram account with short sketches where ethnostress-related topics are sometimes addressed, and posts by activists addressing similar issues.

Another source was academic literature, and various forms of art, including films and literature which I saw as a source of data in social research. I gave myself much more time during the fieldwork to read important Sámi academic literature in Finnish such as Sanna Valkonen's *Poliittinen Saamelaisuus* [Political Sáminess] (2009), Veli Pekka Lehtola's *Saamelaiskiista. Sortaako Suomi alkuperäiskansaansa?* [The Sámi Dispute: Is Finland Oppressing Its Indigenous People?] (2015), went to Aile Aikio's dissertation defence on Sámi representations in Siida Museum collections, and read a master's thesis by a friend on a related topic concerning the wearing of traditional clothes. While visiting museums in various places and libraries in the village, I discovered works of fiction that resonated with my topic, including *Stolen* by Ann-Helén Laestadius and *Halle Helle* by Niillas Holmberg, in which the main characters experience tensions and pressures that can be understood through the lens of ethnostress. I watched various films and took notes or transcribed parts that were related to the topic, and sometimes approached film directors. In these materials, I found so many repeating narratives of people feeling "not proper Sámi". This accumulation of sources provided a sufficiently rich and repeating body of data on this

phenomenon varying from interviews, to academic and fiction literature by Sámi scholars and writers to see that data is thick enough, and I can stop.

Hence, I only needed to conduct semi-structured interviews about the ethnostress people experience to understand the feeling deeper: how people experience it, how they perceive Sáminess, how they perceive other people's experiences of it, what their experiences of expectations of Sáminess by tourists and Finns in the South are, how they respond to it, and what kind of strategies for coping with such expectations and feelings of being "not proper" Sámi they apply.

1.5. Benefits and Risks

To conclude this chapter, it would be valuable to weigh the benefits and risks of this research since the study has been completed. The greatest risk during this research was to add unnecessary pressure on people in Sápmi by conducting one more research in an over-researched place. Since I had a long-term relationship with the field, in my opinion, I was able to minimise the risk in the sense that people already knew me and felt more comfortable, and that I knew a lot about the field I was researching. Another important aspect was adapting methodology to a community burdened by research context by minimizing interviews, adding a bigger variety of empirical data to the methodology plan such as media articles and posts, literature or films. I acknowledge, however, that I still burdened the public figures of the Sámi community by sending emails and trying to contact them for interviews and other academic reasons. That, I agree, contributed to the already considerable number of emails they receive. At the same time, I assume that these figures have strategies and experience to manage such inquiries better than non-public figures. I also explicitly emphasised that participants could choose not to answer specific questions or withdraw from the research at any point. Quite a significant share of people I interviewed were people I already knew well, or we had connections through other people. This, hopefully, lessened the stress and added trust. Moreover, I sought community input on the topic with the community by contacting the Sámi Parliament and community leaders, speaking with local people, and getting their feedback.

At the same time, this study is significant because such an analysis has not previously been conducted. It contributes by addressing a gap in academic literature, opening up a broader scholarly discussion, and providing space for the articulation and recognition of lived experiences. Since the dissertation also analyses various ways people handle ethnostress, it, hopefully, at least in a conceptual way, adds more agency to the community,

shows the strength of the people and their strategies, and, in this way, contributes to shifting the narrative of victimhood to active agents fighting for survival and thriving as a community. As Linda Tuhiwai Smith writes, “[c]elebrating survival is a particular sort of approach” (Smith 2005, 145) methodologically. It denies the colonial discourse of dying peoples and cultures.

Taken together, the reflections in the previous subchapters frame this research as a dialogical and historically situated engagement rather than a neutral or detached undertaking. Conducted in Sápmi, where scholarly work is shaped by the colonial legacy of racialized research practices and contemporary research fatigue, this research inevitably unfolds within relations marked by caution, tensions, and dilemmas. The research reveals mutual shaping and negotiation not only of the participants, but also of the researcher, who are positioned, exposed, and at times rendered vulnerable within shifting hierarchies of power and belonging. Interestingly, the tensions around research reflect ethnostress – a tense atmosphere of being proper or not. It can add to the already existing one by the presence of researchers and reopening sensitive questions of identity, authenticity, and representation.

However, if a dissertation causes too much stress for the community, it could only be shared with other cultural and academic institutions, and remain within academic circles. On the other hand, if the need and importance of the dissertation for the Sámi community emerge in the future, a book or a monograph could be published and accessible to a broader audience. These, however, remain possibilities for future projects. The process entails the assessment of the possible impact on the community with colleagues and in consultation with the Sámi. Regardless, the dissertation will be shared with the research participants separately.

2. SETTLER-COLONIAL HISTORY AND DECOLONISATION OF SÁPMI

This chapter tells the history and contemporality of settler coloniality in Sápmi. The goal of this chapter is to examine the historical pillars of settler colonialism in Sápmi in order to situate contemporary Sámi experiences within a long-lasting structure of dispossession and control. I analyse the gradual appropriation of Sámi lands, the exploitation of natural resources, the dispossession of cultural objects, the erosion of markers in the landscape, the dismantling of social systems, assimilation policies, and state control.

2.1. The Beginning of Interest in Sámi Lands and Migration of Sámi people

Today, Sámi people live across Northern Europe: in Norway, Sweden, Finland, and the Kola Peninsula in Russia, in the land called Sápmi. The Sámi population totals 80,000–100,000, with most, 50,000–65,000, living in northern Norway, 20,000–40,000 in Sweden, 8,000–10,000 in Finland and about 2,000 in Russia. Sámi languages belong to the Finno-Ugric language group. There are 10 different languages (not all of them have survived until present day) and a similar number of regional groups recognized, for example, through traditional clothing. Along with modern lifestyles and occupations, Sámi also practice traditional livelihoods such as reindeer herding, fishing, gathering, and handicrafts.

The Sámi homeland is called Sápmi. In Norway, it covers areas such as Finnmark (Nor. *Finnmark*), Romsa (Nor. *Troms*), Nordlândia (Nor. *Nordland*), and parts of Tröndelage (Nor. *Trøndelag*). In Sweden, it stretches through Norrbottna (Swe. *Norrboten*), Västerbottena (Swe. *Västerbotten*), and into Jiemhten (Swe. *Jämtland*). In Finland, it covers the northern parts of Lapland, especially Eanodat (Fin. *Enontekiö*), Aanaar (*Inari*), and Ohcejohka (Fin. *Utsjoki*), and part of Soađegilli (Fin. *Sodankylä*). In Russia, it encompasses the Kola Peninsula (Rus. *Куэ́лнэгк нё́аппк*) (Kildin Sámi) in the Murmansk region. Historically, Sámi did not have much contact with Scandinavians (Norwegians and Swedes). Following the retreat of the ice sheets, Fennoscandia was settled by populations arriving from both southern and eastern directions. During the Bronze and Iron Ages, Germanic-speaking societies became dominant in southern Scandinavia, while Sámi-speaking communities emerged and remained primarily in the northern regions. The southern extent of historical Sámi settlement in Norway remains uncertain and is a subject of ongoing debate among historians and archaeologists. In some parts, however, Sámi people lived in the areas further south. For example, a

2022 study based on toponyms indicates that Sámi lived up to Uusimaa and Varsinais-Suomi, in the southernmost provinces of Finland. By the 14th century, Sámi in these lands were completely colonized and assimilated by Finns and Swedes (Solantie 2022). In Finland, however, the distinction between Sámi people and Finns has been less pronounced than between Sámi and the Germanic speaking Scandinavians. Finnish and Sámi languages belong to the same Finno-Ugric language group, and scholars have argued that they became separate languages and consequently separate ethnic groups when Finns adopted agriculture, and Sámi stayed hunters. This language schism should have occurred during the Bronze age, around 2000 BC (Lehtola 2002, 20). Agricultural livelihoods were practiced only in coastal areas, and by 1000 BC Sámi were still predominant in all Fennoscandia. The greatest extent of Sámi settlement occurred between the first and 11th century AD: “*Sámi lived from Lake Ladoga to the Arctic Ocean and from central Scandinavia to the White Sea. Except for the southwestern and southern coasts, all the present-day area of Finland was Sámi settlement area.*” (Lehtola 2002, 21–22). Sámi’s main livelihood was hunting for the furs and fur trade. The “savage hunter” image of Sámi people appeared in Cornelius Tacitus’ *Germania* in 98 AD. It is important to note that Sámi at the time did not yet herd reindeer (this only became a large-scale livelihood practice later, in the 16th century). The majority population were Forest Sámi who migrated to fish, hunt, trap animals, and gather according to the seasons (Lehtola 2002, 22).

It is thought that since the Viking Age, Sámi culture has gradually shifted northward, likely due to assimilation rather than conflict. Starting from the 15th century, Sámi faced growing pressure as neighbouring powers – the kingdoms of Denmark-Norway, Sweden, and Russia (Novgorod Republic and later by the expanding Grand Duchy of Moscow [Muscovy]) – increased their interest in Sámi territories as there were no fixed borders in the north. Sweden, unable to access the North Sea due to Dano-Norwegian control, sought a port on the Atlantic coast, while Russian expansion reached the Barents Sea coast. Each of these states claimed the right to tax Sámi. Consequently, Finnish-speaking tax collectors from the northern Gulf of Bothnia and Russian officials collecting taxes along the northern coasts began to enter Sámi territories. In 1551 Gustav Vasa (the king of Sweden and Finland, which was part of Sweden at that time) declared to be taking Sami lands and properties under royal protection and ordered Sámi to pay taxes. Settlements in the north were encouraged, but even back in the 14th century the king was encouraging tax collection in Lapland through so called *birkarlar* (Swedish) and *pirkkalaiset/pirkkamiehet* (Finnish; singular *pirkkamies*) tax-collecting traders in northern Scandinavia (present-day Sápmi) during the late Middle Ages

(Ranta and Kanninen 2019, 43). Even more pressure on the Sámi lands followed after the formation of the state borders. The borders were unclear until the end of the 14th century even though the first agreement was made between Norway and Russia in 1251. However, countries only had spheres of interest and were not interested in control over Sámi lands. In the first half of the 14th century there were treaties between Novgorod (Russia) and Sweden to draw the borders. North of the Ume River (Ume Sámi: *Ubmejejeanoë*), agricultural settlements and colonization was forbidden. However, Swedes were invading the Novgorod controlled area and establishing settlements where they were promised exemptions from military service and taxation for some time. In the Teusina Peace Treaty signed in 1595, a Swedish-Russian border (Finland was part of Sweden at that time) was drawn through the Gulf of Finland, the Lake Aanaar to Varangerbotn. This border separated eastern Sámi who were subsequently influenced by Orthodoxy and other traditions (Lehtola 2002, 22–23).

During this period, Sámi livelihoods changed. In the 16th century, overhunting driven in part by the Sámi's obligation to pay taxes to Norway, Sweden, and Russia, and by excessive trading with European markets which consumed enormous amounts of fur, led to a decline in the reindeer population: "The entire herd would be driven into the corral and killed" (Lehtola 2002, 26). As a result, most Sámi settled near fjords, coastal areas, and inland waterways, where they engaged in a mix of cattle herding, trapping, and fishing. A small group began domesticating reindeer and adopted a nomadic herding lifestyle. Although this group is often depicted by outsiders as embodying the traditional Sámi way of life, they actually make up only about 10% of the Sámi population.

Historically, Sámi people lived in *siida* – "Sámi villages" or "Sámi communities" – that were semi-nomadic seasonal settlement structures to make the best of different sources of livelihoods (Kuoljok and Utsi 2015, 13). A *siida* consisted of several nuclear families, which were relatives but not necessarily sharing the lands and means of livelihoods (Näkkäljärvi 2002, 114). While people migrated between different spring and autumn settlements, the winter village was their main gathering place where state officials would come to conduct administrative affairs (Lehtola 2002, 23). The *siida* system is understood as the prototype of the Sámi community and for long was thought to have loose structure and no permanent settlements before the arrival of colonisers. Lehtola argues the following image to be inaccurate: "*Sámi migrated for their livelihood, but only within their own carefully defined areas. The Swedish crown recognized the siida boundaries and ownership until the 1700s*" (Lehtola 2002, 23). Such *siidas* as mentioned here

were divided among kin groups and no other people from other kin could use the land. The importance of the kin and strong kin structures remain visible in Sámi society today.

The situation of *siidas* changed in the 16th-century. According to Lehtola (2002, 26) this was a result of “the States’ influence and the spread of colonization”. While this was the key reason, changes in livelihoods to big scale nomadic reindeer herding also affected the way of land use: “*It is thought to have spread southwestward from the Caledonian Ridge. It reached present area of Finnish Lapland at the end of the 1600’s, and only arrived in the Kola Peninsula in the 1800s*” (Lehtola 2002, 26). In the 17th-century reindeer herding grew in size and importance, becoming the main source of income and cooperation among reindeer herders. The structure of the village became organized around “the area of the land with reindeer grazing and an association of reindeer owners who together herd the reindeer” (Kuoljok and Utsi 2015, 14). Large-scale reindeer herding brought significant changes to Sámi society, especially for the earlier *siida* organization, whose diverse subsistence practices, such as fishing, trapping, and cattle raising, had gradually been replaced by full-time herding. As wild reindeer populations declined and pastures became available, reindeer keeping emerged as a practical alternative. Knowledge and techniques from hunting were adapted to herding, transforming livelihoods and social structures. The shift led to more nomadic lifestyles, long migrations, and changes in settlement patterns. Migration routes followed seasonal rhythms, and slaughtering often occurred near coastal markets. The traditional *siida* system began to break down, replaced by structures based on private ownership and enterprise, which caused inequalities and competition over land, even among Sámi groups. Reindeer villages replaced kin-based communities, and while full nomadic herding became a defining Sámi activity, it only lasted around two centuries as a widespread practice (Lehtola, 2002, 26–27).

National interest zones were divided in 1751. Even though Sámi were not consulted about it, they had freedom to move (Lehtola 2015a, 136). From the late 19th century onwards, the increasing enforcement of state borders across Sápmi restricted Sámi reindeer herders’ access to migration routes. The new national borders of Norway, Sweden, Finland, and Russia were drawn. In 1809, Finland became part of Russia, which meant the establishment of a new border right through the Sámi area. The border between Norway and Finland-Russia was formally defined in 1826. Previously, large areas of land had not had much control held by Russia, Sweden and Denmark-Norway. The restrictions along the Russian-Finnish and Norwegian border, especially later after 1852 prevented Sámi from reaching key winter pastures in Norway,

causing severe disruption to their way of life. As a result, many Sámi mountain reindeer herders were forced to resettle in territories in Sweden, Norway and Finland. In Finland, they migrated to areas such as Enontekiö, West Inari, Sodankylä, or even parts of central Scandinavia. This put an end to the long-distance nomadism of Sámi people (Lehtola 2015a, 136–137) and forced them to adapt to new environments and face pressures to integrate and choose a national identity. The border between Finland-Russia and Sweden was closed in 1889 (Lehtola 2015a, 136). However, the border between Norway and Sweden remained open to reindeer herders until 1940 as laid down in Lapp Codicil of 1751 on inherited rights. The border closed because of Germany's occupation of Norway and Sámi were not allowed to return after the war to the pastures. Sámi people had to adapt accordingly: *"Throughout history, the Sámi seem to have chosen their nationality tactically. They have chosen to belong to the state which at the moment was most favorable for their source of livelihood. New boundaries have often resulted in the Sámi having to move, or changing their means of livelihood."* (Kuoljok and Utsi 2015, 22).

At the same time, colonization intensified. From the late 19th century, significant numbers of Finnish settlers from the south moved northward into Sámi areas. These migrations, particularly to places like Inari, were part of a broader wave of internal colonization and economic expansion (Lehtola 2015a, 140). It was programmed by governments, sending people to live and develop agriculture in northern parts (Kuoljok and Utsi 2015, Lähteenmäki 2017). The influx of Finnish settlers altered the demographic and cultural landscape of the north, often without regard for the rights or traditions of the Sámi people. This movement contributed to the marginalization of Sámi communities.

Since then, the main dangers for Sámi people came from, first of all, the interests of nation-states and companies in natural resources and from national minority policies. For example, during the 17th century, Sweden needed more sources and income to participate in the Thirty Years' War. The ore was discovered and mining started on the border between Norway and Sweden. The distances between the Gulf of Bothnia and the mining and smelting areas was 400 km and the Sámi with their reindeer were forced to provide transportation. In the end, the mining brought little benefit to either the Sámis or Sweden as little silver was found. Later, when the railway was built in Swedish Sápmi, mining became easier and at the end of the 19th century two big iron mines were established in Kiruna and Gällivare, leading to the rapid growth of population (Kuoljok and Utsi 2015, 23). The mine in Kiruna is today one of the most important mines in the world (Kuoljok and Utsi 2015, 23). Ironically, in the old town of Kiruna, where the Swedish Sámi

Parliament is situated, the earth has caved in because of the mine and a relocation plan of the town is underway as by the end of the 21st century all town may collapse into the mine.

In Finland, the exploitation of forests started in the eastern and northern regions in the 19th-century. More and more timber was needed for the growing sawmill, pulp and paper industries. (Lähteenmäki 2017, 60). In Finland's arctic regions agriculture arrived with colonization and intensified during the 19th century. Some grains and potatoes could be cultivated in Lapland. It resulted in draining peatlands, clearing forests, lowering the water levels in lakes and taking steps to prevent flooding (Lähteenmäki 2017, 60–61): “*It was important for Finland that attention should be paid to agriculture, as farming accounted for 90% of the country's employed population in 1805*” (Lähteenmäki 2017, 60–61). All development projects needed access, so the roads, highways, and railways were built. Even today, there are huge discussions and disputes between the Sámi community and Finnish companies and the state regarding the Arctic Railway, which would connect the Arctic Ocean and the south of Finland (recently it has prompted protests across Sápmi showing that once again there have been no discussions with the Sámi community). With growing number of industrial projects, more people move to northern parts from the south. For example, following Finland's independence in 1917 from the Russian Empire, the Petsamo region in the far north near the Arctic Ocean became part of Finland and:

Where the 1920s were a time of enthusiastic building work in the Petsamo area, the 1930s were marked by industrialization and increasing international contacts. The first priority had been to increase the proportion of Finnish inhabitants so that given a Finnish population of 600 settlers in 1882, the figure had risen to about 1,500 by 1921, and by 1944 there were 5,200 inhabitants altogether, of which over 90% were Finns. The most rapid growth in population took place in the period 1936–40, with the building of the Kolosjoki mining community, largely on the strength of migrants from Northern Finland. The indigenous inhabitants, the Skolt Sámi, were estimated to number about 400 persons in the mid-1920s. (Lähteenmäki 2017, 77)

Another example is from the Inari municipality, where my research took place: “<...> with the heavy Finnish migration particularly in 1920s and 1930s, Saami people became a minority. By 1940 only 30% of the population of Aanaar were Saami and the rest were Finns” (Nahkiaisojä, 2003a, 173, 2003b, 226 in Olthius, Kivelä and Skutnabb-Kangas 2013, 25).

In the 20th century, the exploitation of the lands in the north accelerated. Industrial development became the main source of wealth of nation-states, which mostly consisted of ore mining, logging, hydroelectric power, and ocean fishing industry (Kuoljok and Utsi 2015, 46), irreversibly affecting the reindeer grazing lands, landscapes that were not only the source of economic activity, but of identity or simply feeling of one's own place and home, as well as livelihoods that depended on these landscapes. As Kuoljok and Utsi noted, *"This exploitation has taken place without the consensus of the Sámi. Not even today do the Sámi have the right of vetoing industrial projects, despite the fact that the original sources of livelihood like reindeer herding, fishing, hunting and handicrafts are constantly affected by these encroachments"* (2015, 46). As in many countries with Indigenous groups, the extraction of natural resources and all other economic development programmes have been and quite often still are understood through the idea of national interest and national wealth, especially when the minority is also a minority group in the given area as a result of colonization, migration, and assimilation. Even though the ideas of decolonization and rights of the minorities are growing stronger legally and socially, the existing structure and system still often ignore their voices. This disregard affects not only the livelihoods and identities of local people, but also emotional well-being and disputes among and inside the groups.

With the growth of influence of Norway, Sweden, Finland, and Russia, establishment of fixed borders, and intensifying colonization, Sámi were gradually dispossessed of their own lands. Settler-colonial states gradually used legal and territorial regimes to dispossess Indigenous populations, restrict their mobility, and control their resources – the land. Since settlers were encouraged to move to the north by the states' policies, Sámi slowly became what in Marxist terms is called "surplus population", people considered unnecessary for the capitalist system and expansion, since Indigenous ways of life were not in line with the order. I will show in the next chapter that settler colonialism had a goal to eliminate native populations by dispossessing them of their land. People were not viewed as a labour force, but rather an obstacle to the system, unnecessary "surplus population" and "trouble makers."

2.2. Settler Colonialism in the Nordic Countries

Nordic countries have never been "non-colonial". They had various overseas colonies in the Caribbean and Africa, and still have territories with

autonomous status, for example Kalaallit Nunaat, known as Greenland, and the internal or settler colony Sápmi. The prevailing idea that Nordic countries played only a minor role in European colonialism and that race and racism were uncritically adopted have been challenged by scholars by showing complex links with the emergence of European colonialism and the systems of racism, capitalism and patriarchy (Groglopo and Suárez-Krabbe 2023, 8). Höglund and Burnett (2019) and Lauesen (2021) show the political and economic interests in overseas colonies of Denmark and Sweden in Latin America, Asia, and Africa. Höglund and Burnett (2019) also maintain that Sámi lands have been colonized and *“that the region remains, to all effects and purposes, a colony of these nation states”* (Höglund and Burnett 2019, 2).

Even though, colonial processes were less physically violent in Nordics and Kalaallit Nunaat than, for example, in Canada (Kuokkanen compares Nordic and Canadian colonialism, Kuokkanen 2019, 8) and harsh segregationist laws were avoided, Nordic states have actively contributed to the structures of European colonialism, missionary work, racial hierarchies, Indigenous dispossession, colonial epistemology like racial science, strong assimilatory policies up to the second half of 20th century, and current land and water appropriation, green colonialism and ongoing ignorance of Indigenous people. However, for a long time and very often still today, Nordic countries have been seen as “benevolent” and peripheral to colonial events. Nordic “exceptionalism”, a narrative about equal, fair, neutral welfare states (Groglopo and Suárez-Krabbe 2023, Habel 2012; Naum and Nordin 2013; Lauesen 2021) has been hiding many struggles of Sámi people. At the same time, according to Veli-Pekka Lehtola, the Nordic Sámi Council already used the term colonialism to describe the Sámi position in 1959 (Ranta and Kanninen 2019, 24).

This image of Nordic states as “progressive humanitarians”, according to some scholars, comes with active region and nation-branding and consequently self-perception which was created in mid-20th century Sweden’s social engineering (Padovan-Özdemir and Øland 2022, 43). These principles even though based on freedom, equality, and justice were inherently racist (Groglopo and Suárez-Krabbe 2023, 9) and promoted by using welfare state’s practices of differentiation, assimilation and exclusion for capital accumulation (Groglopo and Suárez-Krabbe 2023, 9, Ålund and Schierup 1991; Goldberg 2002; Schierup, Hansen, and Castles 2006; Sawyer and Habel 2014; Keskinen 2016; Small 2018; Padovan-Özdemir and Øland 2022; Mulinari and Neergaard 2022).

Racism, prejudice, and discrimination remain a very common experience among Sámi people in the Nordics. Ketil Lenert Hansen in the article “The History and Current Situation of Discrimination Against the

Sámi” (2022) reviews and analyses various survey results on discrimination among Sámi in Norway and Sweden (because such surveys are done mainly in these countries). Author states that even though the political situation of Sámi over the years have significantly improved, studies show that Sámi population experience discrimination and prejudice more frequently than majority population (Hansen 2022, 328; Bals et al. 2010; Hansen et al. 2008; Hansen et al. 2017; Heikkilä and Miettunen 2019; Mannila 2021; Omma and Petersen 2015). Hansen comments on the Mihá study (Hansen and Skaar 2021) and states that in Norway:

Sámi adolescents and adults from 16 to 31 years old in Norway reported about experience of prejudice and discrimination. According to the study, 95% of the Indigenous Sámi youth reported prejudice from the dominant society towards their Sámi group (Hansen and Skaar 2021). These figures indicate that almost all the Sámi adolescents and young Sámi in this survey have experienced dominant society prejudices against their Sámi ethnicity. (Hansen 2022, 332)

Such ethnic discrimination takes various forms, including calling Sámi names in public, being ridiculed for wearing *gákti* (traditional clothes), or speaking Sámi, and prejudiced communication in the media (Hansen 2022). According to the scholar, “*it is quite legitimate to joke about the Sámi on the basis of racist and prejudiced conceptions all over Sápmi*” (Hansen 2012). Sámi young women have experienced sexual harassment, while young men – physical violence (Hansen and Skaar 2021). In Sweden, based on two surveys among Sámi youth (12–18 and 18–28 years old) conducted by Lotta Omma in 2008, the following conclusions were made:

Almost half of the young adults [18-28] and 70% of young reindeer herders had perceived bad treatment because of Sámi ethnicity: 25% had heard teachers saying something bad about the Sámi or had been unfairly treated by a teacher due to their Sámi background, and 17% had teachers who treated them unfairly because of their Sámi background. For young Sámi reindeer herders, the numbers were 25% and 43% <...> For Sámi youth (12–18 years old), 55% reported bad treatment because of Sámi ethnicity, and 25% had teachers who treated them unfairly because of their Sámi background (Hansen 2022, 338 cited in Omma 2011; Omma 2013; Omma and Petersen 2015; Omma et al. 2012; Stoor 2016).

In Finland, the Sámi Truth and Reconciliation Commission has collected testimonies on everyday experiences of racism, discrimination, harassment, and hate speech in the media. In Finland, Sámi interviewees described everyday racism as often subtle but persistent, especially in northern parts of Sápmi where Sámi and Finns live side by side. It commonly appears as stereotypes and belittling comments frequently tied to misconceptions that Sámi receive “special benefits”, as well as pressure to downplay Sámi language and identity in schools, workplaces, and public spaces, producing a lasting sense of otherness and reluctance to speak Sámi openly. Racism is also visible in both direct and structural forms of discrimination in workplaces, recruitment processes, education, and public services, where their ethnicity can lead to stereotyping, questioning of competence, and unequal treatment. In social and traditional media Sámi often experience hate speech, are called derogatory names, stereotypes, and hostile debates. Such experiences affect Sámi self-esteem and willingness to express their identity openly and to pass culture and language to the children (Sámi Truth and Reconciliation Commission report, Part II, 2025, 95–111).

In Norway, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission on the Norwegianization policy and injustices against the Sámi, Kven/Norwegian Finns, and Forest Finns published its final report in 2023. The Commission states that *“personal stories received by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission concern negative public attitudes, prejudice, lack of knowledge, stereotypes, harassment, hate speech, and discrimination directed at Sámi, Kvens/Norwegian Finns, and Forest Finns.”* However, the report claims that negative attitudes among the majority population are currently not widespread: *“The findings show that relatively few people in the Norwegian population hold negative attitudes toward Kvens/Norwegian Finns, Forest Finns, and Sámi. Nevertheless, the extent of discrimination and harassment remains a serious problem for minorities who are affected in both public and private contexts”* (Norwegian Truth and Reconciliation Commission report 2023, 612, my translation). The report warns that *“[i]gnorance and hatred, harassment, and discrimination are interconnected, and this constitutes a serious societal problem that can hinder the rights of Sámi, Kvens/Norwegian Finns, and Forest Finns and may lead some individuals to refrain from identifying as members of these groups”* (Norwegian Truth and Reconciliation Commission report 2023, 625, my translation). In Sweden, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission hearings are still in progress and the final report has not yet reached the public.

According to some scholars, colonialism in Finland was different from that in the other Nordic countries, and was often presented as less

forceful (Lehtola 2015b) and not codified through explicit legislation on subjugation of the Sámi (Ranta and Kanninen 2019, 28): “*In Finland, it took place through new decrees, land surveys, development of traffic connections, and reinforcement of administration. The development resulted in a gradual dismantling of local structures*” (Lehtola, 2015, 28–29). However, with the building of a young Finnish nation-state there was no place left in the national narrative for Sámi people and Sámi were left out and marginalised in national history (Ranta and Kanninen 2019, 23–24; Valkonen 2009, 63). The growth of the welfare state and the introduction of compulsory Finnish school education and cultural homogenization had a strong influence on Sámi culture.

In Finland, children were punished for speaking Sámi, or yoiking. Boarding schools were built and any children who lived five kilometres away from schools were forced to live in hostels, returning home only a few times a year (Olthuis et al, 2013: 32–33). This policy also led to the loss of the language. People did not want to teach their children Sámi, believing that they would adapt better to society by speaking Finnish as a mother-tongue. The local social systems were rapidly dismantling since the colonisation of the lands, Christianisation, settlers moving in the area, and welfare state’s policies, replaced existing structures with Finnish ones (Ranta and Kanninen 2019, 25; 43; Lehtola 2022, 43). Moreover, the Sámi as colonized or subjugated discourse could hardly find a way into Finn’s heads since Finland always have seen itself as a victim of colonisation by Sweden from the Middle Ages until 1809, and by Russia until 1917 (Ranta and Kanninen 2019, 24). A similar perspective was expressed by one of the research participants:

[B]ecause Finland has also been under Sweden for hundreds of years and then under Russia, that Finnish people that they, like, they are thinking that they are victims. (Interview 2023, Aanaar, alias Biret, aged about 25)

Settler colonialism also has a face of ignorance which is more than just absence of knowledge but a deeper systematic act referred to as “*settler ignorance*” (Mattila at al. 2024). The lack of information in the Finnish schooling system about Sámi creates a vacuum of knowledge which either transforms into ignorance, misunderstanding of culture, ongoing political battles, or worse – racist attitudes towards Sámi. People and research participants in Aanaar have mentioned the ignorance and racism many times saying that often Finns in very Finnish towns in the north were racist towards Sámi, whereas people in southern Finland were not, they just were ignorant

and knew nothing other than stereotypes or scandalous news but did not understand the problems or context:

[T]he south people they are very like gentle and polite and so on. But the biggest Sámi haters that that's in the north, not in the south. <...> But south people they are just in general <...> – they are polite but ignorant.” (Interview 2024, Aanaar, alias Mihkkal, aged 22)

But um yeah, but when you said that the, that people here in the north – Finnish people – that they might know like more about Sámi than in southern Finland, I don't know if it is because of that or what's the reason but the most racist people towards Sámi are here in Northern Finland. (Interview 2023, Aanaar, alias Biret, aged about 25)

Problems caused by the lack of knowledge about Sámi has been repeatedly mentioned, with participants pointing a lot to the educational system which has ignored the minorities and Indigenous people in Finland's history. Even though some of the quotes are from 2018, the situation regarding Finnish (not Sámi) high school textbooks had changed little in 2023. During my fieldwork I examined 35 high school books published between 1995–2022, including history, geography, social sciences and only little information about Sámi people was provided. A similar situation has been observed in Norway (Hansen 2022, 332). Research participants in Finnish Sápmi shared:

I think Finnish society is making the Sámi people ethnostress worse because the Finnish school system is not telling anything about Sámi people in Finland and that is one key reason why you have to explain yourself when you go to Finnish professionals at the mental health services. Or even when showing your leg that was hurt in a reindeer roundup or in a fishing accident. And I think that's the one what our society, the Finnish society, should fix is that they should tell about Sámi people – how Sámi people would tell about themselves. (Interview 2024, online, Niila Rahko, Integrative psychotherapist and Sámi expert at the Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare (THL), aged 33)

[C]olonialism is not the same as it used to be like with racial biology tests and children don't get punished for speaking Sámi anymore, but colonialism is more subtle. Like, it's still, like, you don't learn about the Sámi at school <...> Well, it bothers me that Finland is seen as this, like,

trend-centric country, that really has it all, like, how our education is very high quality. I think that's first, that's where the problem starts – that still the education system doesn't include Sámi culture and people. (Interview 2018, Aanaar, alias Máret, aged about 24)

I don't know if it's like one page in the history books that tells about the Sámi. So actually if, even though you live in the Sámi area but you're not Sámi, you don't learn about the Sámi at school <...>. And if your parents have some kind of, I don't know (slightly laughing) opinion about Sámi people then yeah. So I think the Finnish education plan is like the key to end the racism. (Interview 2023, Aanaar, alias Biret, aged about 25)

The lack of knowledge and information in schooling books are harmful to the Sámi themselves:

Epecially because I didn't go to the Sámi speaking class, like I explained, I was going to the Finnish speaking class, but there are so many things that they don't teach at school, it's not only harmful to the Finnish, but to Sámi people. Cause there is so much, so many historical people and events that we don't learn at school, so we, kind of, have to learn it ourselves, like, you go to university or you read a book, but it's, like, not part of the Finnish history education. (Interview 2018, Aanaar, alias Máret, aged about 24)

The lack of knowledge also feeds the stereotypes and expectations of what a Sámi person should be like to be “proper” Sámi and “properly” Indigenous, in consequence contributing to Sámi people's feeling of ethnostress.

This ignorance operates not only at the individual level but also at the political level. According to the prominent Sámi historian, Professor Veli-Pekka Lehtola, the Finnish state has always understood the Sámi as a linguistic minority and that the Finnish Parliament never really understood why they signed the Sámi Parliamentary Act in 1995 and recognized the Sámi as Indigenous people, as well as later approved also in the Constitution effective in 2000. The “dual citizenship” of the Sámi Political System and Finnish and the actual implementation of Indigenous rights have never been really understood by the dominant majority (Lehtola 2015, 244–248). Such knowledge and political ignorance back in the day resonate today in many

political challenges that the Finnish state and the Sámi face over issues such as land rights and self-determination:

And that's how the problem starts, cause, you know, the people, who are in decision-making positions, they haven't learned about our culture <...>. (Interview 2018, Aanaar, alias Máret, aged about 24)

The colonisation of Sápmi was a settler colonial process. Since colonialism in Finland differed from that of other Nordic countries, sometimes scholars referred to it as an internal colonialism. The concept of settler colonialism in Finland has been used in scholarly works of Sámi scholar Rauna Kuokkanen (e.g. 2020a, 2020b, 2022) and Laura Junka-Aikio (e.g. 2022). The concept of settler colonialism was first used by Partick Wolfe (2006), and has since become a theoretical paradigm to understanding particular settler colonial relations, and ongoing coloniality and decolonisation efforts. According to Wolfe “*settler colonization is a structure rather than an event*” (2006, 390). Wolfe distinguishes settler colonialism from traditional (overseas) colonialism. While the goal of traditional colonialism is to have colonies with people who can work (labour) in many different ways for colonizers, settler colonialism sees the native people as obstacles, because the main goal is to have land and resources (Wolfe 1994, 96). In the case of settler colonies, colonizers seek that people would ‘go away’ – disappear by assimilation, physical displacement or elimination, erasure of cultural practices, etc. (Veracini 2011, 1–2). This is evident in land dispossession and assimilatory policies towards Sámi which reflect the settler colonial logic of land appropriation and elimination of native populations rather than extracting labour. As Glen Sean Coulthard shows in his study of Indigenous and state relationships of recognition in Canada, this is the main aspect of settler colonialism: “*the history and experience of dispossession, not proletarianization, has been the dominant background structure shaping the character of the historical relationship*” (Coulthard 2014, 13). This also points to a shift of focus in Marxist terms towards inequalities generated by capitalism. In settler colonies the accumulation of capital was impelled not by exploitation of labour, but by colonisation of the lands and Indigenous dispossession. Dispossession of lands, the undermining of self-sufficiency and subsistence economies, and beginning of land exploitation were the main aspects of colonisation according to Coulthard (2014), and continued under neoliberal economy through various development projects when Indigenous people became racialized surplus populations in their own territories (Kundnani 2021).

In addition, the creation of stereotypes, discourses around Sáminess also sustains the settler colonial logic. The group does not just disappear if it understands itself as distinctive. However, this is possible by constructing narratives about the group and what constitutes the group. First dispossession of the lands, then gradual dismantling of social structures and replacement with nation-state common system through a welfare state model, and dispossession of language through schooling is a good recipe for a story of disappearing Indigenous groups. Indigenous peoples have been “inherently connected to a perception of vulnerability” (Veracini 2011, 4) and have been seen as dying for two centuries while in fact they have not, they have survived, endured all assimilatory policies and are very much alive again (Coates 2004, 20). For both Veracini and Coates, this is the discourse about the fragility and extinction of Indigenous groups – the exact goal of settlers, according to Veracini. This discourse of disappearance can also be seen in historical narrative in Nordic countries. The Sámi have frequently been marginalized in Nordic historical narratives, often depicted as lacking their own history or political legitimacy (Alakorva et.al 2022, 99) and the beginning of the history is associated with arrival of agrarian settlers into Sámi lands (Susiluoto 2000, 16). As a result, the Sámi were seen as uncivilized nomads – people without history (Alakorva et.al 2022, 99).

In this chapter, I will further examine different historical pillars of settler colonialism such as dispossession of cultural artifacts and beliefs through Christianisation; the exploitation of Sámi lands by early settlers and today’s green colonialism; the dismantling of Sámi social systems and Finnicization through school system; and control through politics and created discourses around Sáminess. These aspects require a deeper historical examination in order to understand the next process and pillar of settler colonialism – ethnostress, which I will explain and analyse in the following chapters of the dissertation.

2.3. Settler Colonialism and Dispossession

Marxist political economy analysis provides a valuable insight into relations between Indigenous peoples and settler-colonial states, based on land and colonisation rather than capital as a main driving force. In his book *Red Skin, White Masks. Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition* (2014), Coulthard examines how Indigenous peoples sought recognition in Canada. He reflects on settler colonial process and economic, capitalist relationship. One of the very important arguments in the book focuses on the gap in Marxist

critique of capitalism in connection with the exploitation of labour. Coulthard argues that the main point of capitalism is dispossession of the means to live self-sustainable lives and incorporation into capitalist system. From this perspective, settler colonialism is fundamentally driven by the imperative of land dispossession. It is characterized by a structured relationship of domination that secures ongoing settler access to Indigenous lands and resources, which are essential both to Indigenous societies and to the formation of the colonial state and capitalist development. Unlike other forms of domination, the primary motive of settler colonialism is territorial control rather than race or ethnicity per se. This process involves violent and coercive means – force, fraud, and negotiations – to dispossess Indigenous peoples of their lands and self-determining authority, enabling the formation of settler states and capitalist accumulation through the privatization of collectively held Indigenous territories (Coulthard 2014, 1–24). Therefore, Coulthard suggests to shift the view from “*an emphasis on the capital relation to the colonial relation*” (Coulthard 2014, 10). However, it is important to note that for Marx himself colonial domination was not the main concern, rather it only revealed some principles of capitalism (Wakefield 1849, 42).

In Marxist terms, primitive accumulation refers to the ongoing and incomplete process by which direct producers (such as peasants and also Indigenous peoples) are dissociated from their means of labour and resources, including land and other commons, that previously sustained their ways of life as Indigenous or small-scale producers. Unlike traditional views that see it as a single historical event preceding capitalism, primitive accumulation is understood as a continuous process under postcolonial capitalism that undermines non-capitalist segments by dispossessing populations and encroaching on their resources. This process creates conditions for capital to maintain its dominance but does not necessarily absorb the dispossessed into wage labour; instead, many remain excluded or surplus to capitalist needs (Bhattacharya 2022, 1–5). As a result of dispossession, people become “surplus populations”. It is not an accidental side effect of the capitalist system, but, according to scholars, rather an integrated part of the system that keeps regulating labour price and exploitation. There will always be people to replace others within the labour market. Hence those dispossessed of land and means of subsistence are in fact required for the system to sustain exploitation. Capital maintains its dominance by continuously engaging in primitive accumulation – dispossessing non-capitalist producers of their means of labour and resources – while the State intervenes through welfare measures to manage poverty and preserve non-capitalist economic spaces that allow the survival of the dispossessed. This delicate balance prevents large-scale

political upheavals and sustains capitalist reproduction. The dispossessed, however, often remain outside formal capitalist wage labour and survive in these non-capitalist spaces, which are a-functional to capital but crucial for political stability and capital hegemony (Bhattacharya 2022, 1). Arun Kundnani (2021) points out that in neoliberal context surplus populations become racialised in new ways.

By shifting the focus to a colonial perspective, it is harder to defend the old idea of developmentalism that Indigenous and non-capitalist ways of life must be assimilated into capitalism to achieve progress. In fact, this realization influenced Marx himself, who, after 1871, began to move away from the belief that all societies go through capitalist development. In his later years, Marx acknowledged that non-capitalist and capitalist systems could coexist and even saw the potential in non-capitalist traditions to inspire alternative paths to social transformation (Coulthard 2014, 11).

To further examine contemporary contexts, it is important to understand how the settler colonial system continues to develop in the present. According to Coulthard:

[C]olonial relation should not be understood as a primary locus or “base” from which these other forms of oppression flow, but rather as the inherited background field within which market, racist, patriarchal, and state relations converge to facilitate a certain power effect – in our case, the reproduction of hierarchical social relations that facilitate the dispossession of our lands and self-determining capacities. Like capital, colonialism, as a structure of domination predicated on dispossession, is not “a thing,” but rather the sum effect of the diversity of interlocking oppressive social relations that constitute it. (Coulthard 2014, 14–15)

Under the contemporary global neoliberal economy, colonial relations keep existing and dispossessing Indigenous people of their lands and livelihoods. According to Coulthard and scholars such as David Harvey (2003), Kundani (2021), Silvia Federici (2004), Rauna Kuokkanen (2008), Andreia Smith (2005), Junka-Aikio (2022b), present neoliberal reality is only “escalating onslaught of violent, state-orchestrated enclosures following neoliberalism’s ascent to hegemony has unmistakably demonstrated the persistent role that unconcealed, violent dispossession continues to play in the reproduction of colonial and capitalist social relations in both the domestic and global contexts” (Coulthard 2014, 9).

In the case of Sámi people, state interest is hugely visible in land grabbing and the market. Since the 1970s, protests against various development projects have been taking place reaching national courts and global visibility. For the Sámi, land has always held political, economic and cultural importance and a reason for colonisation and resistance. It is therefore not surprising that the Sámi Cultural Revival began with resistance against the construction of Alta Hydroelectric Power Station in Norway known as Alta Controversy in late 1970s and early 1980s. Sámi people protested against it as the dam was interfering with migration routes of reindeer. Construction started in 1978 and was followed by protests in the 1979 summer resistance camp in Alta with protesters from all over Norway and Europe. Several Saami started a hunger strike in front of the Storting (parliament) in Oslo. In 1981, the Prime Minister Odvar Nordli was replaced by Gro Harlem Brundtland, who quickly reinstated the construction plans, refused to talk with Sámi and ordered national police to move to the area of Alta, which was the largest police mobilization in Norway since WWII. Construction resumed in 1981 and was finished in 1987 (Briggs 2006, 149–160). Even though the dam was built, the protest gained international attention and became a starting point for the cooperation for the Sámi rights. This marked the start of the group's fight over resources with the State and with commercial powers, that continues strongly today. Such struggles over the land are still vivid. Today, these processes continue against development projects, such as mining, logging, the Arctic Railway, dispossession of fishing rights in the Deatnu River, and so-called “sustainable” initiatives such as wind power farms. When implemented without meaningful consultation or the free, prior, and informed consent of the Sámi, these projects can reproduce forms of green colonialism by once again sacrificing Indigenous lands, livelihoods, cultures, and futures for the perceived “progress” of dominant society. The disappearance of traditional livelihoods is the most visible and understandable impact of such projects, for example, leaving less and less available areas for reindeer herding. If many development projects were previously carried out in the name of “progress” and well-being of the dominant society, today Sámi lands are taken in the name of “sustainable” development projects. They proceed without Sámi consent and are understood in scholarship and activist circles as “green colonialism”. Sámi territories are often perceived as “no man's lands” and most are actually public lands (for example, in Finland around 90 percent of Sápmi belongs to the state). Projects are developed without the consent of Sámi people while serving the dominant population in the south and further reducing available lands for reindeer grazing. For example, the Fosen case in Norway has been unresolved for years now. Huge windmill farms were built

on Sámi reindeer grazing lands in 2019 and 2020 without the consent of Sámi, despite their opposition. The Norwegian Supreme Court acknowledged on 11 October 2021 that this was unconstitutional. It is important to note that Norway is only one of the countries where Sámi live and the ILO 169 Convention (Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention of the International Labour Organization, also known as ILO 169) is ratified and prohibits the development of projects without the consent and involvement of Indigenous peoples in whose lands the projects are carried out. However, nothing was achieved and in February 2023 protests began in Oslo by Sámi Youth activists marking 500 days since the court decision, demanding a resolution to the issue and removal of the windmills. Sámi youth organized themselves across the borders and occupied the Norwegian Ministry of Petroleum and Energy in Oslo. Many wore their *gákti* turned inside out (a traditional way to show objection and disapproval to authorities), and protested at the wind farm site. From the beginning, Sámi youth activists shared news and broadcast updates on the civil disobedience process. After the first 13 hours, the head of the Finnish Sami Youth (*Suoma Sámi Nuorat*), Petra Laiti, and the board member of the Norwegian Sámi Youth Association (*Noereh*), Elle Rávdná Näkkäljärvi, were broadcasting updates from the Ministry. They were initially allowed to remain inside and the police did not take any action in the beginning. The civil disobedience action was compared to the Alta case in the 1970s. At the same time the film *Let the River Flow* on Alta events was released. According to youth leaders, police and government did not want to reproduce images reminiscent of earlier conflicts over Sámi rights (@petralaiti 2023a). However, the situation changed several days later, when police started removing activists by force from the Ministry. The photos of the removal were often compared to the events 50 years ago. Both the local Nordic and international community reacted to the events. For example, the International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs (IWGIA) shared a statement by Sámi Council President Aslak Holmberg: “*It is unacceptable and unsustainable that in order to make Norway respect the ruling of its own Supreme Court, Sámi youth and allies have to resort to these kinds of means. What kind of message is Norway sending to Sámi youth? Even when we win in court, our rights are ignored*” (IWGIA 2023). Protests kept going and by 2026 the turbines continued to operate, there is still no complete implementation of the court’s decision to end the violation of Sámi rights. Instead, the Sámi and Norway have reached an agreement on remuneration. While the wind farm continues operating, measures will be taken to safeguard Indigenous culture; a portion of the wind farm’s energy would be allocated for local use; additional area for winter reindeer grazing will be designated,

and 5 million Norwegian kroner will be granted for strengthening Sámi culture (Ragjeringa.no 2024).

The Arctic Railway project has gained a lot of attention and controversy in Finland for decades now. The Arctic Railway project is a plan to connect the Arctic Ocean in Norway through Finnish Sápmi with the main railway network in Finland, which currently ends in Kemijärvi and Kolari in the beginning of the Arctic circle. The original idea dates back almost a century, but the project has been cancelled many times for various reasons. In 2017, the project was renewed, and in 2019 Greenpeace, Suoma Sámi Nuorat (Sámi youth organisation), and the Sámi activist and arts group *Suohpanterror* staged protests to block the railway's route. The railway would pass through reindeer grazing areas and carry goods, not people. In this context, Junka-Aikio (2022b) pays attention to the changing position of old settler communities, the state, and the Indigenous community. To give some background, following the Sámi cultural revival movement and the strengthening of Sámi political autonomy, some Finns who previously opposed the Sámi rights movement began to claim their Sámi identity based on ancestral connections (Lehtola 2015a, 13). I will elaborate on this in greater detail in later chapters, since it is a very complex situation involving the Finnish state's paternalistic actions in defining Sámi identity through legislation and including individuals who Sámi do not recognise as Sámi. In this way Sámi self-determination right has been denied. For the purposes of this discussion it is sufficient to know that people who are from old settler communities with distant Sámi ancestry have begun to claim Indigenous Sámi identity. Junka-Aikio shows how such a shift from opposition to the Sámi rights movement to self-indigenisation took place. According to her, since the 1980s Finnish public policy has undergone neoliberalisation whereby the state creates spaces for transnational capital to invest in highly educated workers. It is no longer that locality and people are benefiting from employment. If they are not part of the capitalist economy, as indigenous livelihoods, then settlers are brought to work on the lands. So the beneficiaries are workers and companies from global centres, capital cities, and often transnational corporations. In this neoliberal state, old settler communities, which, as Indigenous people, rely on land, are not valuable for the state and are seen as obstacles to development projects (Junka-Aikio 2022b) and resources.

While Indigenous people facing these threats at least have rights recognised nationally and internationally, although they are often denied, they are a legal tool for fighting. Junka-Aikio argues that self-indigenisation emerges specifically within this economic and political environment. What

motivates them to self-indigenise is the fear of losing livelihoods or Sámi managing the land alone. According to Junka-Aikio (2022b), as a consequence, neoliberal policies encourage identity conflicts between old settlers and Indigenous communities even though they both share the same dangers from the state and corporations. In neoliberal economy and labour market, the settler state's previous policies of elimination of Indigenous communities have now turned to the elimination of any local communities practising land-based livelihoods. Once again, this confirms the previously discussed shift in understanding of colonialism from a focus on labour exploitation towards the dispossession of land. Such identity conflict is a direct consequence of abandonment of earlier state orchestrated agricultural settlement policy. These processes create conflicts between groups, endangers Sámi identity and self-determination, and leave old settler communities at risk of losing their livelihoods. The hesitance of countries to ratify ILO 169 Convention, which recognises Indigenous peoples' rights over their land and resources in most settler colonies, suggests that Indigenous and local communities' control over their lands is just an obstacle to contemporary global socio-political systems. As of today, ILO 169 has been ratified by only 22 states.

2.4. Cultural Dispossession in Sápmi

Border formation and claim of Sámi lands by different nation states were not the only processes that made Sámi dispossessed. Various historical processes and events slowly dispossessed Sámi of their social structures, cultural heritage, and material culture, leaving even fewer marks of Sámi people in the territories. Although these historical events and processes were of different importance in settler colonial process – for example, Christianization was a way to gain control over the lands, whereas the Nazi occupation during WWII, or Finland's territorial losses after the Winter and Continuation Wars were the actions by foreign forces – they undeniably brought disruption and hardship to Sámi life. More importantly, I aim to demonstrate that such events contributed to a broader narrative of Sámi disappearance and cultural absence, reinforcing the settler-colonial idea that “authentic” Sáminess had vanished or no longer existed. Such events contributed to the disappearance of material cultural signs, enforcing the perception that Sámi presence in these territories was minimal or transient. This illusion of absence has long served colonial narratives, justifying continued appropriation of land and undermining Sámi claims to identity,

territory, and sovereignty. The erasure of visible cultural markers not only weakened the material continuity of Sámi heritage, but also contributed to the delegitimization of their historical and contemporary existence in the eyes of the dominant society.

With growing interest in the lands, Christian missionaries also started to be interested in Sámi inhabited areas up north. Christianization was driven by the political interests of Sweden, Norway, and Russia as they sought to expand control over northern territories. According to Lehtola, “[f]rom the 1500s onwards, the governments of the Nordic countries attempted to convert their northern spheres of influence into fixed parts of their nations. There were three main ways in which this happened: Christian missionizing, social control and colonization” (Lehtola 2002, 30). Building of the churches in Sápmi began around the 11th century in areas near the Arctic Ocean and Gulf of Bothnia and in the 1400s expanded into the Russian side. By the 1500s, the Norwegian Sea Sámi had been officially declared converted to Christianity. In Sweden, the process intensified in the early 1600s under King Karl IX, aligning more closely with political goals (Lehtola 2002, 30). Even though Christianization was not always very successful and had its own problems, for example, missionaries living far from Sámi *siidas*, many did more trading than actual teaching, and they did not speak a common language (Lehtola 2002, 30). However, gradually it dismantled the previous indigenous belief system. The old Sámi hunting and later nomadic worldview was deeply rooted in nature, cycles of migration, and a close relationship between the visible world (“this side”) and the spiritual realm (“the other side”). This belief system involved a holistic and practical shamanistic understanding of the world. Special individuals called *noaidi* (shamans) played a central role by communicating with spirits, healing illnesses, and guiding reindeer herds through spiritual practices. The *noaidi* entered trance states and used tools like the *noaidi* drum to navigate both spiritual and physical challenges. The spirit of *noaidi* travelled as a spirit or wind and “[t]hey have the ability to change into a wild reindeer or hide under the reindeer’s neck or hoof; they can fly over the treetops or travel under the ground; they may swim in the shape of a fish; and the Sea Sámi recount that they may even move mountains” (Lehtola 2002, 28). Life revolved around seasonal migrations and harmony with natural cycles, and misfortune was often seen as a sign of spiritual imbalance. Beliefs and rituals were based on deep knowledge of nature. As Lehtola notes “[i]nnumerable tales relating to obtaining a livelihood and epic poems tell that a ‘trance noaidi’ was able to control the movements of a whole reindeer herd.” He further explains that such stories refer to thousands of years of traditional knowledge of the environment enabling people to foresee and

accurately predict the movements of animals and weather (Lehtola 2002, 29). Knowledge was passed down orally, blending myth, ritual, and survival knowledge. Even after the arrival of Christianity, elements of the old faith, such as offerings, beliefs in spirits, and rituals connected to nature, persisted in concealed forms or merged with Christian imagery well into the 1800s. In Kola Sápmi, however, *noaidi* endured the longest due to the least harsh persecutions by the Russian Orthodox church (Lehtola 2002, 29). The old beliefs and practices of seers and healers were replaced with Christian traditions, more compatible with agricultural livelihoods. The image of the *noaidi* transformed into a devilish figure who had sold their souls, that persisted up to the 1900s (Lehtola 2002, 29). Some practices survived, including offerings at sacred places (*seidis*) or yoiking traditions, or were revived.

A significant aspect about the period was the destruction of artifacts and religious objects, like Sámi shaman drums. The drums were burned or taken away during the 17th and 18th centuries, and even into the 19th century. As Jelena Posanger and Konsta Kaikkonen explain, *“Many drums were removed by force. Some were handed to the authorities in fear of corporeal or religious punishment inflicted by representatives of the colonial ruling powers of the kingdoms of Denmark-Norway and Sweden. Most of the sacred Sámi drums were destroyed and burnt, some were lost and some were shipped off, traded or given away as souvenirs”* (Posanger and Kaikkonen 2022, 9). Drums ended up in exhibitions in various museums, including Stockholm, Uppsala, Trondheim, Copenhagen, Paris, Rome, London, Cambridge, Berlin, Dresden, Munich, and Cologne. Also, *“[m]ost of the symbolism of the noaidi drums was lost. <...> Much of the relationship of the oral tradition and the yoik tradition to the shamanistic world-view going back hundreds of years is hidden in the shadows”* (Lehtola 2002, 28). According to Lehtola, Christian priests in Sápmi tried to destroy not only shamanistic practices and objects, but the entire old world-view. Various secular practices which seemed unknown, like yoiking, were likewise intended for elimination (Lehtola 2002, 28).

As previously mentioned, for a long time the Christianization process was slow because priests did not know Sámi languages. The first Sámi-language alphabet book appeared in 1619, followed by a growing number of religious texts published in Sámi. Ministers had to be trained in Sámi or use Sámi assistants to communicate effectively. The local Sámi clergy also received training (Lehtola 2002, 30). However, the major impulse to spread Christian beliefs and values came from the new religious movement Laestadianism. This pietistic and conservative branch of Lutheranism, which began in the mid-19th century, became one of the most distinctive

developments in the North. The Laestadian movement was started by Lars Levi Laestadius in Sweden and later spread to Norway, Finland, North America, Russia, gaining followers in Africa, the Americas, and Central Europe. Laestadius was born in 1800 in the village of Jäkkvik, in the Pite Sámi region of Sweden. His father was a Swedish settler, and his mother was a Christian Southern Sámi. Laestadius was an administrator in the Church of Sweden and a leader of the temperance movement. He married a Sámi woman, Brita Kajsa Alstadius, with whom he had twelve children. The family moved to Karesuando, one of the northernmost parts of Sweden near the Finnish border, where Laestadius worked as a vicar (sometimes referred to as a pastor). It was there that he experienced a religious conversion and began spreading a new faith, the foundations of which he developed together with his colleague Juhani (Juho) Raattamaa (Sámi Culture). This faith became a devout, charismatic, and fundamentalist evangelical movement with conservative moral and religious views.

This religious movement became especially widespread among the Sámi and Kven peoples. Followers called themselves simply “Christians”, to emphasize that this was the true form of Christianity, though others began calling them Laestadians. Laestadianism was successful because Laestadius knew Sámi culture well as he grew up around three Sámi cultures (Lehtola 2002, 38). He proudly identified as Sámi through his mother, spoke two Sámi languages, was familiar with Sámi life and problems, and even adapted some aspects of old Sámi beliefs (such as certain deities) into Christianity. However, he also aimed to change these beliefs and “*try to reach Sámi with his preaching by entering into their thought process*” (Lehtola 2002, 38). According to Lehtola, Laestadius’ preaching was successful because it connected with the already existing fundamentalist *čuoŋvvut* movement among reindeer herders, characterised by states of ecstasy and shouting. Laestadius adopted these elements and was accepted among its members (Lehtola 2002, 38). At the same time, the movement also spread quickly because state schools were opened where Laestadian teachers taught. Preachers trained by Laestadius would even travel on long journeys with reindeer herders. His sermons addressed the serious problems of alcoholism and theft in local communities and helped reduce them, improving the image of the Sámi in the eyes of others. However, the Laestadian fanaticism was greatly evolving into the fanatics group in Guovdageaidnu known as the Guovdageaidnu rebellion. In 1852, religious fanatics killed a local merchant and a policeman, assaulted the preacher, whipped servants, and burned the merchant’s house. While it is argued that the rebellion was connected to general discontent regarding the rights and lands, it was also linked to

opposition towards alcohol production by merchants. The rebels “*wanted to cleanse the whole region of ‘contamination’. The authorities were for them ‘the devil’s children’ and the Norwegian laws ‘the devil’s doing’*” (Lehtola 2002, 38). Laestadius’ success in winning people is often attributed to his ability to adapt to and understand local culture, incorporate cultural elements and Sámi language into the religion, which fostered a sense of pride and identity among followers. However, at the same time, this new faith almost completely erased the old Sámi religion and worldview. According to Laestadius, the old ways were sinful. As Laestadianism spread, practices such as yoiking, worship of *sieidi* (*sacred* naturally unusual rocks or geological formations found across Sápmi), and the *noaidi* with their drums began to disappear.

World War II and its aftermath marked yet another devastating milestone in the erasure of Sámi tangible cultural heritage. In April 1940, Norway was occupied by Nazi Germany, while Finland became an ally of Germany with whom Finland had fought during the Winter War and Continuation War against the Soviets. Germany intended to keep Finmark, and parts of Northern Finland, Petsamo, to secure nickel resources (Knudsen 1995, 7). However, after peace negotiations in 1943–1944 between the Allies and the Soviet Union, Moscow demanded that Finland break diplomatic ties with Germany and expel German troops from Finland. When Moscow threatened to occupy the country in order to remove the Germans, Finland launched aggressive actions, leading to the short-lived Lapland War (October–November 1944) in Northern Finland against the German army. Because of the war, evacuation started in Sápmi. In Norway, German forces confiscated livestock and horses to prevent both the enemy and local populations from accessing food supplies. People attempted to hide their belongings and equipment, while others salvaged what they could (Knudsen 1995, 11–13). During the evacuation process, some people died along the way, and relatives were not permitted to stop to bury or mourn them (Knudsen 1995, 17). In some cases, entire families went into hiding and survived as cave dwellers; many, however, were discovered or killed (Knudsen 1995, 27–30). Evacuations did not occur only in Norway. In Finland, too, widespread evacuations took place. According to the Sámi Truth and Reconciliation Commission in Finland, “[b]y the end of the war, almost all inhabitants of the Sámi areas were evacuated due to military operations” (Sámi Truth and Reconciliation Commission in Finland, Summary 2025, 5).

In 1944–1945, as the Nazis retreated, northern parts of Norway and Finland were completely destroyed by the German army’s scorched earth policy. It was aimed at destroying anything that might be useful to the enemy

when retreating from either one's own or occupied territory: *"The destruction was carried out systematically and efficiently by special commando groups. All types of buildings, bridges, quays, roads, power stations, German military installations, etc. were blown up and burnt"* (Knudsen 1995, 22). Nearly all existing buildings, homes, and Sámi traditional dwellings in the north were burned down: *"According to calculations made, approx. 12,000 residential dwellings in which 60,000 people lived were burnt and destroyed in Finmark and Nord-Troms"* (Knudsen 1995, 23). When people began returning in 1945, even with state assistance, living conditions were very bad for a while, people lived in barracks, tents, and earth huts (Knudsen 1995, 38). The war with the Nazis left behind only random remnants of soldiers' belongings, often referred to as "war junk." These objects became a part of the Sápmi landscape: rusted tools and metal scraps among the moss and trees, or at the foot of the hills where reindeers graze. They were silent witnesses to one of the most terrible periods of the 20th century, which reached deep into Sápmi. The destruction during the retreat eliminated not only physical objects and personal property but also severely impacted Sámi cultural heritage and identity. For example, in Norway, as many as 75 percent of Sámi lived in areas burned down by German forces (Bjørklund 2013, 6). The majority of Norwegian Sámi were coastal fishers, with about 10 percent engaged in reindeer herding (Bjørklund 2013, 7). Their boats, homes, tools, and equipment were destroyed.

Moreover, after the Winter War and Continuation War with Russia Finland lost territories – Karelia and Petsamo regions. Skolt Sámi currently live in and around the villages of Sevettijärvi, Keväjärvi, and Nellim in the municipality of Inari, at several places in the Murmansk Oblast, Russia, and in the village of Neiden in the municipality of Sør-Varanger, Norway. These are not their original homelands. The original Skolt Sámi homeland is located in the Petsamo area, in today's Russia. The Skolt Sami homeland was in the territory of the Russian Empire, but Finland acquired the Petsamo region after the Finnish Civil War (Lehtola 2017, 85). The Treaty of Tartu (1920) divided the Skolt homeland in two: the western part, Petsamo, became part of Finland and the eastern part became part of the Soviet Union. Later after the Continuation War in 1941–1944 (continuation of the Winter War) against Soviet Russia, Finland lost Petsamo. As a result, Skolt Sámi were forcibly evacuated (Lehtola 2018) from their ancestral homeland of Suonikylä and Paatsjoki villages to their current locations. With little things they could carry, their homes were left behind.

After the war, everything had to be rebuilt, but for the Sámi, this meant stronger assimilation into the dominant society. The landscape lost its material culture traces, heritage and visibility. Houses were rebuilt according

to the dominant society's standards. Before the war, people had little interest in dealing with the government or bureaucracy, but post-war mass reconstruction meant that using the dominant language and engaging with bureaucracy became essential for survival. As a result, many families were assimilating into Norwegian culture and customs (Bjørklund 2013, 7). Sámi, having lost everything, had no choice but to rely on state aid. However, the post-war rebuilding policies were based, especially in Norway, for example, on Norwegian culture norms and the Labour Party's ideology of ensuring equal living standards for all, which translated into standardized housing. There was no room in these plans for ethnic, cultural, or lifestyle/livelihood diversity (Bjørklund 2013, 7). The destruction of Sámi buildings, homes, and *goahti* (Sámi hut or tent, larger than *lavvu*) left no trace or testimony of Sámi heritage in Norway. Similarly in Finland, rebuilding followed nationally standardized Finnish models and was closely linked to broader efforts to utilize Lapland's natural resources more efficiently. In this process, Finnish administrative structures and state influence in the north became increasingly consolidated (Sámi Truth and Reconciliation Commission in Finland, Summary 2025, 5). At the same time, during reconstruction, many Finns and Norwegians moved to the North to participate in reconstruction. And the influence of outsiders transformed Sápmi greatly. Finnish settlements like Ivalo were built, where many institutions – police station, health services, post office, frontier guard barracks – appeared and the language used by the institutions was Finnish. Reconstruction followed Finnish housing models. During this period, Finnish clothes became more accessible and fashionable and started to replace Sámi garments. Tilling and cultivating of the land, cultivating meadows for hay-dairy farming, and wage-employment required permanent settlement and changed livelihoods and mobility between settlements (Lehtola 2002, 52-53).

Both the Christianization of the Sámi and later events of WWII left little evidence of Sámi material culture in the region. Moreover, with the rebuilding of Lapland even more Finns and Norwegians moved to the north, intensifying the influence of the dominant culture on Sámi ways of life and material culture. Such change prepared the ground for later assimilatory policies that dismantled not only Sámi material heritage but also their social and cultural practices.

2.5. Dismantling Social Structures and Finnicization

With stronger colonization and agricultural expansion of settlers, Sámi social systems were gradually dismantled and replaced by Finnish ones.

Ranta and Kanninen (2019) in their book *Vastatuuleen. Saamen kansan pakkosuomalaistamisesta* [In the headwind. Forced assimilation of Sámi in Finland] argue that dismantling of pre-colonial social structures is one of the main aspects of colonialism and Finnicization. This is included in the international definitions of Indigenous people by the ILO and the UN, the famous working definition by the UN Special Rapporteur José R. Martínez Combo (the problematics of such definitions will be discussed in later chapters) (Ranta and Kanninen 2019, 21). In their research, Ranta and Kanninen reveal one of the major topics concerning Sámi – forced Finnicization (Ranta and Kanninen 2019, 10). In this subchapter, I address the historical processes of gradual loss of old Sámi social systems through various new laws, changes in reindeer herding systems, 20th century development of welfare states and their schools, housing, and working policies which were built on the idea of homogenic society which meant forced assimilation of ethnic and Indigenous minorities. Such losses made Sámi blend into the dominant society, leaving huge individual, family, and community traumas. However, it is important to approach narratives of cultural loss critically. Sámi people did not disappear. They are successfully rebuilding and building anew with lots of discussions in society and in their own autonomic institutions. Nevertheless, the forced transition to Finnish social systems made Sámi and Sáminess less visible, added to the discourse of disappearing Indigenous culture and worked for settler-colonial logic and goals.

By the late 1800s, Sámi social structures underwent a significant transformation, marked by the dismantling of the traditional *siida* system—a collective, kinship-based structure central to Sámi society. This system was replaced by Nordic-style municipalities, aligning Sámi governance with national state structures. In Norway, the 1837 Local Government Act marked the beginning of enforced Norwegianization, requiring Norwegian language proficiency for municipal participation. Finland followed with similar legislation in 1893, enabling many Sámi to participate in local politics, but under frameworks that eroded their traditional autonomy. In Sweden and Norway legislation allows only Sámi to herd reindeer. In Finland, municipalities were established beginning in 1865 and in Sápmi – in 1893. The *paliskunta* (Finnish state established reindeer cooperative system) system established in 1898, institutionalized reindeer herding into formal cooperatives governed by municipal structures. However, Finnish colonists had also started keeping reindeer as early as in the 1600s. The *paliskunta* system broke away from kin-based *siida* organization, instead requiring cooperatives to follow state-defined territorial, managerial, and bureaucratic frameworks. Reindeer herding became subordinate to agricultural priorities,

with no legal separation of herding and farming zones. This created tension between land uses and cast reindeer herding as marginal in a society increasingly driven by agricultural expansion and colonial settlement models (Lehtola 2002, 42).

As the *siida* system declined, not only Finns were moving to the north for agriculture but also Sámi individuals increasingly adapted to changing conditions by changing to farming. Since their livelihoods changed, they were often registered as Finns. Lehtola described the events:

The process was clearly linked with cultural change. When Sámi became colonists and joined the Finnish village network, they adapted their way of life to the Finnish style and adopted the Finnish language. Being Sámi came to be shameful. Sámi even started speaking Finnish with their children in the hope that they would be more successful in the new environment. By the next generation, or sooner, the Finnish name of the farm became their official family name. (Lehtola 2002, 42)

The formation of the welfare state was another key process to assimilate Sámi, which in anthropology has been described by Robert Paine as “welfare colonialism” (1977). Even though Nordic countries are well known for their strong equality-based welfare systems that formed during the 20th century, the ideas behind this were nationalistic and homogenizing. Social and cultural differences had to be eliminated, the Sámi nomadic way of life, livelihoods, different languages, and earlier ways of life were portrayed as “backward” and “primitive”, an obstacle for progress and their own well-being. Hence, the welfare state was directed to make sure such obstacles disappear through the workforce and the labour market, education systems, and medical interventions, such as forced sterilization in Sweden and Norway. However, the 20th century progress and equality dream based on social Darwinism and assimilation, left many people lifelong traumatised and communities oppressed, fragmented, and eroded.

The extent of assimilation through school systems varied in the countries Sámi communities live. However, boarding schools were the main tools to assimilate Sámi (with the exception of Sweden where Sámi reindeer herders had *Lapp schools* and were forbidden to enter high schools (Lundmark 2002, cited in Hansen 2022, 330). In Norway, the policy of Norwegianization (1851–1963) was aimed at forced linguistic and cultural assimilation of Sámi and Kven minorities, gradually banning minority languages in schools and placing children in boarding institutions to accelerate their transformation into

Norwegian citizens, a process closely tied to nation-building and border security concerns (Hansen 2022, 329). In Sweden, assimilation was combined with segregation under the doctrine “Lapp shall remain Lapp” (*Lapp ska vara lapp*), which confined reindeer-herding Sámi to separate nomad schools with lower educational standards, while non-herding Sámi were more directly assimilated into mainstream society, resulting in widespread language and cultural loss (Hansen 2022, 330). In Soviet Russia (the Kola Peninsula), early Soviet policies initially supported Sámi-language education under a framework of cultural pluralism, but post-war reforms and Khrushchev-era boarding school policies introduced Russification, prohibited Sámi language use, and enforced relocations, leading to severe cultural disruption (Hansen 2022, 331). Anna Andersen (2022) highlights three generational experiences shaped by shifting policies in Soviet Russia. The first generation experienced some cultural support and maintained Sámi language and traditions, while the second generation faced harsh assimilation policies including language prohibition and military discipline. The third generation endured stigmatization, family disintegration, and psychological trauma, with a significant loss of language and cultural identity (Andersen 2022). In Finland, boarding schools and rural dormitory systems played a key role in nation-building and homogenizing citizens (Hansen 2022, 331), meaning assimilating Sámi. Before the 1920s, when education became compulsory, there were travelling schools mostly organized by the church. Boarding schools were built, and any children who lived five kilometres from schools were forced to live in school accommodation, returning home only a few times a year (Olthuis et al. 2013, 32–33). Here, children were punished for speaking Sámi or for yoiking. Although assimilation was less explicitly codified than in some other Nordic countries, Finnish-only education and negative attitudes toward Sámi language were widespread (Hansen 2022, 331). This policy stigmatized language and culture, portraying them as inferior (Ranta and Kanninen 2019, 29). Consequently, this led to the loss of the language and left profound traumas in people’s lives caused by being taken away from their community, family, and culture. Across all four countries, boarding schools separated children from families, restricted Indigenous language use, and sought to reshape identity in line with dominant national cultures. As in other Indigenous contexts globally, these policies have been linked to enduring intergenerational trauma, language erosion that continue to shape Sámi experiences today, despite the formal end of assimilationist schooling systems.

A local friend told me once about the lives of people she knew who had attended boarding schools. She recounted that the school system

destroyed so many people's lives. In her words they did not die, not literally, she clarified. But it did so much damage. Sámi children had to attend schools far away from homes and live in dormitories. They were considered worse than others because they would not speak the [Finnish] language fluently. They lost their close connection with families as they had to spend so many years in school, but at the same time they never fit in where they attended the schools. As a result, so many people have ruined themselves by excessive drinking later in their lives and had other problems (Fieldwork notes, informal conversation 2016). Language and culture loss was also strengthened by the beliefs in success in society associated with the use of Finnish. At the same time, parents often encouraged children to speak Finnish and not to communicate in Sámi believing that they would adapt better to society. One research participant also mentioned that at that time, there was a belief that it is better to speak one language as mother tongue. She commented: *"And at that time, in the seventies, it was believed that the children have to choose one language, otherwise, it's harmful. So the parents chose Finnish"* (Interview 2018, Aanaar, alias Risten, aged about 40). Even after the boarding school era ended, and the Sámi rights movement led to increased cultural autonomy and the recognition of the right to have Sámi languages in schools as the main language in the Sámi homeland area, the Sámi children were for long choosing Finnish language of instruction in schools as according to research participants teachers teaching in Finnish were better educated. One of the informants, Risten, told how her parents chose to send her to school with the Finnish language of instruction in the late 1980s:

I wanted to change to Sámi class at one point, at least in secondary school, but the teaching quality was much worse in the Sámi class at that time. Because they were not qualified teachers, they didn't have enough material, so it was, like, not that good. Because the teachers we had in the Finnish, they were, like, really good, always. (Interview 2018, Aanaar, alias Risten, aged about 40)

Another research participant also shared how she attended a Finnish speaking class in early 2000s hoping to get better quality teaching:

Then my parents also thought it was better for my future to be in a Finnish speaking class and then take Sami lessons, because when you go to high school and you take A level tests, they're all in Finnish. So, if you learn everything in Sami, like in biology, chemistry and mathematics, it can be difficult to switch the language to Finnish when

you know all the vocabulary for different things in Sami. So, that was also a second reason why I was in the Finnish speaking class. (Interview 2018, Aanaar, alias Máret, aged about 24)

The harsh boarding school policy left deep trauma among Sámi people. Some elderly people still avoid speaking Sámi today (Fieldwork notes, 2016). However, with the end of boarding schools, the discourse of dominant Finnish language remained as better choice of schooling and systematic accessibility to some educational levels and qualified teachers until the early 21st century. Today, language accounts for a huge part of ethnostress experience. Generations of speakers were lost during the boarding school period, and this generation did not pass the language on to their children. Children attended Finnish speaking classes even when it was possible to attend Sámi speaking classes, or they spoke Finnish as their mother-tongue since their parents were never taught Sámi, and could not teach them. With the growth of the Sámi rights movement and cultural revival, initiatives such as “language nests” – Sámi speaking kindergartens designed to recreate new generations of speakers were established. In addition, many Sámi language courses for adults have become available, including intensive one-year full-time language and culture programmes at SOGSAKK (Sámi Education Centre). Despite these efforts and the increasing availability of sources, language is one of the most visible sources of ethnostress. People do not feel “proper” Sámi when they do not speak the language or do not speak it fluently. Expectations of others do not help to form a more sensitive environment. People in southern Finland often encounter comments of not being Sámi if they do not speak Sámi. Thus, nearly a century of Finnicization through language policies has left a huge mark in Sámi society and identity today. Contemporary experiences of language-related ethnostress will be discussed in the following chapter.

Another huge legacy of assimilation was the process of modernization in the 20th century, particularly after WWII, which not only left the north scorched without a sign of Sámi material culture when Germans retreated after the Lapland War, but also when rebuilding started and modern social systems entered the north. The period of modernization had a great impact on Sápmi, livelihoods, and job division. As discussed before, economic development and industrial projects were taking place in northern parts of the countries because of their natural resources. This led to growing infrastructure and more settlers from southern parts of the country. Also, the traditional ways of livelihoods changed during the second half of the 20th century. More people entered the Finnish labour system. Modernization in itself was not synonymous with

Finnicization. However, in the Sámi context, modernization was largely implemented through Finnish state institutions, economic models, and administrative structures, often without Sámi control or consent. As a result, structural integration into the Finnish welfare state became intertwined with processes of cultural and political assimilation.

In this context, Finnicization is understood as becoming more similar with the dominant society, as more people entered the labour market and became dependent on the welfare state. On the other hand, we could argue that Finnicization in this sense risks relying on the essentialist approach where culture and identity are seen as static and not changing. The fears of modernisation were already evident at the beginning of the Sámi rights movement. At the first pan-Sámi conference (Sámi Conference) held in 1953, the chair of one of Sámi organisations, Same-Ätnam, gave a speech in which he mentioned that Sámi had to modernise on their own terms:

“Modern development, especially the expansion of technology into Lapland, has thrust this ethnic group into a difficult situation. In order to preserve the culture’s distinctiveness their adaptation to the new times must be highly active. Active adaptation means that Sámi can not alone and without criticism adopt modern culture, casting aside their culture’s irreplaceable values, but that they hold fast to their cultural traditions in the new conditions” (cited in Lehtola 2002, 60).

I would argue that this theoretical essentialist approach still has an impact on today’s identity when it comes to the question of Sáminess. In subsequent chapters, I will show how modernity is in a way associated with Finnishness rather than Sáminess.

A good illustration is a scholarly debate on the modernisation of reindeer herding. Pertti J. Peltó’s study of Skolt Sámi communities in the 1960s–1970s shows how the introduction of technologies such as snowmobiles transformed reindeer herding into a more stratified and economically demanding livelihood, which he links to processes of “de-localization” and interprets them as a form of Finnicization (Peltó 1987). In contrast, Elina Helander-Renvall argues that such interpretations risk reproducing an essentialized divide between “traditional” Sámi and “modern” Finnish life, overlooking how Sámi herders actively adopted and integrated new technologies into their own practices (Helander-Renvall 2007). From this perspective, modernization is better understood as a negotiated and locally shaped process rather than a simple shift toward assimilation.

It is important to acknowledge that even if the Sámi have become modern and adopted capitalist logic in reindeer herding or other areas, this does not make them any less Sámi. Just as the Finns did not become more British by adopting railways and industrialization. This reflects a false logic within certain indigeneity discourses, one that is colonial-centric in nature. It places Sámi people in a double bind: adapting to modern economic and social conditions can be interpreted as evidence of assimilation, while cultural distinctiveness becomes associated with maintaining ways of life identified with the past. Sámi people are thereby denied the possibility of becoming modern on their own terms. Like Finnish society, Sámi society has been transformed through modernisation and globalisation; yet within settler-colonial logic, increasing similarity to the majority society can be interpreted as evidence of the disappearance of Sámi culture. The problem, however, is not modernisation itself. Rather, the rapid and forced spread of the welfare state was far from an organic process conducted with Sámi consent and negotiated adaptation. The Finnish state and Finnish ways led modernisation and transition to Finnish society. Consequently, modernization, when implemented through settler-colonial state frameworks, produced structural dependence and discursive associations that came to be interpreted as Finnicization, while simultaneously generating hybrid and negotiated forms of Sámi modernity.

These processes can be further understood through James C. Scott's concept of state legibility, developed in *Seeing Like a State* (1998). Scott argues that modern states seek to make populations administratively legible through standardized language, uniform institutions, fixed territorial divisions, and simplified social categories. Such measures are presented as rational modernization and improved efficiency, yet they often require the dismantling of complex, locally embedded social systems. In the Sámi context, the replacement of the *siida* with municipalities, the institutionalization of reindeer herding through the *paliskunta* system, the imposition of Finnish-language schooling, and the integration into welfare-state bureaucracies can be read as legibility projects. These interventions did not merely introduce new administrative forms; they transformed social organization in ways that marginalized kin-based governance, linguistic diversity, and locally grounded knowledge. What appeared as modernization and equality-building simultaneously functioned to standardize, simplify, and thereby assimilate Sámi society into the epistemic and administrative frameworks of the Finnish state advancing a settler-colonial logic that depended on the reduction of difference and the marginalization of Indigenous governance and knowledge systems.

The tension between Sámi and Finnish social structures is still visible. Scholars, artists, and activists talk about the need to indigenize or Sámiticize social structures, arguing that many contemporary ones are modelled on Finnish ones. According to the famous postcolonial studies scholar, Homi K. Bhabha, colonizers encourage the colonized to imitate the colonizer. This is how the system of the colonizer is reproduced. On the other hand, mimicry means that it is almost the same, but not quite the same (Bhabha 1994). For example, Sanna Valkonen (2009) argues that the Sámi Parliament and administration system was created according to Nordic models. It was rather imposed than created by Sámi (Valkonen 2009, 137–175). Rauna Kuokkanen suggests such structures should have been based on old *siida* systems (cited in Valkonen 2009, 137–175).

These discussions also take place in public events. For example, during the Indigenous film festival Skábmagovat 2025 in Aanaar, Sápmi Native American, Sámi journalists and filmmakers had a panel discussion on press and media production in a small community context and challenges and disagreements they face in representations of the communities. During the discussion, the famous Sámi film director, Suvi West, raised the issue of the Sámi social system being built on Finnish and Western models. The director expressed the hope that Sámi media would one day become not only media produced in Sámi languages, but indigenized and decolonized media. West further raised an even broader issue that many Sámi institutions, like museums and the Sámi Parliament, were built on a colonial system and Finnish models (Fieldwork notes, 2025).

According to Bhabha, mimicry produces an ambivalent relationship between coloniser and colonised, destabilising the distinction between them. This negotiation takes place in what Bhabha conceptualises as the “Third Space” (Bhabha 1994). However, the Third Space and mimicked systems are new creations on their own. As Smith explains: “[t]he third space is a product of the negotiations, interface, and exchange across cultural boundaries. The third space is the in-between position, and it is also a newly crafted position” (Smith 2008, 8). The journey does not finish here, but opens a space – third space – for identity negotiations (Ashcroft and Griffiths 2007, 118). My observation here is, however, that newly made systems based on Nordic or Finnish models appear as settler-colonial heritage. However, Finnish or Nordic social system models were based on modern nation-state European models, yet they were not assumed to be colonizing or dismantling authentic structures. Consequently, the adaptation of such structures is not literally Finnicizing or assimilating.

One does not become less Sámi because Sámi people have a Parliament that itself is based on the Nordic model or modern Western model. However, it might discursively make them less Indigenous, if indigeneity is understood as continuation of pre-colonial traditions and social structures as it is widely understood today in major organisations representing Indigenous rights such as the UN or the ILO. Nonetheless, what such contradictory ideas and relationships involving lost and adopted social systems say, and scholars and activists have also acknowledged, is that often they are not adopted or working well in Sámi people's case (e.g., Kuokkanen 2007, 150–151). I would also add here, that they do not work in the settler colonial context.

However, Sámi society increasingly discusses the Sámiification of institutions which means adopting them to Sámi needs in the present and creating totally new systems rather than reconstructing old ones. A recent doctoral dissertation defended by Sámi scholar Aikio examines the Sámiification of Sámi Museum Siida. According to her:

*Decolonization critically examines the legacy of colonialism and its structures and influence on Sámi society by looking at the present and into the past with the objective of deconstructing existing colonial structures and practices. Sámiification, for its part, is rather future-oriented in that it seeks to reconstruct new Sámi structures, practices and operations models to replace the colonial structures. At best, it may be understood as an ongoing process during which efforts are made to develop something to better meet the needs of the Sámi at a particular time and place. Thus, Sámiification can include learning the Sámi language and culture at the individual level, but also re-remembering (*muitát*) or relearning (*ođđasitoahppat*) as a community, returning to Sáminess, or introducing Sámi ways and practices to new contexts, as well as creating entirely new Sámi ways of acting in the world. (Aikio 2021, 114–115, original emphasize change to underlying words instead of italics)*

Overall, the dismantling of Sámi social structures and their replacement with Finnish state institutions was not a single event but a long-term process that unfolded through administrative reforms, schooling, welfare-state expansion, and modernization projects. These changes weakened traditional systems of governance, language transmission, and community organization, while simultaneously integrating Sámi people into the structures of the Finnish nation-state. Many of the tensions surrounding language, identity, belonging, and recognition that emerge in present-day

experiences of ethnostress can be traced back to these historical processes of social restructuring and assimilation. Yet, the outcome was not the disappearance of Sámi society. Rather, these processes produced complex forms of adaptation, negotiation, and resistance that continue to shape contemporary Sámi identities and institutions. Current discussions on decolonization, Sámiification, and the reform of Sámi institutions demonstrate that the legacy of Finnicization remains present, while also highlighting ongoing efforts to create social structures that better reflect Sámi values, knowledge systems, and aspirations for self-determination.

2.6. Control through Discourses and Politics

The dominant society's representations of the Sámi were formed by the discipline of Lappology, generally understood as the study of Lapland and Sámi people by outsiders (Kulonen et al. 2005, 189). The discipline is often traced back to 1673 by the publication of Johannes Schefferus' work *Lapponia* (Ranta and Kanninen 2019, 9), and it reached its golden age in 1910s and 1930s (Lehtola 2017, 85). Lehtola (2017, 100) challenges the understanding of Lappology as a unified intellectual project, showing that in Finland it consisted of scholars from diverse disciplines ranging from linguistics to geography and ethnography, who operated within distinct scientific traditions. He also notes that these researchers differed in how they understood the social role of their work, with some framing it as neutral scholarship and others engaging more explicitly with broader political and majority-minority debates. Nonetheless, the Sámi in Lappology studies were often presented with a romanticized view into an exotic people, often looked upon as children with paternalistic gaze (Lehtola 2017, 100). Lappology was an early research on Sámi people until the late 1900s conducted by outsiders and often based in social Darwinism, evolutionary and devolutionary thought:

The interest in Saami culture, on the other hand, was often based on devolutionism, which represents the obverse of evolutionism in the scientific theory of culture. Because the products of a folk culture were considered to belong to the early primitive stages of its historical development, they were assumed to degenerate and disappear (devolution) as the people itself develop. (Kulonen et al. 2005, 190)

Lappology created stereotypes of inferior, primitive culture, presenting it as “pure” and “authentic” Sámi culture. It has been criticised as a northern version of orientalism (Hirvonen 1999, 33–34). According to

Lehtola (2005; 2017, 90) Lappology played an important role in constructing Finnish, Swedish, and Norwegian national identities, as Sámi were understood in opposition to these modern nations. Stereotypes created by Lappology have permeated today's understanding and representations of Sámi people. For example, Sámi researcher Aikio has shown how such ideas influenced exhibitions at the Sámi Museum Siida until the exhibition renewal in 2021 (Aikio 2022) or tourism (see Mazzullo 2022).

Museums have created images of the Sámi made by non-Sámi people from the dominant majority. Two cases of the Sámi Museum Siida former exhibition analysed by Aikio (2023), and the former part of exhibition in Nordiska Museum analysed by Eva Silvén (2014) illustrate how discourses on exotic "others" continued to be reproduced in museum exhibitions until recently. Growing interest in ethnographic research has further reinforced the view of the Sámi as a traditional people, different from the modern world. In *Constructing a Sámi Cultural Heritage: Essentialism and Emancipation*, Silvén (2014), analyses Western stereotypes and exoticisation in the exhibition about Sámi people in the Nordiska Museum in Stockholm, Sweden.

Silvén explains how the former exhibition constructed the exoticized view and stereotypes of Sámi people. Ethnographer Ernst Manker (1893–1972) collected a lot of data on Sámi people, and in 1939 became the curator and director of the museum's Sámi exhibition that was on display for 30 years. The exhibition presented mostly exotic nomadic reindeer-herding families and featured stuffed reindeer, traditional religious objects, reindeer-drawn caravans, and Sámi people in sledges (Silvén 2014, 67). These discursive images became the norm. In these standardised representations, diversities between groups disappeared, and left only an essentialised image of Sáminess (Silvén 2014). As the Sámi politician, Per Mikael Utsi, has stated, data gathering was directed towards selecting exotic and distinctive aspects of Sámi culture (Utsi 2007, 69, cited in Silvén 2014, 67). Consequently, Sámi became homogenized and only different and exotic parts of the culture as opposition to modernity were emphasized.

In her dissertation "*Saamelainen museo? Tutkimus saamelaisten kulttuuriperinnön ontologisesta politiikasta*" [A Sámi Museum? A Study on the Ontological Politics of Sámi Cultural Heritage] Aikio (2023) examined the practices of Sámi Museum Siida and its ontological politics. The dissertation consists of four research articles and a unifying introduction. In one of these articles "A Window into Vanishing Sámi Culture? Visual Representations of Sáminess in the Shared Siida Exhibition by Sámi Museum Siida and Northern Lapland's Nature Centre" (Aikio 2022) the author explains in detail the construction of the museum's first exhibition which was on display during

1998–2021. In response to the fears of the loss of cultural and language heritage after WWII and Finland’s assimilatory policies, in 1959 the Sámi association *Sámi Liito* founded Inari Sámi Museum. The current Siida museum building was built in 1998 (Aikio 2022, 21).

The idea for the exhibition had emerged already in the 1980s when *“Sámi voiced a need for an exhibition space that would complement the information about the Sámi and Sámi history provided by the open-air museum”* (Aikio 2022, 23). The process was delayed by the lack of funding, but in 1990 *“a board of experts was set up to plan and construct a new Sámi Museum building and its main exhibition”* (Aikio 2022, 23). Later, state-owned enterprise Metsähallitus joined the implementation of the exhibition. Given that Metssähallitus managed the Sámi lands, this partnership was itself problematic. In the article, Aikio analysed the photographs used in the exhibition, arguing that they played a role in constructing images of Sáminess for outsiders and Sámi audiences up until 2021. According to the author, she approaches *“both the Sámi Museum and its exhibitions as heritage practices that constantly enact and assemble a multitude of Sámi realities and further Sámi futures (s.f. Harrison 2015). Since its opening in 1998, the Siida exhibition has taken part in assembling the Sámi realities we Sámi now live in”* (Aikio 2022, 22). The museum’s board and experts consisted mainly of Finns and males: *“First, until its last year, the board was all-male panel. Second, only three of its members were Sámi, and the majority and all the key positions were held by Finns. Third, considering that the exhibition was to exhibit Sámi culture and northern nature equally, natural scientists were under-represented: only two of the members were natural scientists”* (Aikio 2022, 23). The author continues to explain that the composition of board members reflected the ideas of the time: *“Western education was considered superior when producing objective information about cultural heritage, and the Sámi were seen as objects, rather than actors, of museum activity. Thus, it was normal and acceptable to implement a Sámi exhibition project practically entirely by non-Sámi men”* (Aikio 2022, 24).

The exhibition was based on anthropological theory of human ecology and ecosystem approach organized around “three focus areas: the natural environment surrounding the culture, the community as an interactive system surrounding the individual and the relationship of the individual to the dominant culture. The exhibition focused on survival strategies of nature and culture in the extreme conditions of the north, and its central idea was the interaction of nature, people and culture (Aikio 2022, 24). Even though the exhibition was innovative and well received by the public, it also reproduced colonial modes of representation. The scholar examines photographs

displayed in the exhibition mainly in the section dedicated to Sámi culture. Photographs homogenized Sámi people presenting them as illustrative images rather than their own individual stories: *“the Sámi are not depicted as individuals with identities but as samples of Sáminess in the same manner as a taxidermy specimen does not represent an individual animal but its species”* (Ruotsala 2003, cited in Aikio 2022, 26–27). The photographs were taken by outsiders Finns rather than drawn from Sámi people and told the outsiders’ perspective on Sámi people: *“[o]nly two photographs, both depicting reindeer, are by Sámi photographers”* (Aikio 2022, 27). The resemblance of Lappology was clear, since photographs were staged, focusing on “traditional culture” from an outsider’s gaze, emphasising reindeer herding, people dressed in *gákti* even though at that time people would work using Western clothes. A snowmobile was presented as something pushing people away from their “traditional culture”. As Aikio explains *“[t]he majority of the photographs (150 pcs, 71%) are black-and-white ethnographic photographs taken by non-Sámi researchers to document the Sámi people. <...> By choosing ethnographic photographs as the main photographic material, the designers ended up confirming Sáminess as defined by non-Sámi and placed it as the foundation of Sámi ethnicity”* (Aikio 2022, 28–29).

Moreover, many photographs were undated which “turns the representation ahistorical” and *“the message conveyed to the visitor is that when presenting Sáminess, time is irrelevant: Sámi culture is static and unchanging”* (Aikio 2022, 29). The exhibition also marginalised the voices of women and children: *“[t]he exhibition featured only 11 photographs (5%) by three female photographers, and none of the are Sámi”* (Aikio 2022, 27) and *“[w]ith the exception of the two boys portrayed in the Näkkäljärvi family tree, there are no photographs of contemporary Sámi children in the exhibition”* (Aikio 2022, 31). Aikio’s analysis of the Siida exhibition (1998–2021) shows how museums constructed “authentic” Sáminess largely through an outsider’s gaze, leaving little space to tell a story by Sámi themselves and reproducing the settler-colonial image of a cultural “other”. The scholar describes how such narrative becomes internalized:

Over time, representations provided by exhibitions are perpetuated and become hegemonic – even more “authentic” than the realities the Sámi themselves assemble through their practices. The Sámi realities assembled by a museum exhibition can come to define “authentic” Sáminess, what Sámi culture is and, eventually, who is Sámi. (Aikio 2022, 35)

These examples illustrate how museums and exhibitions constructed the image and discourse of Sámi people mainly based on the majority, non-Sámi perspective through an exoticising gaze. In such a way exhibitions contributed to shaping expectations of what a “real”, “proper” Sámi person should look like. Both museums and academic disciplines accommodated settler-colonial needs to control the image of the Indigenous group as an exotic cultural “other” who were portrayed as slowly disappearing from the contemporary world. Lappology was built on evolutionary and devolutionary thinking, and museums managed to make the Sámi “others”. In this way, the settler-colonial created a discourse of exotic ways of life inevitably disappearing with the advance of modernity.

This vulnerability works very well in settler-colonial logic of elimination. The Indigenous peoples have been “inherently connected to a perception of vulnerability” (Veracini 2011, 4) and dying cultures which actually only grow stronger (Coates 2004, 20). Already in the 1960s, the myth of disappearance was addressed by Brewton Berry (1960) as a social myth in the USA context. Berry showed how the idea of the “vanishing Indian” was constructed through social Darwinist assumptions and incoherent definitions of Native American identity. Despite official classifications and predictions of extinction, Native populations persisted and even grew, contradicting the myth of disappearance (Berry 1960). For both Veracini and Coates, this is the discourse that positions Indigenous groups as fragile and destined for extinction, and this, according to Veracini, would be exactly the goal of settlers.

To illustrate the epistemic weapons of settler-colonialism, an example discussed by Jace Weaver could be provided. The author argues that in colonial Tasmania it was declared that Indigenous people had disappeared because the colonizer defined indigeneity through bloodline. According to them, there were no Indigenous Tasmanians left. However, there were and still are many people of mixed Indigenous and Tasmanian ancestry (Weaver 2000, 228), who may have borne the identity and culture despite the bloodline. The blood quantum as a way to understand ancestry and ethnicity, as well as culture, is largely rooted in Western societies. The extinction was declared from the coloniser’s epistemic point of view and served their aim. Similarly, in the case of museums and scientific discourse, comparable forms of epistemic violence made Indigenous groups appear to be disappearing. Presenting the Sámi as exotic cultural “others” creates expectations that, when they do not match the picture in contemporary contexts, they are understood as not “real”, assimilated or disappearing. If Sámi people adopt capitalist logics in reindeer herding, or if they live in modern housing, and do modern

day jobs, they are often understood in the eyes of the scholars or tourists as less “authentic” and “real”. Sámi adoption of modern ways of life is understood as assimilation or Finnicisation, whereas it is not claimed that Finns have assimilated as Americans or British because they have adopted their clothing or railways. In short, such construction of a discourse is control over identity and image of the group and, as it will later be shown in this dissertation, permeates self-image of the group. People start internalizing the idea of being not “proper” Sámi, being assimilated or more Finnish.

Marginality in itself also plays a role in settler coloniality. When talking about Indigenous groups, the context is often marginalisation. As Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin argue, *“The result is the positioning of the indigenous people as the ultimately marginalised, a concept which reinscribes the binarism of centre/margin, and prevents their engagement with the subtle processes of imperialism by locking them into a locally strategic but ultimately self-defeating essentialism”* (Ashcroft, Griffiths, Tiffin 1995, 214). Marginalisation and, more importantly, the representation of groups as marginalised means that there is little place for these groups in the dominant society. As culturally other and marginalised, they are perceived as living in the outskirts of contemporary modernity – are exotic but irrelevant. Marginalisation also means fragility, endangerment, and vulnerability, which are exactly the aspirations of settler-colonial narratives. The more Indigenous groups are represented as vulnerable and fragile, the more it strengthens the discourse of extinction of distinctive groups and anchors the settlers’ indigeneity. It means that “marginality is the condition of the centre” (Minh-ha 1995, 216). Indigenous groups are marginalised until they are perceived as “others” by the dominant majority, and the centre maintains power as long as it is recognised as the dominant society. The question then becomes: what constitutes this centre? Veracini suggests that settler colonies, unlike overseas colonies, do not have a distinction between colony and metropolis; settler colonies actually erase this distinction (Veracini 2011, 3). Veracini likely refers to geographical differences in land occupation. However, there is still a power asymmetry: people in settler colonies are often marginalized, and decisions are made in capitals by national political powers and economic interests, in line with the needs of the dominant majority. Marginality is a convenient discourse for the colonial structure. Hence, the loss of marginality is a step towards decolonisation. The political emancipation of Indigenous groups and the creation of autonomous voices are necessary to decentralise the centre on which marginalisation depends

Another aspect of the state control is control over identity – a determination of who belongs to the Indigenous group. In the case of Finland,

this has been decades-long process of negotiation between Sámi and the state, particularly regarding the official definition of Sámi and eligibility to vote in Sámi Parliamentary elections. With the recognition of the Sámi as Indigenous peoples in the 1990s, Sámi also established political bodies to govern their cultural autonomy. The Constitutions of Norway, Sweden, and Finland recognize Sámi as an Indigenous people and Sámi parliaments were established in Norway in 1987, in Sweden in 1992 and in Finland in 1996 (there is also a Sámi parliament in Russia, however, it is not yet recognized by the Russian Federation).

Despite efforts to have a common Sámi definition in Nordic Sámi Convention, today all the countries have their own separate laws to determine Sámi identity. In Norway and Sweden, the criteria for inclusion on the Sámi electoral roll are largely similar, however, “[i]n Norway and Sweden, the *Sámediggi* have historically tried to increase the number of registered voters while the *Sámediggi* in Finland has been more restrictive” (Mörkenstam et al. 2022, 294). In Norway and Sweden, both systems combine a subjective element, requiring an individual to identify as Sámi, with an objective element, meaning that the individual, or at least one parent or grandparent (in Norway, up to great-grandparents), must have used Sámi as a home language. Alternatively, eligibility may be established if one’s parent is already registered on the electoral roll of the Sámi Parliament (Mörkenstam et al. 2022, 297).

In Finland, the Sámi status as an Indigenous people was first written into the Constitution in the Act on the Sámi Parliament in 1995. The Act on the Sámi Parliament of Finland describes Sámi as:

The Sámi, as an indigenous people, have linguistic and cultural autonomy in the Sámi homeland as provided in this Act and in other legislation. For the tasks relating to cultural autonomy the Sámi shall elect from among themselves a Sámi Parliament (Act on the Sámi Parliament (974/1995 amendments up to 1026/2003 included)).

The recognition of the Sámi as an Indigenous people was the result of efforts of activism (Lehtola 2015a, 247), starting from the Sami rights movement in 1960s–1970s to the recognition of Sámi Indigenous status legally in the Act on the Sámi Parliament in 1995. However, according to Lehtola (2015, 221; 266) and others (Karjalainen 2015, 154–166; Tuulentie 2001, 29–32; Valkonen 2009, 71), even if the Indigenous status was recognised, the Finnish state did not understand the importance of that and treated Sámi as a linguistic minority. This can be seen in long-standing

disputes over Sámi self-determination which was for a long time controlled by the Finnish state rather than Sámi themselves. Nevertheless, for Sámi this was a very important step which gave a political tool to address injustices, and encourage advancing of Sámi rights.

The law established a lot of important aspects. For example, the right to use the Sámi languages when dealing with the authorities in the Sámi homeland area. The area of traditional Sámi homeland was recognized by the Constitution in 1996 and consists of municipalities of Enontekiö, Inari and Utsjoki as well as the Lappi reindeer-herding district in the municipality of Sodankylä. Sámi have constitutional self-government in the Sámi homeland concerning language and culture. The Skolt Sámi also maintain their tradition of village administration, under the Skolt Act. However, the autonomy granted to the Sámi is limited. The Sámi Parliament in Finland is under the Ministry of Justice and only has an advisory role in political decisions. The Sámi Parliament practically plays only a cultural role and is responsible for allocating funds and producing educational materials.

In the Act on the Sámi Parliament, the definition of who is considered a Sámi person is provided. It has not been purely a legal question (only those legally recognised as Sámi under the law are eligible to vote in Sámi Parliamentary elections), but also a question within the communities: “[w]ho is a Sámi is an essential question politically, socially and emotionally” (Valkonen 2014, 211). The official definition adopted in 1995 and used until 2025 has been mainly based on linguistic criteria with certain exceptions:

For the purpose of this Act, a Sámi means a person who considers himself a Sámi, provided:

- (1) That he himself or at least one of his parents or grandparents has learnt Sámi as his first language;*
- (2) That he is a descendent of a person who has been entered in a land, taxation or population register as a mountain, forest or fishing Lapp; or*
- (3) That at least one of his parents has or could have been registered as an elector for an election to the Sámi Delegation or the Sámi Parliament. (Act on the Sámi Parliament 1995)*

Controversially, this linguistic definition was extended almost accidentally in 1995 to include descendants of people who were identified as “Lapps” (the term “Lapp” is now considered derogatory) in previous land, taxation or population registers. In the draft version of the Act, this criterion had a year limit of 1875, which would have restricted ancestry claims to a

closer historical connection. However, when adopting it in the Parliament's Constitutional Law Committee, Finnish lawyers changed it to its current form with no mention of the year. Sámi representatives were not asked of their position on this matter (Lehtola 2015a, 65). This created the situation where people with very distant Sámi ancestors could register in the Sámi Parliament voting list or run for the Parliament. This created three decades of disputes over Sámi definition in Finland. Sámi were concerned about the future of Sámi rights and self-governing when Finnish people could enter the electoral list and could influence decisions concerning Sámi. At the same time, new movements of self-identified Sámi appeared because of fear to lose rights to the land and water use (Lehtola 2015a) and started to apply for rights to vote. The Finnish government confused on the matter, continued to make paternalizing decisions regarding Sámi identity while not realizing Sámi self-determination rights. The situation generated a lot of hatred, new stereotypes, and fatigue among many Sámi.

This mistake or event did not match Sámi people's understanding of Sáminess and led to debates and quarrels locally, nationally and even reached international courts. Many people who were not considered Sámi by the Sámi community entered the electoral roll by appealing to Finnish courts after the Sámi electoral commission had rejected their applications for recognition as Sámi and eligibility to vote. For example, during the 2015 Sámi Parliamentary elections, a scandalous event took place. Before the elections, hundreds of people applied for a right to vote and to be considered as Sámi. After the Sámi Parliament rejected applications, nearly 200 people appealed the decision to the Supreme Administrative Court, which ruled that 93 of them had the right to vote. While applicants, of course, welcomed the decision, it was met with great discontent by a lot of Sámi. The former president of the Sámi Parliament, Klemetti Näkkäläjärvi, resigned from the Sámi electoral roll in protest, saying that Finland was a racist country that protected the interests of Finns and the Finnish state over Sámi Indigenous rights. Another former president of the Sámi Parliament, Tiina Sanila-Aikio, commented on the situation, blaming the Finnish state for continuing forced assimilation. She maintained: *"This is a question of the collective rights of the Sámi and not the rights of individual persons"* (Yle uutiset 2015). In general, fear of assimilation grew within Sámi society. In 2018, the UN Human Rights Committee found that Finland had violated Indigenous rights. However, nothing significant has been done about this strong international ruling.

For decades, Sámi advocated for changes the so called "Lapp" criteria, which means that people could claim Sámi status based on records originated from church registers and tax documents where people were

classified according to livelihoods such as as hunting, fishing, or reindeer herding. New settlers were also taking up Sámi livelihoods and they would be written in the books as “Lapps”. Individuals who had one distant ancestor identified as Sámi or “Lapp”, could apply for Sámi status. The neo-Lapp or Forest Sámi (*metsäsaamelaiset*) movement (mentioned before) also found a way to claim Sámi Indigenous status, even though many members were against Sámi rights and autonomy in the 1990s (Lehotla 2015, 13). Unfortunately, such legal chaos created a lot of troubles for Sámi society. The Sámi were increasingly portrayed in Finland as a closed, shady community who did not accept outsiders. It would often be the only thing people knew about Sámi, and Sámi in the south would get a lot of questions regarding this issue. For example, a research participant was attending a conference in Northern Finland but not in the Sámi homeland area. She was only asked by Finnish attendees about the Sámi definition debate, and had to explain the difference between reclaiming and maintaining Sámi identity through a Sámi parent and Sámi family, and attempts by Finnish people to claim identify through distant ancestors:

Finnish people were, like, all over the place asking me, like, these really complicated political questions and to one of them I also explained this my story of reconnecting how it differs from a Finnish person looking into their identity through ancestors from hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of years prior when to me it's just one generation. Like and everyone understands why I'm doing it. Why I do it. So there is no Sáminess without community. (Interview 2023, Rovaniemi, alias Karoliinná, early 30s)

The fatigue of this question spread in the Sámi community. Karoliinná further commented on the event, pointing out that such interactions were very common and caused fatigue:

[B]ecause it's such a hot dilemma at the moment, so they were so interested "what is your perspective on this?" And I feel like it's such a, like, a mentally hard subject because it's actually basically about someone who is trying to steal your identity on false basis and trying to assimilate, continue assimilation, colonization, and this, like, political power hierarchies between the major population and minorities. So, I feel like every time I had the conversation I age mentally five years. <...> I can tell you that this question just, you know, exhausts me so much. Because it's like I said, it's just an

invasion of identity. So, it's a very, like, consuming subject to try to explain to a Finnish person why it's so exhausting. (Interview 2023, Rovaniemi, alias Karoliinná, early 30s)

What makes it more tiring for Sámi, is that Finland has not ratified the ILO Convention, which would strengthen Sámi rights to their lands, often suggesting that first the identity question has to be resolved. As a result, identity becomes a big political question and burden on Sámi while the Forest Sámi (*metsäsaamelaiset*) movement's active role continues to create confusion among the general population. Karoliinná adds:

[N]ow there are actual generations who are born and growing into these identities that are not actually based on truth. And these generations are now, for example, taking over TikTok, which is creating a false reputation of Sáminess. (Interview 2023, Rovaniemi, alias Karoliinná, early 30s)

Media influences on this debate and general hate speech towards Sámi have been discussed academically (e.g. Näkkäläjärvi 2017, Junka-Aikio 2022a). Pirita Näkkäläjärvi argues that hostile and derogatory speech directed at Sámi people, expressed through public and private intimidation, personal attacks, online harassment, and other practices aimed at silencing, has significantly narrowed the space for Sámi participation in public discussion (Näkkäläjärvi 2017).

The advocacy and legal disputes to amend the law started after the Act on the Sámi Parliament was adopted in 1995. Three governments failed to pass the new law and to accept amendments. However, recent efforts have finally paid, and after 30 years of debate, in August 2025 a Reformed Act on the Sámi Parliament was adopted in the Finnish Parliament, followed by many from the Sami community sharing joy online. The legal issue was also addressed by the Sámi Truth and Reconciliation Commission in Finland (Sámi Truth and Reconciliation Commission report, Part I, 2025, 64–68). However, this was a long and tiring process for the Sámi community. While preparing for fieldwork, I encountered in 2022 a petition circulating in the media calling for the Finnish government to amend the Act on the Sámi Parliament and finally grant Sámi a self-determination right, including updating the voting process for current times, e.g., postal voting is a huge problem since post offices in small areas have been closed across Finland. The Act finally reached the government and the Finnish Parliament in 2023 and was put to a vote. However, it has not been accepted. The president of the Finnish Sámi Youth

association at that time, Petra Laiti, was in Oslo occupying the Ministry of Petroleum and Energy together with other Sámi activists protesting the Fosen case when she received the news. Laiti commented on the news on her Instagram live feed in the lobby of the Norwegian Ministry of Petroleum and Energy:

I literally have very little to say other than this is a travesty, this is a tragedy, but above all it's incredibly racist. This is about a room full of Finns deciding behind closed doors that a community, none of them belong to, doesn't have a say who represents that community. It's a room full of Finnish politicians making a conscious choice to continue the ... just a crumbling of Sámi democracy. And it's also the Finnish Parliament deciding to act against the explicit recommendations of the UN Human Rights Committee, and UN Committee against Racial Discrimination who both of them have explicitly stated that Finland needs to revise the Sámi Parliament Act and today that a conscious decision has been made to not do so. And so this puts this issue in a completely different perspective because this means now that Finland is both aware of the human rights violations that the UN has called Finland out on and is actively deciding not fixing those human rights violations. (@petralaiti 2023b).

Later more information on the legal procedure came to light. The Parliamentary Act did not reach the Parliament and was stopped in the Constitutional Committee when members decided not to continue with it. Later some speculative news came about one member of the committee who was a supporter of the Sámi rights being given the wrong time to attend the meeting, and instead the anti-Sámi representative was chosen (@petralaiti 2023b). Again, the fatigue in the livestream of the president of the Finnish Sámi Youth association showed in unfiltered manner being caught in between protests and news:

And so the sad sad truth of the matter is, I will be forced to leave the action regarding Sámi land rights in order to fly back to Finland to watch my Parliament crumble. And that is the reality of Sámi youth in Finland. So, you get to choose between occupying the state department lobby and being at home watching your democracy tearing itself apart. <...>

And what I really feel so desperately unfair about all of this, is the amount of time we spent with both of these issues. Fovsen Njaarke plans started what? Years ago.

-Yeah, like over ten years ago [answered by a member of the Norwegian Sámi Youth Association, Elle Rávdná Näkkäljärvi]

Over ten years ago. And similarly the Sámi Parliament act has been a burning cause in the Sámi community in Finland for over 10 years. The law itself is 30 years old, but the conflict that is causing is 10 years old. So, 10 years of Sámi young people putting themselves on the line of these issues and the truth of the matter is that at some point we stop being young, and the issues are not still resolved. And the issues are still there. (@petralaiti 2023a).

The discourse over identity is a sensitive topic for the minority community, since the dominant group has much more power. The exercise of power can be visible in scientific discourses, museum representations, and even legislative histories concerning minority rights and definitions, and paternalistic acts of deciding who is a member of the community. However, once the image of vulnerable, marginalized, and “backward people” constructed through Lappology and early anthropological works have been built, the political choices are made accordingly, and the State makes the choices for people it sees in such discourse. This has influenced the Sámi identity formation, and still continues to do so.

2.7. Decolonisation of Sámi: Instead of Concluding Remarks

If settler colonialism in Sápmi unfolded through land dispossession, forced assimilation, dismantling of the *siida* system, suppression of language, destruction and removal of sacred objects, and epistemic control through Lappology and state institutions, contemporary Sámi politics and cultural life can be read as multidimensional processes of decolonisation. What was once taken, silenced, or marginalised is today being reclaimed, renegotiated, or reimagined. The repatriation and rematriation of cultural objects and ancestral remains challenge earlier practices of extraction and museum collections. Truth and Reconciliation Commissions in the Nordic countries (Finland 2021–2025; Norway 2018–2023; Sweden 2021–present) publicly acknowledge assimilation, boarding school trauma, and structural injustice. Similarly, church apologies symbolically confront the role of Christianisation

in dismantling Sámi belief systems. These processes mark a shift from official ignorance to formal recognition, even if material redistribution of power and land remains incomplete.

At the same time, linguistic and cultural revitalisation directly opposes earlier projects of homogenisation. Sámi language nests, adult language courses, and strengthened Sámi-language education counter decades of prohibition and stigma. The reclaiming of Sáminames, the renewed visibility of drums and *gákti*, and the flourishing of contemporary Sámi art, film, literature, and political activism undermine the long-standing discourse of the “vanishing Indigenous.” Alongside these developments, the transformation from Lappology to Sámi Studies represents an epistemic shift in which Sámi increasingly define the terms of research, representation, and knowledge production about themselves.

Land rights struggles against mining, wind power projects, and infrastructure developments confront the foundational logic of settler colonialism – dispossession of territory. However, these rights have not been implemented successfully. Only Norway has ratified ILO Convention 169, whereas Sweden and Finland have not yet done so. In this context, the critique of Coulthard is relevant. According to Coulthard, reconciliation processes like Truth and Reconciliation Commissions often frame settler colonial violence as a past issue, ignoring the ongoing colonial structures: “*Originally, however, this approach to conflict resolution was developed in polities undergoing a formal ‘transition’ from the violent history of openly authoritarian regimes to more democratic forms of rule*” (Coulthard 2014, 22). This framing encourages forgiveness and reconciliation as ways to “move on”, which can obscure and leave intact the present colonial power relations. Indigenous anger and resentment are frequently portrayed negatively, as obstacles to reconciliation, rather than legitimate responses to ongoing injustice. Thus, these processes risk depoliticizing Indigenous resistance and maintaining colonial domination under the guise of healing and progress (Coulthard 2014, 22). These ongoing Indigenous struggles over lands and waters in settler-colonial contexts still require people to fight and resist generation after generation. They get tired of using time for this and for explaining various topics, and tired of being questioned about Sámi disputes, and as I will show later, and about being “proper” Sámi. However, many important steps have been suggested to governments by Commissions. In Finland, the Commission encourages self-determination, ratification of ILO Convention 169, and advancing the Nordic Sámi Convention. It recommends securing land, fishing, and reindeer herding rights through legislative reform; safeguarding transgenerational land-use rights; supporting Skolt Sámi self-governance; and

ensuring cross-border Sámi cooperation. The Commission further calls for, among other measures, equal language and cultural rights for all Sámi children regardless of residence, culturally appropriate health and social services, permanent psychosocial support structures, improved public knowledge about Sámi as an Indigenous people, and the establishment of state-level coordination and regular parliamentary reporting to ensure long-term commitment to Sámi rights and compensation for damages (Sámi Truth and Reconciliation Commission in Finland, Summary 2025, 8–10).

Yet decolonisation in Sápmi is not a simple restoration of a precolonial past. Rather, it involves processes of Sámiification – rethinking institutions, governance structures, museums, and cultural practices to better reflect Sámi needs and perspectives in the present. It is a negotiation between continuity and change, tradition and modernity, memory and innovation. What was lost is not merely being recovered; it is being reinterpreted and reshaped. In this sense, decolonisation is an ongoing restructuring of relationships between Sámi and the state, between land and livelihood, and between inherited colonial frameworks and emerging Sámi futures. These transformations, however, also generate new questions about authenticity, belonging, and “proper” Sáminess, tensions that will be explored in the following chapter through the lens of ethnostress and contemporary negotiations of identity. The following chapters will show how ethnostress is not only a consequence but also another one “pillar” of settler-coloniality, and the ways people negotiate and de-colonise it in their everyday lives.

3. EXPECTATIONS OF AUTHENTICITY IN SETTLER-COLONIALITY

This chapter argues that expectations of authenticity function as a central mechanism of settler-colonial power. Rather than treating authenticity as a neutral cultural ideal or a matter of individual identity, it examines how authenticity expectations regulate Indigenous difference by defining who can be recognised as a legitimate Indigenous subject and on what terms. Drawing on theories of settler colonialism, indigeneity, ethnicity, and identity construction, the chapter analyses how Indigenous identities are produced through ongoing processes of negotiation between colonial representations, state recognition regimes, ethnopolitical movements, and everyday social interactions.

Using the Sámi case, the chapter situates these dynamics within broader global debates on indigeneity and recognition. It demonstrates how shared markers of Sáminess, such as language, cultural practices, traditional livelihoods, and connections to place, have emerged through historical processes of colonisation, resistance, and ethnopolitical mobilisation. While these markers have been crucial for Indigenous political survival and collective self-determination, they can also become essentialised as expectations of what constitutes an “authentic” Sámi identity.

The chapter further argues that authenticity expectations are not imposed solely from outside Indigenous communities. As Indigenous peoples engage with state institutions, legal frameworks, and international Indigenous politics, colonial categories of difference may become internalised and reproduced within ethnopolitical movements themselves. Consequently, authenticity expectations operate simultaneously as a strategy of political recognition and as a source of tension, shaping how individuals negotiate belonging, legitimacy, and identity. By tracing these processes, the chapter lays the groundwork for understanding ethnostress as an embodied experience emerging from the intersection of settler-colonial power, identity construction, and the internalisation of authenticity expectations.

3.1. Roots of Ethnostress: Sámi Nation Building and Essentialisation of Identity

According to Lehtola (2015, 57) and Valkonen (2009, 58–59), in modern society Sámi needed a unified Sámi identity, Sámi ethnicity, and common performativity. As Lehtola argues, “[t]he birth of an ethnic identity

was only possible when the family and village based local identity of Sámi culture was exchanged for a general Sámi identity, a general Sámi feeling of belonging” (Lehtola 2002, 57). Moreover, the national borders between Sámi “*caused divisions of culture and language among the Sámi where there had been none before*” (Lehtola 2002, 58). In Norway, the first efforts to organize Sámi political interests emerged in the early twentieth century, but they did not succeed due to strong resistance from the state (Gaski 2008, 220). The Sámi political awakening started in the 1940s (Valkonen 2009, 66), and the process accelerated in the post-war period and came in successive waves with regional and national differences (Lehtola 2002, 58).

The first organisations were already established in the mid-20th century: Sámi Sær’vi and Oslo Sámi Sær’vi in Norway, (1948), Same-Ätnam in Sweden (1945), and Samii Litto in Finland (1945) publicly known as *Saamelaisasiain komitean mietintö* (Sámi Affairs Committee) (Lehtola 2002, 57). Later, more local organisations were founded. Lehtola states that the growing feeling of belonging and the formation of Sámi organisations that united different Sámi groups, were the effect of the World War II evacuation experiences. Sámi had to live in the south among Finns who spoke the language they did not know and led unfamiliar ways of life, “*they realized the existence of a ‘Sámi people’ who had similar clothing and thinking patterns, and spoke similar language. The loss of their homes, the feeling of insecurity and strangeness opened a new social realm which promoted the strengthening of the feeling of belonging together*” (Lehtola 2002, 58). The forming of the Sámi nation was also due to the changed environment in the international (e.g., The UN Declaration on Human Rights) and national policies towards minorities (Valkonen 2009, 67; Lehtola 2002, 58), as well as reaction to postwar rebuilding of Sápmi according to the standards of the dominant societies and, as a consequence, assimilation (Lehtola 1997, 70; 2002, 70), and modernization (Lehtola 2002, 57; 60). Sámi organisations proposed initiatives advancing their rights already in the 1950s. In the report of the Finnish government Committee for Sámi Affairs (1952), the organisation, among other things, proposed “*special Sámi areas where Sámi privileges and rights in their actual areas of occupancy would be protected.*” However, those suggestions were ignored (Lehtola 2002, 58). In Norway, the government committee report was prepared in the late 1950s. Most of the suggestions were ignored, but it succeeded in ending the Norwegization policy in Sámi areas and allowing the use of the Sámi language in schools (Lehtola 2002, 58–60). These and other claims of recognizing Sámi as a distinct group were quite radical at the time and attracted both attention and criticism in society. For example, in Norway Sámi were understood as Sámi speaking Norwegians

until the 1970s. Even the Sámi Labour Party politician Hans Opstad argued that all problems that Sámi have are only because of the inequalities between the periphery and the centre (Bjørklund 2013, 22–23). In 1953, first Sámi Conference was organized in Jáhkâmáhkke (Lulea Sámi) (Swe. *Jokkmokk*), Sweden. The conference resulted in the establishment of the pan-Nordic Sami organisation *Sámiráđđi* – the Sámi Council (1956), which continued to organize these conferences since. The conference fostered the pan-Nordic Sámi identity as well as for the first time revealed Sámi issues as complex and holistic rather than as separate concerns (Lehtola 2002, 60).

At the end of the 1960s, a new wave of cultural and political movement emerged called ČSV, an abbreviation with several interpretations but the best known is *Čájet Sámi Vuoigŋa!* [Show Sámi Spirit!] The movement was led by the first young “boarding house generation” (Lehtola 2002, 70) and was a breakthrough for Sámi culture and activism. In arts it was also known as the “Sámi Renaissance” (Lehtola 2002, 70). During this period, Sámi visual arts, handicrafts (*duodji*), the popularisation of the traditional dress *gákti*, literature, music, and theatre flourished and educational and printing companies were set up. Soon, ČSV became associated with more radical views. Ivar Bjørklund writes: “*ČSV soon became a rallying call for radical Sami, i.e. Sami people who had a confrontational attitude toward Norwegian society. ČSV represented an alternative Sami self-image. Sami language and culture was no longer something to be ashamed of. <...> To the outside world, the development seemed ominous. Some newspapers were writing about ‘Lapp Power!’ among the Sami, a parallel to the Black Power movement in the USA*” (Bjørklund 2013, 29). More political organisations were founded, for example, in 1968 the central Sámi organisation in Norway, Norgga Sámiid Riikasearvi (Norway’s National Organisation of Sámi), was established. According to Lehtola, “[u]nder its influence the attitudes of Norwegians began to change and the Sámi’s concept of their own rights” (Lehtola 2002, 70). ČSV also started to form a united image of Sáminess with no room for ambiguity about who was Sámi and what it meant to be one – either one is Sámi or from the majority population (Stordahl 1996, 95). Valkonen comments that during the ČSV era Sáminess became something you take a stand on and make it visible and perform. The lack of that would be interpreted as non-Sáminess (Valkonen 2009, 75). At the same time, a mythology of Sámi living in freedom and peace was born (Gaup 2006, 93).

Where the Sámi were more stigmatized, more radical forms of activism emerged. For example, in Norway, compared to Finland, the public was more hostile towards Sámi and the Sámi activities in Norway were more radical (Nyyssönen 2007, 339). A big turn for cultural awakening occurred in

Alta, Norway, in the late 1970s, when Sámi people protested against the construction of the Alta hydroelectric dam, which interfered with reindeer migration routes. Even though the dam was built, the Alta case attracted national and international attention, and strengthened the Sámi political movement for their rights. At the 1976 Sámi Conference, it was decided to join the World Council of Indigenous Peoples (Valkonen 2009, 72). The Sámi were later recognized as an Indigenous people in Norway by Constitution in 1988 and in Finland in 1995. The Swedish Parliament recognised Sámi as an Indigenous people in 1977. Since, the indigeneity discourse has been used in referring to Sámi and Sámi rights. The National Association of Norwegian Sámi also used this discourse in advocating for Sámi rights in the Alta conflict bringing new perspectives (Bjørklund 2013, 26). This was new not only to the Norwegian public, but to other Sámi, showing that the Sámi ethno-political movement, like other national movements, was constructed and led by elite groups: *“Such views aroused strong reactions, not least from Sami quarters. Many Sami thought the Sami demands undemocratic; they would provoke conflict, and moreover, they were an insult to the King and the Royal Family. Expressions like ‘Super Sami’ and ‘Oslo Sami’ started appearing in Finnmark newspapers”* (Bjørklund 2013, 26).

Unlike the Alta conflict in Norway, which led to a broad re-evaluation of state–Sámi relations and strengthened the use of international Indigenous rights discourse, Sámi mobilization in Finland achieved more limited results. The Kessi dispute in the late 1980s emerged over state-planned logging in the Kessi area of eastern Aanaar, within the Sámi homeland in Finland. The dispute centred on whether old-growth forests used as reindeer grazing lands, particularly by Skolt Sámi herders, should be logged by the state Forest and Park Service as compensation for areas previously protected for conservation. Often seen as Finland’s parallel case to the Alta conflict, it remained primarily as a forestry and environmental conflict rather than a fundamental land ownership or self-governance struggle. While environmentalists presented the issue as a struggle to protect the “last wilderness forests” of Finland, Sámi actors also raised broader concerns about land use rights, traditional livelihoods, and unresolved questions of land ownership in the Sámi homeland area. Although Finnish Sámi actors employed legal arguments and international rights references, they lacked the same level of unity, political leverage, and national impact as their Norwegian counterparts. The outcome was a compromise establishing wilderness areas while allowing continued logging. It was widely perceived as a partial defeat and did not fundamentally transform the state–Sámi relationship (Nyyssönen 2008, 87; 90–98).

Another turning point occurred when the Finnish government formed the Sámi Delegation in 1973. It was called Sámi Parlameanta (Sámi Parliament) by the Sámi. The Delegation proposed developments in legislation in the early 1990s, and in 1995 the Act on the Sámi Parliament was passed. It also established Sámediggi, the Sámi Parliament in Finland. The Sámi in Norway and Sweden followed the same model based on the example of the Sámi Delegation, with Sámi Parliaments established in Norway (1989) and Sweden (1993) (Lehtola 2002, 70). More developments followed. As Sari Pietikäinen puts it: “*Sámi-ness, which used to be seen in terms of diverse and localized village-centered identities, has been articulated into a new collective Sámi identity that reaches across borders and is marked by the symbolic construction of a Sámi nation, Sápmi. Today, Sápmi has its flag, National Day, national anthem – and, to an extent, joint media*” (Pietikäinen 2008, 183). The imagined community (Anderson 1983) emerged. As Valkonen argues, the Sámi began to repeat the logic of one nation and it meant building a discourse of the Sámi as a one nation (Valkonen 2009, 72).

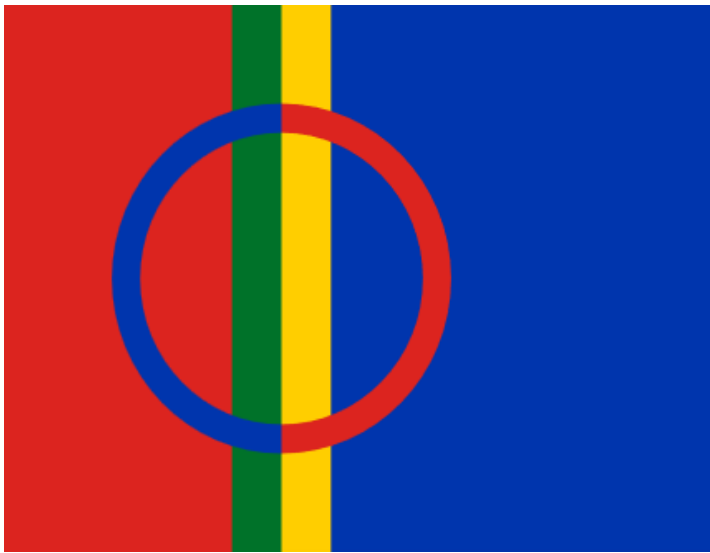


Figure 7. The Sámi flag, designed by Astrid Båhl and adopted by the Sámi Conference in 1986. Source: Wikimedia Commons, public domain.

In relation to the indigeneity, in Finland, Sámi efforts to defend their rights have drawn on several overlapping discourses that shifted over time. According to Nyssönen (2008) early institutional Sámi politics emphasized cultural distinctiveness, portraying the Sámi as an original people whose identity was closely connected to traditional livelihoods and nature. Some

actors outside the official Sami Delegation incorporated the discourse of “natural people” following global Indigenous discourse (Nyyssönen 2008, 92). In the 1980s, this representation of the Sámi as practitioners of a sustainable way of life gained visibility, particularly in broader public and international arenas. However, *“rhetoric of fear emerged in official and unofficial statements regarding separatism and disintegration of the nation-state”* (Nyyssönen 2008, 89). Over time, however, Sámi political strategy increasingly turned toward a rights-based and legal discourse, reframing Indigenous identity from a cultural characteristic into a juridical status grounded in collective rights and land claims (Nyyssönen 2008, 92). Thus, Sámi advocacy in Finland evolved through a tension between cultural, environmental, and legal discourses, shifting from images of authenticity and sustainability toward a more strategic rights-based approach aimed at establishing firmer legal foundations for land and self-determination claims.

In Norway, in later politics after the establishment of the Sámi Parliament, according to Lina Gaski (2008, 232), Sámi political elites framed the narrative of the Sámi relationship to territory through several overlapping discourses of history and struggle, Indigenous rights, culture and tradition, and centre–periphery. These interpretative frameworks construct shifting boundaries between “us” and “others,” positioning the Sámi in different subject roles depending on the context. Through historical narratives, territorial issues are raised as part of a long struggle in which the Sámi appear as victims of external power. The Indigenous rights discourse draws a sharper divide between Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations, while the cultural discourse emphasises tradition and a close relationship to nature as defining features of Sámi identity. Finally, the centre–periphery discourse broadens the “we” to include all northern residents against distant state authorities, creating insider–outsider distinctions not strictly based on ethnicity. The essentialisation and homogenisation of Sámi identity are visible as cultural authenticity must be emphasized. The task of Sámi politicians and activists is to *“provide historical, cultural, political, and economic arguments to both sustain the distinctive character of the Sami nation and to legitimize its demands for further autonomy”* (Gaski 2008, 234). Dichotomies emerge in the discourse of indigeneity: victims-oppressors, ecology-environmental degradation, Indigenous- non Indigenous, closeness-alienation and, finally, tradition/culture/authenticity-modernity (Gaski 2008, 232).

Since the lands were always an issue, a matter of dispossession and colonisation, no wonder the Sámi rights movement strengthened and received international visibility for such disputes. Hence, the traditional livelihoods, living off the land, and cultural “otherness” became an epicentre of the

struggle and, discursively, a major cultural and Sáminess factor. The use of the land also becomes a way to save identity, a tool to mobilise people. Culture – the livelihoods, the knowledge about the environment, and the language – is something to be practised. Not participating in traditional livelihoods could be seen as a threat. In settler colonialism the Indigenous people find themselves in a trap. On the one hand, to resist assimilation they have to fight development projects, save traditional livelihoods, and their ways of life. On the other hand, Indigenous cultures, as any other cultures, are changing but there is an expectation of authentic indigeneity and otherness to legitimize the right to defend against further invasion to their lands.

In her book *Poliittinen saamelaisuus* [Political Sáminess] Valkonen (2009) argues that symbols of Sáminess were created as a Sámi nation building project and united Sámi living in four different countries. These symbols became the Sámi languages, Sámi traditional dress and handicrafts, and connection to nature through livelihoods such as reindeer herding, fishing, or other practices. The researcher argues that with the awakening of political consciousness, aspects of Sámi lives that had previously been targeted by assimilation policies and humiliation became those symbols. Valkonen notes that *“stigmatized difference and otherness have become the basis and justification for resource and political demands”* (Valkonen 2009, 24, my translation). For example, *gákti*, traditional clothes that only Sámi can wear (which in views of many activists cannot be worn by non-Sámi), is the symbol of Sámi pride. Yoiking is part of every major official Sámi celebration, and in the past 30 years so much has been done to revitalize Sámi languages. All official information in the Sámi area should be available in three Sámi languages in Finland.

While such symbols can play an important role in Indigenous political mobilisation and collective identity formation, they can also contribute to a relatively homogeneous image of what Indigenous identity should look like. The problem arises when cultural practices that have acquired particular political and symbolic significance become understood as timeless markers of authentic indigeneity. Writing in a North American Indigenous context, the educator and healer Diane Hill and her colleague Robert Antone caution against precisely this tendency:

[T]he concept of “being Indian and possessing a unique culture” takes on a near exclusive identification with a lifestyle that existed before the loss of mobility (somewhere between 100 or 300 years ago) <...> you can still hear the arguments that a particular ceremony must be done in this way and only in this way; that the “real”

traditional person must look, dress and live in a way prescribed by the past, and so on. These arguments can get us locked into highly emotional feelings and beliefs that argue about “going back” instead of recognizing the living culture that we carry. (Antone and Hill 1992, 6)

Antone and Hill thus point to a tension inherent in the construction of recognisable Indigenous identities: cultural practices that serve as important sources of collective identity and political mobilisation may also become fixed as standards against which contemporary Indigenous lives are judged. A similar tension has been discussed in the Sámi context by Valkonen (2009), who examines how Sámi ethnopolitical mobilisation developed within international discourses of indigeneity. She argues that the ethnopolitical Sámi movement and Sámi nation building process were formed on the grounds of international discourse of indigeneity which emphasizes the relationship with nature and land, traditional livelihoods, and are the basis for language and culture. However, the indigenous discourse is built on essentialist Western colonial assumptions of the Indigenous “other”. According to Valkonen, Sámi identity was formed around a specific set of ideas that tied it to traditional ways of life, such as reindeer herding, which is often seen as more “authentically” Indigenous. Even though this helped to form the narrative and collective belonging around Sáminess, it also created a division between who counts as “truly” Sámi and who does not.

Those who live according to traditional practices, such as reindeer herding, were seen as more “real” or “proper” Sámi compared to others. As the researcher puts it, *“some represent the indigenous people better than others, a reindeer herder represents the indigenous people better than a lumberjack”* (Valkonen 2009, 188, my translation). Mathisen problematizes discourses about the relationship between nature and Indigenous peoples and writes about hegemonic representations of Sáminess. According to him, it leaves no room for modern Sáminess, modern ways of life are understood as “non-authentic” and associated with assimilation into the dominant society:

People may either live up to that image, which may not be too easy in modern society, or they may choose to live otherwise. But then they are not considered to be “authentic” Sámi anymore. (Mathisen 2019, 27–28)

Kuokkanen also comments on the hegemonic nature of the Sáminess discourse and argues that often Sámi repeat such discourse themselves and unconsciously internalize such colonial attitudes (Kuokkanen 2007, 149).

Valkonen (2009) distinguishes between normalised and naturalised Sáminess, and marginalised Sáminess that does not fit into a normalised image. People who do not fit in the Sámi normalised image have difficulties in dealing with their ethnicity (Persson 2006, 124–235). Persson further emphasises that because of that Sámi always assume that it is difficult to be modern Sámi in the contemporary world (Persson 2006, 116). While Gaski comments on possible Norwegian Sámi Parliament voters, scholar comments on many people who do not recognise themselves in these normalised Sáminess images: *“They live outside the so-called Sami core areas where the ethnic border between Sami and Norwegian is blurred; many of them can not speak the Sami language and they do not bare visible cultural traits or possess knowledge that is traditionally connected to ‘Saminess’”* (Gaski 2008, 219). Gaski further notes that *“Others see themselves as marginal in relation to the political centre of the modern Sami nation, and at the same time as a result of assimilation many consider Saminess to be part of the distant past and of no relevance to their present identification”* (Gaski 2000 from Gaski 2008, 222). The author also adds that many consider themselves to be “mixed” (Gaski 2008, 222).

Valkonen explains that such strategic essentialism (Spivak 2008) was emancipatory and helped unite Sámi using such symbols as language, handicrafts, and relationship with nature. However, they homogenized Sámi identities. Once political mobilization is achieved, it can have negative effects on the community and its members:

Essentialism may become a practice and standard for the valuation of the Sámi community and the self-evaluation of the Sámi people. This affects both Sámi politics and the way individuals identify themselves as Sámi. (Valkonen 2009, 15, my translation)

Hence, during the formation of the Sámi ethnopolitical movement, a homogenic Sámi identity was formed which was needed for the political mobilization at that time, uniting different Sámi families, language groups, livelihoods, and people living in different countries. People needed the common story to have an “imagined community” (Anderson 1983) to unite and fight for their rights. At the same time it homogenized Sámi identity into clear Sámi markers, and those who did not fit them came to be perceived, and perceive themselves, as not authentic enough.

3.2. Many Places - Same Expectation

Similarly to the Orient (Said 1978) which is a construct depicted by the West as “other”, the Indigenous people are situated in a similar discourse of authenticity, understood through the image of pre-colonial Indigenous peoples. Indigenous peoples live in settler nation-states, therefore the decolonization process and advocacy work for their rights are embedded in the long-lasting colonial discourses and representations of Indigenous peoples. On the one hand, for Indigenous peoples, the politics of identity (Hill and Wilson 2003) and strategic essentialism (Spivak 2008) based on authentication and exoticization are great strategic tools to advocate for their rights. On the other hand, it perpetuates the discourse of the cultural “other”, and as my research shows, creates the epistemic environment to feel “not proper” Indigenous in the modern world.

Expectations of authenticity and accusations of inadequacy have been examined by anthropologists since the rise of Indigenous movements through the 1980s, 1990s, 2000s and even 2010s. This phenomenon seems to have interested anthropologists and raised the issues of the way we conceptualize indigeneity. There is anthropological and scholarly literature available from different parts of the world on the similar issue, including studies from Australia (Povinelli 1998a, 1998b), India (Steir 2010, 2011; Moodie 2015), Latin America (Graham 2002; Ramos 1994; Morelli 2021), Indonesia (Bakker 2007), Namibia (Kraak 2010), Siberia and Circumpolar North in Russia (Slezkine 1994), Europe in Sámi cases (Valkonen 2009, Mathisen 2019, Aikio 2022, Mazzullo 2022).

Elizabeth Povinelli shows how the multiculturalist ideology in Australia creates legal requirements for Indigenous peoples to show the ties to their pre-colonial cultural traditions and worldviews to be recognized as Indigenous (Povinelli 1998a, 1998b). She describes this as “*cunning for recognition*”. Such a requirement is built on the image of cultural difference in contrast to Australian modernity. However, this does not include the legacies of colonization, assimilationist policies, and cultural change. Indigenous people, accordingly, try to fit these requirements and are accused of being opportunistic, not being real or “authentic” Indigenous people (Povinelli 1998a).

Correspondingly, Steir (2010, 2011) criticizes the “liberal-culturalist” approach to Indigenous peoples. She (as well as others Tsing 2007; Friedman 1999) argues that neoliberalism has led to a shift from class and economic struggle discourse to international “liberal-culturalist” discourse of

indigeneity, putting Indigenous groups into a complicated position where they have to meet the dominant society's images of Indigenous communities (Steur 2010; 2011). Steur shows how in Kerala, India, the main Adivasi movement *Adivasi Gothra Maha Sabha* strategically internalized international culturalist discourse instead of their class struggle for land and social inequality. This led to the accusation of the group being not authentic and "really" Indigenous, forced eviction from their occupied lands and the deaths of two people (Steur 2010). She argues that the "liberal-culturalist" discourse does not mute the subaltern groups, but changes their voice and the dominant group is not capable of hearing it (Steur 2011, 93). Furthermore, David Graeber also shows how the struggle for an alternative political and economic system of the Zapatista movement, was reshaped as cultural and identity-based by international discourse. International media, humanitarian organizations, and the UN very quickly represented the movement as that of Mayan Indigenous people "demanding Indigenous autonomy" (Graeber 2004, 104).

In "How should Indian Speak" Graham (2002) shows Western audiences' expectations of the authenticity of Indigenous people of Latin America through the language use issues in identity politics. The scholar shows that Indigenous people have three different strategies when speaking in public: they use the dominant language, they speak their own Indigenous language with a translator, or they mix both. These strategies are sometimes accompanied by a fourth element – visual performativity. The first strategy is illustrated by Davi Yanomami's, a leader and spokesman for the Yanomami people in Brasil, speech and his accusation of being governed by somebody else's interests, because he is being inauthentic speaking in the dominant language.

The second strategy usually means misinterpretations or wrong translations and, consequently, the message intended to the audience being lost. However, it satisfies Western audiences' expectations and meets the image of authenticity and legitimacy. The third strategy is the mix of both. Moreover, performance, clothing are used to legitimize the indigeneity for foreign and Western audiences. Graham also shows that Western-centric monoculturalism is deeply rooted in advocacy work: "Western ideologies of identity posit essential ties between language and culture and impose external definitions of what counts as legitimate in Indians' discursive practice" (Graham 2022, 189).

Ramos refers to Baudrillard's ideas on simulacra (1981) and examines the way NGOs and their advocacy work create the "hyperreal Indians", the image that the bureaucratic process needs. As a result, actions of real Natives might be understood as "wrong", and not proper for Indians. Ramos gives an

example of the Tukano people of Brazil where in 1990, 123 people were expelled from their lands and three Tukano men tried to seek help from NGOs. However, they received limited support as their reputation was that of “bad” and “improper” Indians who collaborated with miners and denied their “noble savage” image. Ramos argues that *“It results from the perhaps totally unconscious construction of a simulation of the real Indian, the model that by anticipation replaces the lived experience of indigenous peoples”* (Ramos 1994, 161). Camilla Morelli (2021) explores the use of ethnographic animation as a participatory research method with Indigenous Matsés youth who have migrated from rural Amazonian villages to the city of Iquitos, Peru. The ethnographer shows the expectations and stereotypes imposed on Indigenous youth seen as “matter out of place”, caught between stereotypes of indigeneity. They are viewed as outsiders who do not belong in the city, yet they have also lost the “exotic charm” associated with their grandparents, leading to their indigeneity being questioned. This creates a feeling of invisibility and denial of the right to self-representation.

In *We Were Adivasis. Aspiration in an Indian Scheduled Tribe*, Megan Moodie (2015) examines how the Dhanka Scheduled Tribe has to negotiate their status as Adivasi. On the one hand, by being, representing, and performing an Adivasiness to legitimise themselves for government quotas for jobs, and, on the other hand, driving for their aspirations and state created policy of quotas for Scheduled Tribes to strive for social mobility until they are no longer classified as Scheduled Tribe in the sense of marginalisation. As a result, they often vocalise their indigeneity in the phrase: “we were Adivasis” that combines both socioeconomic mobility and expectations of authentic indigeneity (Moodie 2015). Yuri Slezkine (1994) writes about not-so European colonization of Siberia and Circumpolar North in Russia. The scholar demonstrates how Indigenous peoples of the region were repeatedly imagined and represented through shifting stereotypes, from monstrous and uncivilized beings in early accounts, to “children of nature” and later to backward populations in need of socialist modernization. Within Soviet ideology, the Bolsheviks interpreted circumpolar foraging societies as “authentic proletarians.”

In Indonesia, Laurens Bakker (2007) ethnographically investigates the contrast between the outside image of the Mentawai people as primitive and exotic and the complex realities of their lives on Siberut Island. Bakker shows the expectations of tourists who seek to experience what they perceive as “authentic Mentawaiian life”, looking for unique cultural traits such as traditional forest skills, hunting techniques, and herbal medicine used by the *kerei* (shamans). Bakker observes the dilemmas Mentawaians face: “*how does*

one profit from tourism and modern life without losing one's claim to authenticity? Buying cows and ducks is passable, as tourists will not notice their foreign origin, but large radio sets or blue jeans clash with tourists' expectations of authentic Mentawaians" (Bakker 2007, 276). Marijn Kraak (2010), also analyses the impact of tourism and media and sustaining the "primitive" and "exotic" discourses. In her book and the accompanying documentary *Authenticized* (2015), based on the same research in Namibia with the Ovahimba people, Kraak provides an anthropological analysis of the Dutch reality television programmes *Groeten uit de Rimboe* and *Groeten Terug*, in which European families temporarily live with Indigenous communities presented as "primitive". Kraak demonstrates how the programme is heavily staged and that their representations reveal more about Western stereotypes and expectations than about the Indigenous communities themselves.

Such issues have a lot to do with colonized temporality. Frida Buhre and Collin Bjork (2021) point out that time is used to subjugate Indigenous peoples and as a tool for resistance and advocacy. They show how, on the one hand, the 20th century Swedish state sought to preserve historical Sámi practices, but, on the other hand, erased possible Sámi futures by placing the Sámi into racial stereotypes of the present (Buhre and Bjork 2021, 232). The authors further provide the example of the rhetoric of the famous Sámi activist Elsa Laula, who connected Sámi and Swedish histories in her advocacy while also moving beyond the settler-colonial temporal framework within which these histories were articulated. The authors suggest that "braided histories" and "braided times" in Indigenous rights rhetoric could overcome this settler discourse on time (Buhre and Björk 2021). Similarly, Mark Rifkin (2017) writes how settler time challenges the dominant settler conceptions of time as a singular, universal framework that erases Indigenous temporalities and sovereignty. Rifkin suggests that temporal sovereignty challenges essentialism and expectations of authenticity by rejecting the idea that Indigenous peoples must fit into fixed, static temporal categories, such as being relics of the past or needing to prove their "authentic" Indigeneity through unchanging traditions:

The representation of Native peoples as either having disappeared or being remnants on the verge of vanishing constitutes one of the principal means of effacing Indigenous sovereignties. Such a portrayal of Indigenous temporal stasis or absence erases extant forms of occupancy, governance, and opposition to settler encroachments. Moreover, it generates a prism through which any

evidence of such survival will be interpreted as either vestigial (and thus on the way to imminent extinction) or hopelessly contaminated (as having lost – or quickly losing – the qualities understood as defining something, someone, or some space as properly “Indian” in the first place). (Rifkin 2017, 5)

Instead, temporal sovereignty emphasizes Indigenous temporal multiplicity and ongoing processes of becoming that include adaptation, negotiation, and continuity beyond settler-imposed timelines. This resists the policing of Indigenous identities and temporal self-understandings, which often demand a narrow, essentialist notion of what counts as “authentic” Indigenous presence or history.

The expectations discussed above have been called in literature in different ways, for example, already mentioned “cunning for recognition” (Povinelli 1998a, 1998b) or “hyperreal Indian” (Ramos 1994). Other scholars have introduced additional concepts. The concept of ethnostress developed by scholars such as Robert Antone and Brian A. Myers (Antone, Hill, and Myers 1986), Antone and Hill 1992; Wallace 2012; Pilon 2020, and Sámi scholars Kuokkanen 1999 and Lehtola 2015a is another concept to explain such expectations of authenticity. However, it points to a different aspect, specifically, the experience of those who are subjected to such expectations. Two more concepts are important to consider before moving further. Renato Rosaldo explains such expectations through the concept of “imperialist nostalgia” (Rosaldo 1989). This affect (feeling) of dominant colonizer societies describes the wish and expectation for contemporary Indigenous people to be “authentic”, “exotic” and so “hyperreal” and “proper” Indigenous people. At the same time, it shows the continuation of coloniality in affective ways. Not only do colonized peoples feel of being “not proper”, but the past colonizers also feel “imperialist nostalgia”. These two experiences are interconnected, unfortunately, the power relations are often unequal and the expectations of dominant societies have stronger influence.

Rosaldo explains “imperialist nostalgia” as “*a particular kind of nostalgia, often found under imperialism, where people mourn the passing of what they themselves have transformed*” (Rosaldo 1989, 108). Such affect is paradoxical as a person kills, transforms, intervenes and then mourns for what is lost. People colonize other people and then mourn for the lost \ old forms of life they have contributed to destroying. They damage the environment and then worship nature. Rosaldo illustrates this through the example of anthropologist Allen Batteau and his introduction of the cultural category of Appalachia. Batteau argued that in the 19th century when “North Americans

intensified the destruction of their human and natural environment” they started “to deify nature and its Native American inhabitants” (cited in Rosaldo 1989, 109). According to Batteau this idealization is linked to sacrifice, “where people draw a line between the profane (their civilization) and the sacred (nature), and then worship the very thing their civilizing process is destroying” (cited in Rosaldo 1989, 109). This is exactly what the feeling of nostalgia hides – “often brutal domination” of those who are destroying and long for the loss. This nostalgia, Rosaldo explains, “uses a pose of ‘innocent yearning’” (Rosaldo 1989, 108). Interestingly, the scholar explains that nostalgia is not the concept found in every culture; it is neither a natural nor a pan-human concept, nor is it that innocent (Rosaldo 1989, 109).

Rosaldo provides examples of people from different professions immersed into Indigenous Ilongot community (Philippines). He describes encounters with Ilongot culture in the first decades of the 20th century by Lieutenant Wilfrid Turnbull of the Philippine Constabulary who came to find men who killed American ethnographer William Jones. He then discusses more recent experiences of evangelical Christian missionaries from the Baptist organization called the New Tribes Mission, who worked with the tribe from the 1950s. The last example comes from Rosaldo’s own fieldwork experience with Mischelle Rosaldo at the turn of the century. According to him, all of the experiences have the imperialist nostalgia in common and, regardless of professional background, it comes from the same ideological background. Moreover, with the feeling of nostalgia it hides the forms of this ideology and the forms of domination:

Although not the one Michelle Rosaldo would have written, this essay is part of a larger anthropological effort to speed the demise of a conventional trope mourning the passing of traditional society-and to remind “us” of how complicit we are with imperialism. The anthropological trope and the colonial official’s curious longing for what he or she has destroyed – the sentimental discourse I have called imperialist nostalgia – cannot neatly be separated from one another. Both attempt to use a seemingly harmless mood as a mask of innocence to cover their involvement with processes of domination. (Rosaldo 1989, 120)

This kind of nostalgia, according to Rosaldo, comes from the ideological white man’s civilizing mission. In this ideology where civilization and progress are the virtues, the imagined “static savage societies become a stable reference point for defining (the felicitous progress of) civilized

identity” (Rosaldo 1989, 108). The cultural “other” becomes a tool to define one’s selves. However, Rosaldo states that “[t]he memories that evoke moods of imperialist nostalgia both reproduce and disrupt ideologies” (Rosaldo 1989, 121). They show the effects of ideology and its grievances while simultaneously reproducing that ideology by concealing it in a nostalgic manner. Such innocent nostalgic manner also shapes the expectations for the cultural “others”, the cultural “survivors” of the ideologies and imperialism and sets the expectations of cultural authenticity.

The effect of such discourses is that it excludes people not fitting into the category of indigeneity. Steur notes that there are many cases when various Indigenous groups do not join the Indigenous movement, for example, because of the gap between the international and local representations of indigeneity. Kaushik Ghosh talks about “*awkwardness of fit*” into transnational discourse, and shows how leaders of the Indigenous movements in India “*no longer need to be involved with the everyday struggles of land and territory but are continually encouraged ‘to perform and fit the paradigms of transnational ‘indigenous’ subjectivity’*” (Ghosh 2006, 502). This transnational discourse, according to Steur, is a hegemonic process intertwined with neo-liberal political and economic processes when the class is no longer relevant (Steur 2011). Some are left behind if they do not fit the expectations of cultural authenticity described by Povinelli (1998a, 1998b).

What is left is the need to fit into discourse. The problem with the images of “real” and “proper” Indigenous is that it becomes something impossible to achieve. Lauren Berlant describes this as “cruel optimism”, which according to her “*exists when something you desire is actually an obstacle to your flourishing*” (Berlant 2011, 1). Those upon whom the expectations are placed are in distress and fear of failure. Kimmel suggests that this failure can be accompanied by shame, which is a fear of being unmasked as a fraud (Kimmel 1994, 131, cited in Allan 2018, 178). It makes people feel not enough Indigenous and ashamed to identify themselves as Indigenous, and consequently identify more with the dominant group. Losing identification caused by such a “proper” Indigenous image seems like a continuous assimilation. In this way, shame and fear become the affects of control by setting the expectations to fit the image or abandon identity altogether. This fits very well into settler colonial goals of eliminating the Natives.

3.3. Settler-Colonialism and Subaltern's Strategic Essentialism

[T]he requirements of authenticity <...> imposed upon indigenous peoples by settler or post-settler governments can become oppressive (Sissons 2005, 39)

Authenticity, essentialization, and settler coloniality are all intertwined and depend on each other. Indigenous movements for rights and culture are the way to resist existing coloniality and survive as distinct groups. However, this often creates essentialising discourses of cultures and indigeneity, which might have damaging as well as emancipatory effects.

Coloniality

Mignolo writes about coloniality rather than colonialism pointing to its epistemic presence in today's relationships. For the scholar, it is the existing system and power structure. He explains: "*[t]his term – in short – refers to the Colonial Matrix of Power. I understand the CMP as a structure of management (composed of domains, levels and flows)*" (Mignolo 2017, 40). And this structure is of an epistemic origin – the way colonisers and later nation-states constructed the concept of the human. This epistemology is linked to modernity, and so coloniality is part of modernity. Mignolo illustrates this with the history of Indigenous peoples, migrants, and refugees, who, according to him, were understood as lesser human beings in the colonial matrix of power (CPM). Mignolo argues that "*[t]he nation-state form emerged at a crucial moment of the first mutation of the history of the CMP*" (Mignolo 2017, 42). He explains that prior to the emergence of nation-states there was no concept of "nationals". The governance was monarchic and supported by the church. So, "*[t]he outcasts were all kinds of 'unbelievers'*" (Mignolo 2017, 42).

With the emergence of nation-states, non-nationals – Indigenous peoples, slaves, and later immigrants and refugees – became lesser human beings. The logic of coloniality stayed the same, however, as Mignolo notes the rhetoric has changed. The rights of people depend on their status as "nationals" or, in other words, citizens, and so "*the nation-state form of governance is today an encumbrance because it favours nationals over humans: by its logic, non-nationals are lesser humans*" (Mignolo 2017, 42). This, the author suggests, is an epistemic classification that produces coloniality and racism. Hence, until we are in this existing colonial matrix of power, we are live in coloniality. For long marginalized groups, including

Indigenous peoples, the movements involve “*reclaiming the land and dignity that belongs to them; their affirmation of their own humanity; and their confronting the barbarism of ‘Western humanism’, which made them lesser humans*” (Mignolo 2017, 43). In contemporary identity politics, citizenship is not an issue anymore, but the rights to self-determination, lands and culture. The struggle is not over as Indigenous peoples aim to be recognised and survive as distinct groups, making decisions for their own futures.

Settler-Colonial Logics and Cultural “Othering”

All groups of people, cultures, or individuals have their differences as well as similarities, but when it comes to defining “the other”, it is rather a question of power relationships and politics of identity than objective appreciation of these differences and similarities. According to Jonathan D. Hill and Thomas M. Wilson, negotiations between the group and all kinds of structures (nation-state, international movements, and corporations) could be understood in a two-directional way. The first is a top-down political project: identity politics. The second is a bottom-up grassroots movement: the politics of identities. And these two are in constant dialogue, but not necessarily possess the same power (Hill and Wilson 2003). While this brings attention to the difference in the power to influence the discourse around identities, we should see the ethnic process not only as a dichotomy of a nation-state’s power and an oppressed ethnic group’s voice but also as heterogeneous mutually influential systems.

Recent historical research studies into postcolonialism try to find new ways to discuss it, and avoid the Marxist approach of dichotomous perceptions of colonised and colonisers, while seeing it in a more complex and multi-level manner (Lehtola 2015b; Hokkanen and Särkkä 2008, 190). While this brings attention to the difference in the power to influence the discourse around identities, we should see ethnic process not only as a dichotomy of a nation-state’s power and an oppressed ethnic group’s voice but also as heterogeneous mutually influential systems. However, it is very important to note that these actors do not share the same influence and power. In this sense, identity politics means conforming to a unified version of official expectations, often under the guise of efforts to preserve the “authenticity” of ethnic culture. Cultural differences take on a special significance for ethnicity when they begin to play an important role in social interactions (Eriksen 2010, 66).

Decolonisation tries to recognise and eliminate visible and often hidden forms of colonial power, economic control, cultural domination, values, etc. And so, decolonisation attempts to revitalise the Indigenous

languages, cultural forms, and knowledge systems. Both postcolonial independent states and Indigenous minorities in (post)settler colonies face challenges in decolonising cultures by colonialism with the questions of authenticity and revitalisation of traditions. However, I would like to elaborate on the Indigenous issues in (post)settler colonies as settler colonial process puts Indigenous groups into a vicious circle of authenticity. The problematics of authenticity and indigeneity in the decolonisation process could be better understood by examining different forms of colonialism.

Veracini proposes to differentiate decolonisation of colonialism and settler colonies. These two forms of colonialism, according to the author, pursued different purposes, and therefore require different processes of decolonisation. Veracini suggests that the only similarity between colonialism and settler colonialism is that in both cases exogenous groups enter a territory. The author then explains the differences in purposes of these colonialisms. Colonialism seeks to have colonies with people who could work (labour) in many different ways for colonisers. In the case of settler colonies, the colonisers seek that people would “go away” – disappear by assimilation, physical displacement or elimination or erasing cultural practices, etc. (Veracini 2011, 1–2). Therefore:

The successful settler colonies “tame” a variety of wildernesses, end up establishing independent nations, effectively repress, co-opt, and extinguish indigenous alterities, and productively manage ethnic diversity. By the end of this trajectory, they claim to be no longer settler colonial (they are putatively “settled” and “postcolonial” – except that unsettling anxieties remain, and references to a postcolonial condition appear hollow as soon as indigenous disadvantage is taken into account). (Veracini 2011, 3)

These different demands and goals of colonisers generate different reactions. If colonised groups are expected to work for colonisers, they might resist by way of anti-colonial struggle, self-mutilation, insubordination, mimicry, and similar ways. For groups in settler colonies, it is the goal of the coloniser for groups to disappear, so the resistance is Indigenous survival as distinct groups (Veracini 2011, 4). Decolonisation in colonies, first of all, means the end of domination and departure of the colonisers. This is not the case in settler colonies. While often using anti-colonial rhetoric, Indigenous groups have to choose the better colonial form by “reconstituted partnership” and “treaty traditions”. Nevertheless, these relationships or structures are not non-colonial (Veracini 2011, 5). Veracini notes that decolonisation might be

a misleading term in this case, as there is no way to decolonise the relationship between settlers and Indigenous peoples. The rights of Indigenous peoples still depend on settlers (Veracini 2011, 6). Moreover, decolonisation should change the domination, however, in postcolonial states neocolonialism takes over and uses the same labour of formerly colonized populations in new ways. In post-settler colonies, *“polities have recently relented and shifted from active repression of indigeneity to its incorporation by recognition”* (Veracini 2011, 8).

The goal of Indigenous peoples’ resistance in this settler coloniality is to stay distinct groups. This inevitably is based on what is understood as distinctive groups by the dominant society. There are two aspects in this: vulnerability and authenticity. The first one has already been discussed in previous chapters. In short, the Indigenous peoples have been *“inherently connected to a perception of vulnerability”* (Veracini 2011, 4). Similarly, historian Ken Coates argues that, for two centuries the discourse is that Indigenous cultures are dying, but they are not dead. In fact, they are very much alive again (Coates 2004, 20). For both Veracini and Coates, this is the discourse that places Indigenous groups in a fragile and extinction position, and this, according to Veracini, would be exactly the goal of settlers. Consequently, he suggests that decolonising relationships between Indigenous peoples and settlers requires:

Correspondingly, colonised “others” must cease being perceived as fundamentally docile and indigenous people must cease being and being understood as inherently vulnerable and endangered. Considering the direct discursive link joining fragility and “indigeneity”, indigenous peoples’ exiting survival on the side of life will then contradict the most fundamental characteristic of what being “indigenous? (in the eyes of the settler) is all about: they will not go away. (Veracini 2011, 9)

The second aspect of distinctiveness is frequently mentioned cultural authenticity. In the globalised world, age of migration, multiculturalism, and cultural differences, it is no surprise that culture is “currency” to buy some autonomy and freedom from colonisers. Traditional practices and authenticity become a useful discourse for resistance and advocacy for Indigenous rights as essential prerequisites of survival. While this discourse is an effective way for resistance, which, according to Gayatri Spivak, might be understood as “strategic essentialism” (2008), it also has some losing aspects in this discursive struggle between Indigenous peoples and settler societies.

Traditions and traditional activities, livelihoods that have been lost or weakened during assimilatory policies, often have to be emphasised. In this respect, the issue of decolonisation and nativism is that it tries to reject the colonial past and, in doing so, can imply that cultures were more “real and pure” before colonisation. This inevitably leads to the issues of authenticity. Some practices become “inauthentic”, “hybridized”, or “contaminated”, while people are searching for authentic forms of pre-colonial times (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin 1998, 21). Other practices and forms become iconised, reducing the complexity of Indigenous cultures. There is also a great risk that just like different practices are, some people are perceived as less indigenous or authentic.

Coulthard (2014) criticizes both constructivist and essentialist discourses on group identity and recognition politics. The scholar argues that *“According to social constructivist proponents of this line of critique, when claims for cultural accommodation are grounded on essentialist expressions of group identity they can too easily be deployed to justify repressive and authoritarian demands for group compliance on the one hand, or sanction unjust practices of exclusion and marginalization on the other”* (Coulthard 2014, 79) Coulthard debates this critique in his book making a point that what appears as essentialism is deeply entangled with broader colonial and patriarchal power relations. He emphasizes that these identity claims cannot be separated from the unequal structures of sovereignty and patriarchal colonial state power that shape and often reinforce exclusionary and authoritarian practices within Indigenous communities. Coulthard provides a case study on Indigenous women’s rights which highlights how colonial and patriarchal structures deeply shaped gender discrimination within Native communities in Canada. Historically, laws like the 1876 Indian Act enforced sexist provisions that stripped Indigenous women of their status if they married non-Indigenous men, reflecting a patrilineal and patriarchal colonial logic that marginalized women’s identities and rights. Coulthard emphasizes that Indigenous men’s essentialist claims about culture and tradition have sometimes been used to justify gender exclusion within communities, but these claims are inseparable from the broader settler-colonial and patriarchal power structures that sustain such inequalities (Coulthard 2014, 73–103).

A closer examination of the concepts of decolonisation and settler decolonisation opens more ways to understand the issues of authenticity and essentialization. For Indigenous peoples in settler colonies, decolonisation means surviving and remaining distinct Indigenous groups. However, these political struggles find their way in emphasising cultural authenticity, which becomes a source of emancipation for Indigenous groups, as well as a struggle

in itself, as they become immersed into struggles of recognition for cultural authenticity. On the other hand, this cultural authenticity can become a source of marginalization for many who do not fit dominant images, or because of the colonial relations, e.g. it may produce patriarchy and gender inequalities. Decolonisation is not only about decolonising cultures and cultural practices as taking them back. It is a project of a bigger scale – it is the decolonisation of power relationships that dictate the overall discourse of what means to be a distinctive group. Consequently, identities, self-identity and their performative manifestations are never free from the context of power structures. Such structures are not only political and economic but also epistemic. Such a system is ongoing coloniality with its binary epistemic structures of minorities and Indigenous groups.

Strategic Essentialism and Authentication

The strategies of marginalised or subaltern are shaped in relation to the broader discourses of the dominant majority. This process is intricately intertwined, and actors influence each other. We may now see that *“colonialism also brings about response and resistance, which may significantly influence the self-image and strategies of communities”* (Lehtola 2015b, 31–32). The images, strategies and discourses around indigeneity are therefore never free of the context, they are intertwined relationships. The same applies to processes of essentialisation and discourse of authenticity.

Subaltern Studies, which emerged in the 1980s, addressed how marginalised groups were represented and whether they could “speak” within dominant discourses, as raised by Spivak (1988). The concept of the subaltern, introduced by Antonio Gramsci, refers to groups excluded from hegemonic power (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin 1995, 215). Historians of the Subaltern Studies group, led by Ranajit Guha, criticised dominant interpretations of Indian nationalism for being elitist and instead sought to foreground the role of marginalised groups in history (Chakrabarty 2000, 1–15). They also expanded the notion of the political beyond formal institutions to include everyday forms of resistance towards elites based on social relations such as kinship, class, and locality or ethnicity (Chakrabarty 2000, 16). As a broad category, the concept of the subaltern helps to analyse oppressed and misrepresented groups, including Indigenous peoples. Similar to subaltern groups, Indigenous movements are often interpreted either as elite-driven projects or as unified forms of resistance, both of which risk homogenising diverse experiences and reinforcing narrow ideas of authenticity. Like subaltern actors, Indigenous peoples resist hegemonic structures, such as

global capitalism and nation-state assimilation, while operating within discourses that shape how their voices are recognised. Thus, subalternity provides a useful framework for understanding Indigenous resistance and the constraints on how it can be expressed.

An important figure in later Subaltern Studies and critique is Spivak. In her essay “Can the subaltern speak?”, she criticises the way agency was conceptualised in Subaltern Studies. Sometimes misunderstood, she does not suggest that subaltern cannot speak at all, or cannot exercise agency. Her essay rather points out that it is not so simple for oppressed groups to exercise their agency. Spivak explains that oppressed people are restricted by the discourse of their own subalternity and that the subaltern voice is affected by the institutions that give the agency or “the voice” to them (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin 1995, 79). In other words, subaltern or oppressed groups do not have some kind of “authentic” voice in an essentialised sense. Instead, they resist and exercise their agency with respect to broader discourses of elite groups and existing power structures.

In the case of Indigenous resistance, as it was shown above, the discourse is constructed about being culturally different groups with traditions, and traditional livelihoods in opposition to modernity. In addition to that, subalterns cannot exercise the voice freely, because it is trapped into the discourse of victimhood, or in Indigenous cases – that of extinction and fragility. In post-settler colonies, which want to dissolve these groups into simply “nationals”, this means that in order to keep being represented as distinct groups, Indigenous peoples are trapped in these discourses. However, this is exactly the aim of the settler colonies to keep this discourse of fragility and disappearance of Indigenous people. This means that it is very hard if not impossible to resist this aspect of coloniality because the subject or the group has been constituted through the “*planned violence of imperialist project*” (Spivak 1989 cited in Hawley and Nelson 2001, 420). Moreover, the loss of culture and endangered position of Indigenous groups as subalterns also constantly reestablish Indigenous as not having a place in the modern world.

The subaltern position of Indigenous groups and historical memory have had a strong impact forming the articulation of who can speak for Indigenous peoples. As Spivak observed, subaltern groups are often represented by others and not by themselves. In the context of Indigenous peoples, there is a long history of anthropologists from dominant societies entering these groups and documenting their ways of life, making sense of it, and telling the world about it. Indigenous peoples lack the voice of their own. In decolonial movements, the representations done by people from the dominant groups are being criticised. In the Indigenous movements, it is

sometimes preferred for Indigenous to study Indigenous issues. Some have stronger opinions that Indigenous issues should not be studied by Westerners. Similar opinions could be made about advocacy, journalism, and any other area.

However, academia, and especially anthropology, has a principal role in this discussion. The preference for Indigenous to study Indigenous peoples comes as a response to colonial racial anthropology, which was used to prove Indigenous groups being “inferior” races and so the discipline was directly working for colonial system and order. No wonder, that many feel misrepresented by Western science. This position brings political emancipation and awareness of past injustices. On the other hand, this brings us back to the question of the “authentic” voice. The aspiration of “authentic” voices of misrepresented peoples also reinstates and mimics the binary colonial structures of oppressed and oppressors. The subalterns and their voices are defined by the differences from their coloniser (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin 1995, 218). Consequently, it also homogenises the voices of all Indigenous peoples. While it supports emancipation and the promotion of Indigenous voices, it is also a trap of the same epistemic power structure of coloniality.

The concept of subalternity could be useful to understand the Indigenous peoples’ movement. The agency of subaltern groups is exercised within a broader matrix of power and predominant discourses. Indigenous peoples are living in settler colonies which maintain the discourse of them being endangered as distinct groups outside modernity. Within this discourse, Indigenous resistance and survival are based on their marginality. This shows that subaltern voices depend on the broader discourse of the dominant society and counteract according to it. The claim of authenticity forms in the context of historical experiences being represented by others and dominant society’s discourses of Indigenous being outside modern society. On the other hand, authentication and exoticization for minorities are great strategic tools to advocate for their rights, a process Spivak (2008) calls “strategic essentialism.” Strategic essentialism should therefore not be understood solely as a cynical political strategy or as the passive acceptance of externally imposed expectations. As Marshall Sahlins (1962) observed in Fiji, Indigenous people consciously articulated customs as an expression of collective identity, distinctiveness and continuity. Such strategic essentialism may also function as an important means of political mobilization. Cook-Lynn observes that Indigenous scholars suggest that essentialism is a “defensive notion” and is used to challenge the domination of other groups, as well as a tool to make their experiences to be heard (Cook-Lynn 1997, 20). Thus, the

affirmation of language, *duodji*, *gákti*, or traditional livelihoods should be understood both as meaningful expressions of belonging and as responses shaped within the epistemic conditions of settler colonialism. The issue, however, is, as mentioned before, and emphasised by Steur (2011, 93) who paraphrases Spivak's (1988) argument, that it is not the subaltern who cannot speak, but the superaltern who cannot hear. The dominant majority often fail to understand the actual struggles of minorities and instead expects them to conform to the image the majority expects. Minorities create and perpetuate the image for recognition purposes. In settler-colonial contexts, the very need to emphasize customs and traditions is inseparable from broader colonial regimes of recognition that require Indigenous peoples to demonstrate their cultural distinctiveness and continuity in order to be acknowledged as legitimate political communities.

This myth of authenticity as Gareth Griffiths calls it, created the representation of Indigenous cultures as static. It presupposes that an "authentic" culture belongs to pre-colonial times. This means that the voice of people hybridised by the colonial process has less authenticity and legitimacy in the public sphere (Griffiths 1995). Griffiths refers to it as "liberal violence":

I want to argue that authentic speech, where it is conceived not as a political strategy within a specific political and discursive formation but as a fetishised cultural commodity, may be employed <...> to enact a discourse of "liberal violence", re-enacting its own oppressions on the subjects it purports to represent and defend. (Griffiths 1995, 241)

To sum up, settler colonialism has created the discourse of otherness and authenticity. This discourse has entered the public sphere, affecting how the voices of "others" are perceived: they are "real" and legitimate if authentic, which is understood through the image of pre-colonial Indigenous peoples. However, this "appeal to 'authenticity' is not merely an ontological contradiction, but a political trap" (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin 1995, 214), and essentialization is formed through the logics of coloniality.

3.4. Indigeneity as Discourse

Indigenous Movement and Rights Formation

Indigenous Peoples, also referred to as First Peoples, Native Peoples, are commonly defined as groups or tribes that lived in specific territories prior

to the arrival of dominant populations, that is, before colonization, or those who have been marginalized within nation-states due to their distinct ways of life and cultural differences. Examples include various First Nations across North and South America, Aboriginal Australians, the Māori in New Zealand, Inuit in Greenland, Canada, and Alaska, the Sámi in Europe, and numerous Indigenous groups in northern Russia such as the Chukchi, Evenki, and Komi, as well as Adivasi groups in India and many other Indigenous peoples and tribes worldwide.

Colonialism is often associated with European imperialism, but by colonialism and coloniality I do not refer exclusively to European colonisation. Indigenous nations live under settler-colonialism, which defines them in some way. Even though Indigenous autonomy is growing and settler states have changed their cultural policies over time, coloniality continues. Some of the Indigenous peoples, like in the Americas, have been colonised by Europeans, but for others, the notions of indigeneity and colonialism are not so clear. The Indigenous groups of Asia and Africa have been decolonised from Europeans, but they still face challenges as Indigenous groups. When delegations from Africa and Asia joined the international movement for Indigenous rights, non-governmental organisations started to adopt the notion of indigeneity to new situations and it is now suggested to define indigeneity in relation to nation-states (Muehlebach 2001, 436). If we take this approach, then European colonialism is just a part of the story. However, in many cases, colonialism is associated with previously so-called Third World European colonisation, and has so much less to say about other colonialisms, especially for Indigenous worlds (Weaver 2000, 224). Weaver accurately notes that for much of the world that has been liberated from colonial powers in the mid-20th century, colonisation is not over. Not only because they face many consequences of colonialism and neocolonialism today, but also because “[i]ndigenous peoples around the world remain colonized peoples, victims of internal colonialism” (Weaver 2000, 223).

Indigeneity is a broad term used to describe a wide range of culturally and linguistically unrelated groups who, despite their differences, face similar challenges and unite in a shared political movement. The Indigenous movement is a struggle for collective rights to ancestral lands, the preservation of culture, environment, and ecological diversity, along with traditional ways of life connected to these. According to the UN, there are approximately 370–500 million Indigenous peoples living in over 70 countries, representing between 5,000 and 7,000 distinct languages and cultures. These groups inhabit nearly a quarter of the Earth’s land surface and are custodians of approximately 80 percent of the world’s remaining biodiversity and 90 percent

of global cultural diversity.

Indigenous movements began gaining visibility around the mid-1970s, alongside other civil rights movements, such as women's and LGBTQ+ rights. Since then, various organizations and institutions have formed, and Indigenous peoples have acquired international recognition. Although struggles to protect land and autonomy existed earlier, the declining power of nation-states to enforce cultural and social homogenization, along with globalization, created space for new political-cultural initiatives, including those by Indigenous groups seeking cultural liberation.

Indigenous peoples have endured oppression and injustice, and many live in colonial or settler states, where political and legal boundaries are being redefined. Like many oppressed communities, Indigenous peoples today continue to cope with the intergenerational trauma of past abuses and its ongoing psychological and social consequences. Indigenous movements advocate for the rights of their peoples as separate peoples or groups within existing states. These movements differ from other social movements. For instance, women's or Black civil rights movements often focused on eliminating discrimination and achieving social, legal, and economic equality. In contrast, Indigenous movements prioritize autonomy, collective rights, and sovereignty – the right to exist as a nation within a nation. These movements most often are not separatist or aimed at creating independent states. Instead, Indigenous rights focus less on individual material or social welfare and more on the collective rights and aspirations of Indigenous groups. These include the right to self-determination and autonomy, the preservation of languages and traditions, the recognition of Indigenous knowledge systems, the protection of ancestral lands and natural resources based on the principle of free, prior, and informed consent, and the inclusion of Indigenous political institutions in decision-making processes. The aim is to foster well-being according to Indigenous peoples' own worldviews and values.

First attempts to petition for Indigenous Peoples rights were made in the 1920s. In 1923, Cayuga nation's Chief Deskaheh went to Geneva to the League of Nations (the predecessor of the UN) on behalf of the Six Nations of the Iroquois and raised questions about the disputes with the Canadian state on their autonomy. In 1924, Māori religious leader T.W. Rātana and a delegation travelled to London to protest violations of the Treaty of Waitangi signed between Māori in Aotearoa (New Zealand) and the British Empire in 1840 and to protect the lands of Māori People. None of these efforts were taken seriously or addressed. However, after WWII and the foundation of the UN, Indigenous Rights Movement gained momentum of political and legal development. Around the same time, Sámi activists also started to make

attempts to make their cultural rights issues public. On 16 December 1917, the First Sámi National Assembly took place in Trondheim. Today, this date is celebrated as the Sámi National Day. The majority of attendees were Southern Sámi. The assembly was initiated by activist and politician, Elsa Laula Renberg, and the Sámi women's association. In the years leading up to the assembly, Sámi people in both Norway and Sweden increasingly felt that their culture and traditional livelihoods were under threat. As a result, between 1904 and 1910, various Sámi organizations and journals began to emerge.

In the years 1945–1993, the foundations for Indigenous Rights were laid. In 1957, the International Labour Organisation (ILO) started to investigate forced labour of local populations; in 1972, the UN sub-commission carried out research regarding discrimination against Indigenous Populations. In 1977, the International NGO Conference on Discrimination Against Indigenous Populations in the Americas was held at the United Nations in Geneva. In 1981, the first International NGO Conference on Indigenous People took place in Geneva, and in 1982, first meeting of the UN Working Group on Indigenous Populations (WGIP) was held in Geneva. Finally, in 1989 one of the most important documents protecting the rights of Indigenous peoples was published *The Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention 1989 (No. 169)*; and in 1993, the UN Working Group on Indigenous Populations started to draft the *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*. Many important steps have been taken since 1993 and a lot of international monitoring practices and institutions were established. For example, in 2000, the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues was founded, and in 2001, the UN established the Special Rapporteur on the rights of Indigenous Peoples. In 2007, the UN General Assembly adopted the *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*. In 2008, the UN *Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* was established.

Indigeneity Discourse as Cultural “Other”

Even though the UN does not have an official definition of Indigenous peoples leaving it open for self-determination by different peoples, the definition proposed by Jose R. Martinez Cobo (1986) has often been used as a working definition:

Indigenous communities, peoples and nations are those which, having a historical continuity with pre-invasion and pre-colonial societies that developed on their territories, consider themselves distinct from other sectors of the societies now prevailing in those territories, or

parts of them. They form at present non-dominant sectors of society and are determined to preserve, develop and transmit to future generations their ancestral territories, and their ethnic identity, as the basis of their continued existence as peoples, in accordance with their own cultural patterns, social institutions and legal systems. (Cobo 1986)

This definition emphasizes historical continuation from pre-colonial times, distinctiveness from other sectors of society, and a relationship with and inhabitation of the ancestral lands. However, it has been criticised by scholars as being Eurocentric and ahistorical (Coates 2003). It focuses on European imperialism and suggests that “true” indigeneity is before contact with colonizers. This leads to further criticism of indigeneity being ahistorical – fixed in time where cultural change is understood only as “contamination” rather than change, adaptation and Indigenous modernity. At the same time, this definition was historically based on the cases of settler-colonialism in the Americas. However, when the delegates from Asia and Africa joined the movement after the decolonisation following WWII, the definition became more challenging. After European colonizers left, newly formed states faced groups of people marginalised in these states who could be classified as national or ethnic minorities rather than Indigenous peoples. However, these marginalised people faced the same challenges as Indigenous peoples in America, Australia or Europe. As Coates (2004) pointed out, for example, the Yanomami in the Amazon would meet all of Cobo’s criteria, but the Ainu in Japan have merged into the vast majority. The Hutu and Tutsi in Rwanda represent large and complex societies, while the !Kung in Botswana are a small nomadic community in the desert. These cases also raise broader questions about the boundaries of indigeneity, specifically, whether an entire state can be considered Indigenous, like Mongolia, where the majority of the population is descended from nomads and pastoralists and whether the same applies to Fijians, in Fiji. Similarly, whether Scots and Catalans in Europe are Indigenous in the nation states where they live like Sámi in Northern Europe. The Indigenous groups in South East Asia have experienced very different historical contexts of caste relations. For example, Adivasis or Scheduled Tribes in India have existed outside the caste system, hence, they have been economically and politically marginalised in the independent Indian State. The quota systems have been introduced as mechanisms of social justice or compensatory discrimination (Moodie 2015, 8).

Different approaches have been developed to define indigeneity.

Survival International, one of the most prominent international organizations defending the rights of Indigenous Peoples, defines indigeneity in terms of a way of life, particularly *traditional* ways of living. Thus, an Indigenous person living in an urban environment and pursuing a career in a capitalist economy would not necessarily fit this definition. The UN Commission on Human Rights and the UN Economic and Social Council defines Indigenous peoples as existing societies that are vulnerable to capitalism and have a long-standing relationship with the lands where they live and which are considered their source of livelihood and natural right. However, this definition was not included in the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. The UN International Working Group on Indigenous Affairs (IWGIA) emphasized marginalization, loss of autonomy and control over resources, and loss of culture due to the emergence of nation-states. They are understood as victims of these processes. As a consequence of the growing variety of indigeness after the international movement was joined by delegates from Asia and Africa, some international NGOs started to define indigeneity through the relationship of power imbalances between Indigenous groups and nation-states (Muehlebach 2001, 436).

According to Friedman (1999), Indigenous movements are cultural political strategies aimed at cultural liberation from the homogenizing forces of the state. They involve public claims for recognition, funds, and land, based on particular rights of “particular” people, often emphasizing collective versus individual rights and national versus ethnic identities. These movements are part of a broader global process of fragmentation of nation-state homogenization and involve practices of identity rooted in territory and genealogy (Friedman 1999, 6). Indigeneity is described as a form of intentionality about being rooted in a particular landscape, involving an identity of rootedness and genealogy related to territory. It is not merely a social struggle for recognition but a lived practice of difference that is prior to and embedded within the structure of the nation-state. Indigeneity can produce alternative identities against the state or, in some cases, extreme nationalism within the state. It is a complex identity that links local identifications to higher-order unifying symbols and expresses a life-orientation that cannot be dismissed by intellectual arguments alone (Friedman 1999, 6–8).

Muehlebach (2001) ethnographically investigates the meetings of the UN Working Group on Indigenous Populations (WGIP). In her article “Making Place” the researcher claims that Indigenous delegates at the UN WGIP use “culturalist” arguments as a political tool to articulate Indigenous identity, rights, and place in the world. These arguments are intertwined with legal and political claims, making it difficult to separate cultural discourse

from political discourse. Indigenous activism at the UN aims to highlight the exploitation and oppression faced by Indigenous peoples, proposing alternative values and an “indigenous morality” that links ecological destruction with ethnic subjugation. Muehlebach conceptualizes this activism as “place-making”, where Indigenous delegates discursively produce a sense of Indigenous place and identity on an international stage. Indigenous claims are of the hybrid nature, they challenge existing international legal frameworks and call for recognition beyond the state-centric model of international relations (Muehlebach 2001, 1–6). Muehlebach notes an important aspect that political unity and argumentation as culture and cultural differences over indigeneity become consistent over time. The article highlights the importance of shaping these discourses and the ongoing struggle to have Indigenous differences acknowledged and respected by states and international bodies (Muehlebach 2001).

According to Sámi scholar, Valkonen, the recognition of Sámi as Indigenous people can be considered one of the most significant achievements in ethnopolitics to this date. All four countries (Sweden, Norway, Finland, and Russia) recognise Sámi as Indigenous people (Valkonen 2009, 137). However, indigeneity is the colonial definition and creation of dominant powers. From the 17th century Indigenous people were seen as “noble savages”, later in evolutionary theories understood as the lowest step of evolution, contemporary understanding often associates them with “old ways” and the continuation of pre-colonial tradition. According to Valkonen, to have political demands as Indigenous peoples means also adapting the political demands to preserve tradition and prioritize the traditional which is a great risk to be seen as frozen in time (Valkonen 2009, 174). Valkonen also points to the paradox that Indigenous peoples’ power comes from their colonized and subjugated positions (Valkonen 2009, 144). Along these lines, the term *Indigenous* can reinforce colonial discourse, as it tends to victimize, portray people as powerless, always outside positions of power, and as disappearing. Niezen (2003) argues that the history of Indigenous peoples has been constructed differently from other ethnic and national groups. It is built on a discourse of victimization stemming from the experience of colonisation, marginality, and social and cultural injustices (Niezen 2003, 10–11). Contemporary global legislation, agreements, and international law are made to correct such injustices and at the same time through that Indigenous people are defined as “others” to whom certain part of state power is handed over in the form of cultural rights and self-determination (Valkonen 2009, 147). Experiences of colonisation therefore become the main foundation of identity building. However, the term, the ideas, and movements are responses to that,

and sometimes have hidden effect of reproducing the discourse of victimhood and lost cultures, which consequently strengthens ethnostress.

Similarly, in the book *Resistance as Negotiation. Making States and Tribes in the Margins of Modern India* (2024), Uday Chandra ethnographically presents a bottom-up critique of the terms “Indigenous” and “Adivasi”. The author brings the reader into a Facebook discussion by research participants. They discuss the article by the famous Indian sociologist, B. K. Roy Burman, who criticized the concepts of “Indigenous” and “Adivasi”. In response, the Ho and Munda Adivasi communities argue that such labels are imposed by outsiders and serve to essentialize, victimize, or marginalize communities, and make them look “backward”. Chandra comments on the matter, saying that “[t]hese conflicts concern, above all, what it means to be a modern Ho or Munda or Oraon person”. The scholar further argues with the comment on the need to present identity in the way that make it possible to negotiate with the state: *“It is as much a critique of statist anthropology, which draws on Roy Burman’s anthropological critique of indigeneity, as it is critique of adivasi village elites who speak to the state in its own language of tribe”* (Chandra 2024, 197). The participants of discussion suggest that these terms obscure internal diversity and agency by reducing dynamic cultures to static, exotic identities, and reinforcing a colonial gaze even within well-meaning discourses.

To conclude, indigeneity as a legal definition formed historically and was initially based on the context of settler-colonialism in the Americas. However, there is no clear definition of it and it does include some kind of marginalisation within the nation-state, whether due to livelihoods that are vulnerable in the global modern economy, remoteness in forest regions and dangers by development projects, historical assimilatory policies of languages and cultures, and many other factors. Nonetheless, what it tells us that indigeneity and nation-state are intertwined with each other and are the products of each other whether it is discourse of modernity formation in contrast to “primitive”, “backward”, “traditional” in early stages of nation-state ideology, or whether indigeneity is counter product of nationalism.

3.5. Ethnicity in Construction to the “Other”

Ethnicity and identity have long been subjects of scholarly interest. The word “ethnicity” derives from the Greek word *ethnos* meaning “heathen” or “pagan” (Williams 1976, 119). It was used in English in this meaning, often referring to some other ethnic groups than the majority British, from the Middle Ages until the mid-19th century. In the US the term began to be used

after WWII by politely referring to immigrant minorities. However, until the late 1960s, ethnicity was not a focus among social anthropologists. Classical anthropologists did not use this term, except Max Weber, who used it in a quite different meaning (Eriksen 2010). While the concept of ethnicity was not widely used in social sciences at the beginning of the 20th-century, Weber and many other social scientists of the time believed that ethnicity and nationalism would lose importance and simply vanish as a result of modernization and individualism. Eriksen (2010) makes a clear point that Weber's predictions did not come true. Rather, quite the opposite took place, they became more prominent and import in political and scholarly debate. Today, ethnicity is one of the major concepts and fields of anthropological research.

For a long time, ethnic and national identity and culture were understood in the primordialist terms, rooted in ideas of natural, bounded communities, the perspective which originates in late 18th–early 19th century German Romanticism, and is associated with thinkers such as Johann Herder. In contrast, contemporary anthropology conceptualises ethnicity as relational and socially constructed. A key shift was introduced by Barth (1969), who argued that ethnicity is not defined by shared cultural content but by the boundaries that distinguish groups from others: „<...> *the ethnic boundary that defines the group, not the cultural stuff that it encloses*” (Barth 1969, 15). Ethnicity thus first of all emerges through social interaction and then boundaries are established by positioning one's own group as different from another. This interactionist approach was further developed by Eriksen (2010), who emphasises that ethnic groups are constituted through contact with others and must be understood relationally:

For ethnicity to come about, the groups must have a minimum of contact with each other and they must entertain ideas of each other as being culturally different from themselves. If these conditions are not fulfilled, there is no ethnicity. For ethnicity is essentially an aspect of a relationship not a property of a group. (Eriksen 2010, 16)

Cultural differences are mobilised to signal distinctiveness. So ethnicity is “*relationships between groups which consider themselves and are regarded by others, as being culturally distinctive*” (Eriksen 2010, 5). Ethnic identities are therefore not fixed but continuously produced and reproduced in relation to perceived “others.”

Rather than being opposed to modernity, ethnicity is often intensified by it. As Eriksen (2010, 13) argues, ethnic identities frequently emerge as

responses to processes of modernisation, globalisation, and social change. This aligns with broader theoretical perspectives that treat identity and indigeneity as dynamic and negotiated: identities are formed through interaction (Jenkins [1996] 2004), remain multiple and in process (Hall 1990), and are performed in social contexts (Goffman 1959). At the collective level, these processes intersect with projects of nationhood and power. National identities are constructed through political and cultural alignment (Gellner 1983; 1997) and through shared imaginaries (Anderson 1983), while institutions help reproduce these meanings (Nisbet 2000). Critical approaches further highlight that ethnicity is shaped by power, representation, and political economy (Comaroff and Comaroff 1991; 1997; 2009), and may be mobilised in response to global transformations and state structures such as Indigenous movement and other various minority rights movements (Friedman 1999). Despite these theoretical developments, essentialist understandings of ethnicity as fixed and inherited remain influential in public discourse (Baumann 1999, 59). This tension between relational and essentialist understanding is central to analysing contemporary constructions of ethnicity.

The construction of Sámi identity and ethnicity has been deeply shaped by processes of social interaction and opposition to various “others”. Drawing on Stuart Hall (1996), it is productive to talk about identification rather than identity. It emphasises the process and a change over time. For the Finns, building a modern national identity often involved portraying the Sámi as “backward” or as remnants of a distant past, thus reinforcing the narrative of Finnish progress and modernity. In response, the Sámi have actively formed their ethnic identity around the very traditions and practices that Finnish society sought to assimilate or suppress, emphasizing cultural resilience and distinctiveness. Similarly, in *Arctic Mirrors: Russia and the Small Peoples of the North* (1994), Slezkine examines how the Russian Empire and later the Soviet Union represented and governed Indigenous peoples of the Arctic and Siberia, including Sámi, arguing that these groups served as a “mirror” through which Russian society defined its own identity, civilization, and modernization policies.

It is interesting that, for example, Sámi indigenous religion did not play an important part in Sámi identity construction. Possibly because even though Christianization did destroy many makers of Sáminess, Laestadianism also made the Sámi language and lifestyles visible and included. More importantly, it was never prohibited or something to be ashamed of, unlike other Sáminess symbols which later became Sámi identity markers. Valkonen suggests that Sáminess markers come from what was once assimilated and

seen as backward, mocked, and humiliated:

The Sámi people have experienced the assimilation policy, cultural belittling and even contempt, practiced by the states that had divided Sámi land in the past, as unjust and oppressive. With the awakening of political consciousness, the practice of Sámi ethnopolitics has become to emphasize the difference between the Sámi and the mainstream population. Meaning, stigmatized difference and otherness have become the basis and justification for resource and political demands. (Valkonen 2009, 24, my translation)

Markers of Sámi identity have changed considerably over time and have been shaped by historical and social transformations. As Lehtola (2002, 86) notes, Finnish sociologist Erkki Asp as early as in 1965 attempted to define Sámi identity through a set of criteria that included practices such as reindeer herding, living in turf huts, staying overnight in traditional dwellings, using reindeer milk, speaking Sámi, and maintaining traditional livelihoods. These markers reflected a static understanding of Sámi culture that associated authenticity primarily with traditional subsistence practices. However, Lehtola emphasizes that Sámi identity has increasingly been understood as dynamic and evolving rather than fixed. For younger generations, such traditional markers are no longer seen as necessary conditions of Sáminess; a person does not have to herd reindeer, live in Sápmi, or even speak Sámi fluently in order to be recognized as Sámi (Lehtola 2002, 86).

Historically, certain identity markers also emerged through colonial encounters and shifting economic conditions. During earlier periods, Sámi identity was often contrasted with agriculture, which was associated with settler populations. However, as traditional livelihoods became increasingly constrained due to colonization and the narrowing of economic niches, many Sámi adopted agriculture as a strategy of adaptation (Nyyssönen 2008, 93). This transition created new internal distinctions, for example, between permanently settled Sámi (*dalolas*) and reindeer herding Sámi (*badjeolmmos*), and sometimes led to economic disparities and conflicts both within Sámi communities and between Sámi and Finnish settlers. At the same time, such adaptive strategies were often interpreted as signs of assimilation, reinforcing the idea that “authentic” Sámi culture could only survive through isolation from majority society (Paltto 1973, 42ff, cited in Nyyssönen 2008, 93). The opposition to agricultural civilisation increased in later modernisation times with the development projects of hydroelectric power plants and reservoirs, that symbolised control over nature, while Sáminess adopted living with the

nature discourse (Lehtola 2002, 88). These historical shifts demonstrate that Sámi identity markers have never been fixed, but rather have evolved in response to changing political, economic, and cultural conditions.

At the same time, Sámi identity has developed in contrast to the Forest Sámi movement, and Sámi had to crystallize what is Sáminess and Indigeneity for them. Those become aspects of living tradition, lifestyle and values, and language use rather than ancestry, while the Forest Sámi define themselves in opposition to the Sámi, asserting that anyone living in Lapland may claim Sámi roots and heritage. The boundaries between Finnishness and Sáminess had to be explained both in public debates, scholarly work, among people themselves. The Sámi traditionally identified with their clan or kin, and it still seems to be very important. It has been acknowledged by scholars (Valkonen 2009, 132; Amft 2007, 76; Svonni 1996; Kramvig 2005, 57; Lehtola 2015a) and in media (e.g., Yle uutiset 2015) that Sáminess is about collective identification, being known and recognised by other members of the group. The research participants expressed similar beliefs.

In a discussion with two Sámi interlocutors about the 2015 elections and the ruling of the Supreme Administrative Court that allowed individuals not recognized by Sámi institutions to enter the electoral register, they noted that the Court's reasoning placed significant emphasis on self-identification. From their perspective, however, Sámi belonging was understood primarily through community relations, where recognition depends on whether a person or their family is known within the community (Fieldwork notes, 2016).

This relational dimension is clearly illustrated in research participant Matti's reflections on Sáminess and processes of reconnection:

And I've kind of made this in my mind, <...> if we accept that there's identity or me as an individual, and then we have the community [showing different places on the table]. And what makes me Sámi is not this or this, but what is between. <...> it's the connection between the self and the group, not just the group, but acceptance of the group, but also accepting who you are, where you come from. And without that, um, what am I? And if you are reconnecting with your culture, you have to create that connection, which has been severed. (Interview 2023, Helsinki, alias Matti, early 30s)

Later in the interview Matti emphasised the relational aspect even more by criticizing the identity term:

I think identity is a stupid word, and, uh, we should it's very individualistic. Like, what is my identity? Yeah. I kind of, I also speak

about identity, but I also criticize it, because what is my identity? If there's no other Sámi people in the world, am I still a Sámi person? (Interview 2023, Helsinki, alias Matti, early 30s)

Relational identification becomes a form of collective knowledge followed by various elements through which one knows and recognises people who belong to their own group. Both Máret and Matti explained:

I guess it's like knowing our people and when you see a Sámi person, I guess, you can just tell it. Like, if you share <...> the same way of thinking and if there's language there too, and the clothing and and if relatives, but, yeah, it's, there are so many different aspects. (Interview 2018, Aanaar, alias Máret, aged about 24)

[W]e have the outside markers, you know. You know, the dress. You can make handicrafts. You can... you can yoik. You can, um, you can do activism. You can do this and that and that. But what is the underlying current? You know, what is the what about the cultural values? What about unspoken rules? What about, you know, what about, um, the way you talk? What about whom you talk to, and which way you talk to? And how do you deal with, um, some culture cultural, um, things, and what about differences between villages and the relationship between families, friends, because they're all intertwined. And that's something you don't see. You you can't get into that. That's like the the thing that's really hard for people who are outside the community to understand, like, because you don't know all of these things. So and not maybe not all of Sámi people might not know them either if they haven't, you know, lived in communities. But it's like, there's a way that is passed down to you <...> it's like things that sort of make you a Sámi person as well. (Interview 2023, Helsinki, alias Matti, early 30s)

Living culture is another aspect that is clearly emphasized, often in opposition to Western understanding of ethnicity as blood quantum. In Sámi Parliament's view, Sámi identity requires a living connection to the Sámi community (Lehtola 2015a, 107). Many share the same view. The research participant, Biret, clearly and briefly responded:

Because <...> it has to come, like, from your close relatives not some ancestors hundreds of years ago. (Interview 2023, Aanaar, alias Biret,

aged about 25)

Another participant, Karoliinná, approached the issue from a more critical perspective:

Because it's such a Western individual approach to Indigeneity and I don't recognize that myself and none other Sámi people do either, at least the ones that I know. (Interview 2023, Rovaniemi, alias Karoliinná, early 30s)

At this point, Lehtola's explanation is particularly relevant: "*Sáminess takes shape among people living in the present*" (Lehtola 2015a, 107, my translation).

It is widely accepted that a Sámi person is someone who grows up within the culture and has been enculturated into it; for example, children adopted into Sámi families and raised within Sámi culture are regarded as Sámi regardless of their biological ancestry. (cf. Valkonen 2009, 222). A woman, who joined the conversation while we were talking with a friend in the Sajos lobby, explained: "*you have to learn the culture, be enculturated, or you or your parents, grandparents should speak Sámi*" (Fieldwork notes, 2018). Research participants frequently emphasized that Sámi identity was closely connected to lived experience and exposure to it. Growing up in environments where the Sámi language, social concerns, and cultural practices are present can create a sense of belonging that develops through everyday encounters. Karoliinná who grew up in the city, emphasized the importance of being in touch with Sámi culture and compared this experience with the Karelian heritage she carries:

[B]ecause of course there is the same bloodline in a way and I said to him well I don't know Karelian culture. I don't know Karelian identity or anything. I don't identify with it. But Sami identity and culture has always felt more natural to me because we've been in Sápmi, and I've felt Sami presence in my childhood in many many ways, and I felt like the collective concern for Sami issues even when I before I realized that I can start reconnecting with my own identity. (Interview 2023, Rovaniemi, alias Karoliinná, early 30s)

In addition, connection to the language and its cultural meanings is understood as something that must develop through engagement with the living language. Another participant commented during one of our conversations: "*how much*

then can you be Sámi if you do not speak the language or even your grandparents do not speak Sámi? How much of culture then is there?" (Fieldwork notes, 2016).

However, Finnishness is rarely critically reflected upon, as it is often normalized and understood primarily in contrast to Sámi identity. Karoliinná appeared to consider the question when asked: *"Well yeah that's a very good question because when you grow up in Finnish culture I don't think you actually, like, think about it so much because it's just who you are in a way and it's so normal"* (Interview 2023, Rovaniemi, alias Karoliinná, early 30s). When I asked another research participant, Heidi, in the interview what Finnishness meant to her, she struggled to explain until she mentioned, laughing, some widely known associations with Finnishness, like sauna, being quiet and shy, and drinking alcohol (Interview 2023, Anaar, alias Heidi, aged 35+)

Alongside Sámi identity, Finnishness as a national identity also appears in everyday conversations, often in flexible and situational ways. During my fieldwork, I initially found it confusing how people could refer to both "we Sámi" and "we Finns" depending on the context. Over time, however, it became clear that these identities were not mutually exclusive but coexist and are mobilized in different situations. Valkonen (2009, 130) similarly notes that Sámi and national identities intersect in everyday life: for example, Sámi individuals may support the national sports teams of the countries in which they live while simultaneously maintaining a strong sense of belonging to the broader Sámi community across state borders. Such national and ethnic lines were hard for me to understand when I was coming to Sápmi ten years ago. Over time, such shifts between Sámi and Finnish reference points became so common in everyday speech that they no longer stood out as contradictions but rather as part of a multilayered, flexible, and situational identity landscape.

In recent decades, discourses of indigeneity have also played an important role in shaping contemporary understanding of Sáminess. Beyond the previously discussed framing of indigeneity in relation to colonial modernity, traditional livelihoods, and relationships with nature, research participants frequently emphasized shared experiences and solidarities with other Indigenous peoples. In conversations, Sáminess was often described not only as a cultural or political position within the Nordic states, but also as part of a broader Indigenous community grounded in collective experience and mutual recognition.

For Karoliinná, Sáminess and Indigeneity were closely interconnected. In her view, Indigenous belonging was rooted in community recognition and shared social relations:

I always connect Sáminess with the indigeneity community <...> Sámi people and Indigenous people know who are Sámi people or Indigenous people... I always connect indigeneity to community.
(Interview 2023, Rovaniemi, alias Karoliinná, early 30s)

Such perspectives may also be shaped through encounters in broader Indigenous contexts, including international Indigenous events, festivals, cultural programs, and artistic spaces where music, films, and discussions frequently address shared histories of discrimination, assimilation, and cultural revitalization. Research participants are largely in their twenties to forties and grew up in a period when Sámi activism and transnational Indigenous networks have become more visible. At the same time, these participants also demonstrated strong awareness of critiques directed at simplified representations of indigeneity, particularly the binary opposition between “modern” and “traditional” lifestyles or the romanticized discourse of Indigenous peoples as inherently connected to nature. In many conversations, such narratives were openly questioned, joked about, or critically discussed. Taken together, these reflections illustrate how Sámi identity politics are actively negotiated and reinterpreted in contemporary contexts. Rather than passively reproducing externally imposed discourses, Sámi individuals engage with them critically, adapting ideas of indigeneity to their own lived experiences, community perspectives, and present-day social realities.

Concluding Remarks

This chapter has shown that experiences of ethnostress emerge within a broader framework of settler coloniality, where Sámi identity is constructed and negotiated in relation to dominant majority society. As discussed, ethnicity is not a fixed property but a relational process formed in contrast to the “other”. In the Sámi case, this process has been deeply shaped by colonial histories, where identity markers have been both imposed from outside and strategically mobilised from within. The analysis demonstrates that Sámi ethnopolitical movements do not operate in isolation but respond to the structural conditions of settler colonialism.

As Valkonen (2009) shows, symbols of Sáminess, such as language, traditional livelihoods, and connections to nature, have become central markers of identity. However, these markers are not only internally produced but are also shaped by external expectations that maintain the Sámi as culturally distinct “Others.” In this sense, Sámi identity formation, like any

other ethnic formation, has not been a “natural” process free from social and historical conditions, but a process profoundly contextualised by settler coloniality. Identities tend to be formed in opposition to others. In this case, Finnish national identity has historically been constructed in part through the othering of the Sámi, while Sámi identity has been built around those aspects of culture that were most targeted by assimilation. These aspects became key mobilising elements of Sámi ethnohistory: shared experiences of land dispossession, cultural marginalisation, and historical injustice were transformed into symbols of collective resistance and identity. Thus, the construction of Sáminess has taken place within, and in response to, a settler-colonial context.

Ethnostress emerges from the tensions produced by this context. It is shaped by overlapping pressures: the need to reclaim culture, to meet expectations of authenticity, and to navigate identity within nation-state structures that continue to operate through colonial logics. As Fee (1995, 243) suggests, demands for “authenticity” can confine Indigenous peoples to static representations, denying the possibility of change while reinforcing boundaries between modernity and tradition. At the same time, these same markers of difference are essential for political recognition and resistance, creating an ongoing paradox. From a decolonial perspective, these dynamics can be understood as part of broader epistemic structures that reproduce binary distinctions such as authentic/inauthentic and modern/traditional (Mignolo 2017; 2020). Decolonisation, in this sense, involves challenging these imposed categories and recognising the coexistence of multiple ways of being and knowing (Mignolo and Walsh 2018). However, these transformations are not abstract processes but are lived and negotiated in everyday life.

The concept of ethnostress contributes to this discussion by showing how these structural tensions are internalised at the individual level. At the same time, people are not passive recipients of these pressures, but actively navigate, negotiate, and resist them. The following section builds on this foundation by examining how the very symbols that sustain collective identity and political struggle may also become sources of inadequacy and tension, what Berlant (2011, 1) describes as “cruel optimism,” when something one desires becomes an obstacle to one’s own flourishing.

4. ETHNOSTRESS

This chapter examines how authenticity expectations are experienced, negotiated, and embodied in everyday life through the phenomenon of ethnostress. Building on the previous chapter's argument that authenticity expectations function as a mechanism of settler-colonial power, it explores how these expectations become lived realities that shape feelings of belonging, legitimacy, inadequacy, and cultural responsibility among Sámi individuals.

The chapter conceptualises ethnostress as a form of ethnicity-related stress emerging from the need to negotiate, perform, and justify one's ethnic belonging within contexts shaped by colonial histories and ongoing power relations. It argues that ethnostress is not simply an individual psychological condition, but a social and discursive phenomenon produced through interactions between colonial structures, community expectations, ethnopolitical identity formations, and everyday experiences.

Drawing first on existing academic literature and then on ethnographic material, the chapter examines the multiple ways in which ethnostress manifests in contemporary Sámi life. The analysis is based on participant observation, formal and informal interviews, media materials, and literary sources, showing how ethnostress is articulated, interpreted, and lived in practice. Particular attention is paid to the ways in which authenticity expectations become internalised and emerge through questions of language, cultural competence, mixed identities, belonging, representation, social position, and the pressures associated with being recognised as a "proper" Sámi.

4.1. Definition of Ethnostress

As noted in the Introduction, the concept of *ethnostress* originates in the work Hill, Antone, and Myers (Antone, Hill, and Myers 1986). It was subsequently taken up in both Indigenous scholarship more broadly (Antone and Hill 1992; Cajete 1994; Sanchez 2003; LaDuke 2005; Merskin 2010; Wallace 2012; Pilon 2020) and Sámi scholarship (Kuokkanen 1998; Valkonen 2009; Lehtola 2015).

In the book *The Power Within People. A Community Organizing Perspective* (Antone, Hill, and Myers 1986), the authors introduce and define the term ethnostress for first time:

“Ethnostress” occurs when the cultural beliefs or joyful identity of a people are disrupted. It is the negative experience they feel when interacting with members of different cultural groups and themselves. The stress within the individual is centred around a negative self-image and sense of place in the world. Beginning on an individual basis, the effects of the “ethnostress” phenomena are analyzed and then applied to the collective groups of family, community and nation. (Antone, Hill, and Myers 1986, 9)

Antone and Hill who coined the term “ethnostress”, in their publication *Ethnostress: The Disruption of the Aboriginal Spirit* (1992) explain the context the term emerged from. The emergence of the term was encouraged by the discussions in the 1980s among various cultural groups, races, and colours on exploration of the “causes underlying the dysfunctional social behaviour, and the reasons behind the poor economic situation, and the reality of the political battles being waged inside of their communities. Community leaders of all nations were attempting to understand the ‘confusion’ inside of their world” (Antone and Hill 1992, 1). According to the authors:

“Ethnostress” was to become the label for the confusion and disruption that people were experiencing inside of their world. For the purpose of definition, Ethnostress, comes from two words; “ethnicity” which refers to the roots of our aboriginal identity and “stress” pertaining to the impact that the reality of our experience has on the development of the aboriginal person. In short, living within native communities is a very stressful experience. But, to simply state this and not provide the bigger picture would not do the concept justice, we need to be able to relate the stress to the disruption of the aboriginal identity, and further, to understand the impact of this disruption on the individual and community itself. (Antone and Hill 1992, 1)

Subsequently, the authors explain ethnostress in various ways that Indigenous or Aboriginal, as stated in the book, culture in Canada was disrupted. They describe how colonialism disrupted their social organization, spiritual practice and system of government. They then summarize these disruptions by stating:

The disruption of our cultural beliefs has been occurring since the time of contact with non-indigenous people, about 500 years. Over

the years since that first meeting in the early 1980's, we have come to recognize that specific "hurting" behaviours associated with the feelings of fear and anger without our communities are examples that aboriginal people are suffering from "Ethnostress"; a loss and confusion of identity. (Antone and Hill 1992, 2–3)

Anthony F. C. Wallace discusses ethnostress in *Tuscarora: A History* (2012), where he adopts the term from Antone, Hill, and Myers (1986) to analyze the experiences of the Tuscarora Native people in the northern US and Canada. The entire chapter of the book is dedicated to the topic of ethnostress where the author examines the historical and ongoing challenges faced by the Tuscarora and other Haudenosaunee communities due to colonization, forced assimilation, and cultural suppression. The author details the impact of Christian missionary efforts, government-run boarding schools, and policies that led to significant cultural loss, psychological trauma, and social issues caused by ethnostress and intergenerational trauma, including substance abuse, family breakdown, and identity struggles, while also highlighting community resilience through spiritual revival, healing programs, and efforts to restore traditional practices and reciprocal relationships.

Merylene Pilon, in her article "Colonial Trauma in Canada: Ethnostress, Public Stress and Political Stress among Indigenous Peoples" (2020), analyses colonial and generational trauma through cultural studies and psychological perspective. The author notes that Western medical definitions of trauma when applied to Indigenous experiences of colonial violence are limited and not accurate. The article examines the enduring impact of colonial trauma on Indigenous peoples in Canada, emphasizing the multifaceted nature of this trauma as ethnostress, public stress, and political stress. Pilon uses the definition coined by Antone and Hill (1992). The author further explains the systematic issues currently pressuring Indigenous groups in Canada such as inadequate housing, health disparities, and social marginalization rooted in historical injustices like residential schools and discriminatory policies. Pilon argues that true reconciliation requires more than apologies and reparations; it demands a deep acknowledgment of genocide and systemic racism, empathetic listening to Indigenous narratives, and culturally sensitive healing approaches that address intergenerational trauma and promote societal transformation.

Debra Merskin, in her article "The S-Word: Discourse, Stereotypes, and the American Indian Woman" (2010), looks into ethnostress among Native American women. The author critically examines the persistent negative stereotypes and underrepresentation of Native American women in

media, culture, and society, focusing particularly on the harmful use of the term “squaw”. These stereotypes, rooted in colonial narratives and reinforced through language, place-naming, and popular culture, contribute to systemic oppression, cultural erasure, and psychological harm, described as “ethnostress”. Merskin emphasizes the importance of ethical media representation, the power of language in shaping social realities, and the need for reclaiming Indigenous identity through respectful discourse and renaming efforts, drawing on feminist and critical race theory frameworks to analyze these complex intersections of race, gender, and power.

Merskin defines ethnostress based on other authors, and even does not mention works by Antone and Hill. However, the definitions used are similar. Merskin uses definitions by Gregory Cajete (1994), Sanchez (2003), and Winona La Duke (2005). Ethnostress is defined in the article as a psychological response pattern resulting from the disruption of deeply held cultural life and belief systems, which affects self-image and understanding of one’s place in the world. It is described as internalized oppression caused by negative verbal and visual discourse, leading to poor self-image, low self-esteem, and dissociation with real health consequences. Additionally, it is directly related to colonization, sexual violence, dehumanization, and marginalization experienced by Native women, impacting personal and intimate aspects of life.

Gregory Cajete, in his book *Look to the Mountain: An Ecology of Indigenous Education*, examines Indigenous approaches to education, highlighting central aspects of American Indian views on teaching and learning. They promote the creation of a modern, culturally grounded educational system that draws on traditional tribal values and principles, while also integrating relevant ideas, technologies, and content from contemporary education. Cajete also writes about ethnostress, explaining that it comes from the contact with Europeans:

Creation, identification, and empowerment of American Indians – as Tribal people in the face of modern constraints – have been the central dilemma of American Indian life since the time of the first European contact. The struggle to maintain American Indian identities, in a modern context, has continued to intensify and become more complex since the turn of the century. The struggle to maintain who we are, and what we believe in, has resulted in expressions of hopelessness and accompanying forms of disempowerment. Collectively, American Indians continue to suffer from “ethnostress” that began during the time of first contact. (Cajete 1994, 188)

Based on Hill, Antone, and Myers' definition (1986), Cajete then defines ethnostress as a psychological process:

A psychological response pattern stemming from the disruption of deeply held cultural life and belief systems that one cares about deeply. Such a disruption may be abrupt or occur over time and generations. Its initial effects are readily visible, but its long-term effects are many and varied, usually affecting self-image and an understanding of one's place in the world. (Cajete 1994, 188).

Winona La Duke in the foreword to Smith's book *Conquest: Sexual violence and American Indian Genocide* (2005) refers to colleague Agnes Williams, who explained ethnostress in the following way:

As a Native woman, you can be sure that you suffer from, what my colleague Agnes Williams calls "ethno-stress". In other words, you will wake up in the morning, and someone will be trying to steal your land, your legal rights, your sister will be in jail, your public Anglo-dominated school district will be calling about your children's conflicts with teachers or their spotty attendance, and your non-profit organization's funding is getting cut by a foundation because you are no longer a priority. (La Duke 2005, xvii)

The author further continues:

"Ethno-stress" is reality of our situation as Native Women, which is directly related to the process of colonization, sexual violence, dehumanization and marginalizing of who we are. The reality is that what is personal and intimate – whether your family history, the perceptions of you as an individual, or perceptions of your daughters – becomes the centrepiece of power relations between peoples and societies. (La Duke 2005, xvii-xviii)

John Sanchez, in his article "How American public schools using down-linked news media shape American Indian identity" (2003), pays attention to the discourse of Native Americans, images and representations in media and school books. The author explores how mainstream media and public education systems perpetuate stereotypes and inaccurate portrayals of American Indian cultures, which negatively affect both public perception and the self-identity of American Indian students. In the article, Sanchez mentions

ethnostress and defines it citing Cajete's definition (which is based on Antone, Hill, and Myer's definition).

To sum up, the term "ethnostress" was developed in North America in Native American context. As Wallace notes, "[t]he more familiar term *Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)* has also been applied <...>" (Wallace 2012, 107). At its core, ethnostress refers to the psychological, social, and cultural strain that arises when Indigenous peoples' identities, belief systems, and ways of life are disrupted, especially through colonization, assimilation policies, and negative stereotypes. Ethnostress manifests in its long-term effects: intergenerational trauma, substance abuse, family breakdown, and health disparities. However, the term was coined to understand the difficult social reality and behavioural problems of Native communities which points to the effort for change. Hence, researchers writing about ethnostress also note resistance, healing, and cultural continuity as ways to overcome ethnostress.

Interestingly, the content of the term changes slightly in the context of Sámi scholarship. The concept was first introduced by Sámi political scholar Kuokkanen, who not coincidentally, had worked with and studied Native Canadian communities. Kuokkanen wrote her master's thesis on ethnostress among Sámi people (1997), and later published an article in the collection "Pohjoiset identiteetit ja mentaliteetit, osa I: Outamaalta tunturiin" [Northern identities and mentalities, part I: From fells to mountains] (1999). Her article "Etnostressistä sillanrakennukseen: saamelaisen nykykirjallisuuden minäkuvat" [From ethnostress to bridge building: self-images of modern Sámi literature] explores the complexity and diversity of Sámi identity, culture, and literature, emphasizing the interplay between traditional heritage and contemporary challenges. Key themes include the role of literature in expressing and preserving Sámi identity, the impact of external perceptions and ethnostress, the symbolic significance of light, and the non-linear conception of time rooted in nature. The works discussed illustrate Sámi resilience through storytelling, cultural affirmation, and resistance to essentialist views, underscoring the dynamic and multifaceted nature of Sámi identity in a postcolonial context. While describing stereotypes around Sáminess, dominant society's cultural appropriation and indifference to and ignorance by dominant society of Sámi history and, consequently, contemporary rights claims are discussed and the term ethnostress is introduced and defined:

Ethnostress is stress experienced by the individual as a result of having their ethnic identity questioned. Ethnostress often also causes other social problems, such as alienation, alcoholism, and violent

behaviour directed both at oneself and at others. Ethnostress is caused by unmet psychological needs, and those who suffer from it are uncertain of themselves and of their very existence. Due to centuries of colonisation and assimilation policies, Indigenous peoples have experienced psychological alienation and spiritual deprivation, resulting in the loss of control over their culture and their lives. This can in turn lead to chronic identity problems and break the group's sense of belonging and social solidarity. (Kuokkanen 1999, 97, my translation)

The author continues on commenting issues related to positive identity formation caused by disruption of cultural backgrounds, as well as expectations of authentic Indigenous culture:

For centuries, however, the ethnic backgrounds of Indigenous peoples have been seriously fragmented and weakened, leading to a situation where they have had little opportunity to form a strong, positive identity.

Defining culture solely in material terms also harms an individual's positive self-image. If an individual adopts a restricted view of their culture, they will have no reason to believe in their culture or in their people. This view, combined with the idea of a single "true" Indigenous identity, produces individuals who have very little on which to rely when constructing a positive self-image and envisioning a future as representatives of their people. The result is a damaged, insecure individual, and therefore also a damaged community. (Kuokkanen 1999, 97, my translation)

Subsequently, Kuokkanen analyses poems by Sámi writers. While concluding the discussion of Inger-Mari Aikio's poetry collection *Silkeguobbara lákca* (1996), Kuokkanen observes the presence of ethnostress in it, and defines it as an expectation to meet demands of Sáminess and dominant society at the same time. She describes this feeling as living "between two worlds", as reflected in the title of one of the article's subchapters: "[E]thnostress: the inability to be Sámi, i.e., to meet the real or imagined demands imposed by society, but at the same time the inability to be non-Sámi, i.e., to adapt to the dominant society" (Kuokkanen 1999, 103, my translation). Lastly, in concluding paragraphs Kuokkanen further clarifies the

concept of ethnostress, defining it as uncertainty of identity and belonging between Indigenous and colonizer cultures:

Colonialism manifests itself nowadays in different ways than before. Today the colonial aspirations of states are expressed, for example, as racism, which in its many forms affects Sámi identity in many ways. Many may experience ethnostress: uncertainty about who we are and where we truly belong. For this reason, it is important to examine Sáminess in a new light and to strive to rid ourselves of the factors that restrict Sámi identity and a positive self-image. (Kuokkanen 1999, 109, my translation)

Building on Kuokkanen's text on ethnostress, Valkonen, in the book *Poliittinen Saamelaisuus* (2009), summarizes the demands that Sáminess places on the individual and how these demands become a reflexive identity project, which can be both beneficial and harmful. Valkonen explains how Sáminess became a political category of a group, filled with meanings and urges for a person to meet the expected ways of being Sámi – learning and performing Sáminess according to a set of markers. As a consequence, a person experiences ethnostress. The scholar states:

The Sámi discourse also determines the place of the Sámi: with the development of politicization, Sámi has become "general Sámi", a cultural identity that both represents a certain group of people defined as Sámi and invites the individual to a certain subject position. The concept "Sámi" is a category of classification and a subject position that carries with it historical, cultural and political meanings of Sámi, with which the individual called to this position has to "clear the differences". Sámi as a mandate that invites, enables, obliges and sometimes forces an individual to become a Sámi. Because growing up as a Sámi in today's conditions is not always very easy, Sámi may also turn into a reflexive self-project in which one becomes a Sámi by learning and performing the cultural hallmarks of Sámi, the "Sámi procedure". This is in many ways meaningful for individuals and their identity as Sámi, and fulfils many needs of belonging, community and being accepted. (Valkonen 2009, 281, my translation)

Valkonen draws on Kuokkanen's concept of ethnostress over its earlier use in the Native American context in the Americas. The scholar

emphasizes the pressure of meeting identity expectations over alienation and disruption of culture caused by colonization. Valkonen notes:

On the other hand, the transformation of Sámi from “a natural being into a reflexive self-project” may cause ethnostress, in which case ethnostress is not so much related to the alienation caused by colonization, but specifically to the mandate that the concept “Sámi” contains. (cf. Kuokkanen 1999; Valkonen 2009, 281, my translation)

Lehtola, in the book *Saamelaiskiista. Sortaako Suomi alkuperäiskansaansa?* (2015), mentions ethnostress on several occasions. The scholar adopts the concept from Kuokkanen and examines its subsequent use by the Sámi in media discourse. Lehtola defines ethnostress as follows: *“Ethnostress means constant feeling of inadequacy regarding one’s own Saminess <...>”* (Lehtola 2015a, 238, my translation). Later the scholar supplements the definition of ethnostress while examining three different media articles (the articles will be described further in this chapter): an interview with Pirita Näkkäläjärvi (Salomaa 2012), an interview with Anni-Helena Ruotsala (Honkanen 2014), and an article by Xia Torikka (Torikka 2015). While analyzing these articles, Lehtola suggests that ethnostress also means *“pressure to act in every matter for the benefit of one’s own ethnic group”* (Lehtola 2015a, 238, my translation). He analyzes the sources of ethnostress that originate within community and those that come from outside it. Referring to pressures, Lehtola discusses the hierarchies inside Sámi groups and illustrates them with two examples: the first is Minna Rasmus’ survey conducted in 2010 where Inari and Skolt Sámi respondents spoke about unequal treatment from Finns and Northern Sami; and the second is the well-known expression “super Sámi” used in the Sámi community to describe those against whom others were measured: *“other people are compared to the attributes associated with them – reindeer herding, riving, or the knowledge of the Sámi language”* (Lehtola 2015a, 239, my translation). However, Lehtola suggests that the biggest pressures came from outside Sámi society as representations of Sámi people: *“Ethnostress can manifest itself in such a way that a Sámi person has to constantly explain his or her own identity and tell what the Sámi is. Finns belonging to the majority do not have to do it”* (Lehtola 2015a, 239, my translation). The author continues that people often have to explain how Sámi are different from Finns living in Lapland. He criticizes this expectation by saying: *“The definition of the distinctiveness of the is expected to be unambiguous, and therefore person who asks is not satisfied with the Sámi’s appeal to ‘various perceptions’ and desires to see the*

'whole picture'. At the same time, no one asks the definition of a 'true Finn' " (Lehtola 2015a, 240–241, my translation).

It is useful to briefly relate the concept of ethnostress to the notion of minority stress. Minority stress theory, first articulated by Meyer (2003), explains mental health inequalities as a result of excessive exposure to stress caused by stigma, discrimination, and marginalised social status (Frost and Meyer 2023). Unlike general stress, minority stress originates specifically from prejudice and structural inequality, and operates through mechanisms such as expectations of rejection, hypervigilance, and the internalisation of negative societal attitudes, which can lead to chronic psychological strain (Hoy-Ellis 2023). While initially developed in the context of sexual minorities, the concept has been extended to other marginalised groups, including ethnic and Indigenous populations (das Nair and Sand 2024). In Scandinavian contexts, similar processes have been identified in experiences of discrimination, invisibility and hypervisibility, and pressures to represent one's group in everyday life (das Nair and Sand 2024), although the term itself is not consistently used in Sámi-focused research.

In this sense, ethnostress shares important similarities with minority stress, particularly in highlighting the cumulative psychological effects of marginalisation. However, as the preceding discussion has shown, ethnostress places stronger emphasis on the disruption and negotiation of ethnic identity itself, especially in contexts shaped by colonialism. It captures not only stress resulting from stigma, but also the tension of having to perform, maintain, and justify one's belonging within both Indigenous and dominant frameworks. Thus, while minority stress provides a useful psychological model, ethnostress offers a more context-specific and relational lens for understanding how these pressures are experienced in Indigenous contexts such as the Sámi case.

To conclude, the concept of "ethnostress" in academic literature originated in the Native American context, where it was used to explain the alienation, cultural disruption, and intergenerational trauma caused by colonization. In Sámi scholarship, however, the meaning of the term has shifted. Kuokkanen broadened the concept of ethnostress, defining it as stress arising when ethnic identity is questioned, which fosters insecurity, alienation, and destructive behaviours. She criticizes the narrow definitions of "authentic" indigeneity hindering the development of a positive identity. The scholar further interprets it as living "between two worlds," caught between the expectations of Sáminess and the dominant society, and ultimately as a contemporary uncertainty about identity and belonging under ongoing racism and colonial structures. Subsequently, scholars have expanded and redefined the term in distinct ways. Valkonen links ethnostress to the pressures of

identity expectations, framing Sáminess as a reflexive identity project that can be empowering but also burdensome. Lehtola further adapts the concept by examining its use in media discourse, emphasizing both internal and external pressures: from hierarchies and expectations within Sámi communities, and from majority society's demands that Sámi individuals would constantly explain and justify their identity. Thus, within the Sámi scholarly and public context, ethnostress no longer refers solely to the consequences of colonization, but also to the ongoing negotiations of identity, belonging, and authenticity that shape Sámi lives today.

4.2. Feeling “Not proper” Sámi: Expectations of Authenticity

In Sámi scholarly discourse, ethnostress has shifted from describing the effects of colonization to capturing the ongoing pressures of identity and belonging. Kuokkanen frames it as stress from questioned identity, restrictive notions of authenticity, and the experience of being “between two worlds,” while later scholars such as Valkonen and Lehtola emphasize identity expectations, community hierarchies, and majority demands that continually force Sámi individuals to define and justify who they are. While in the Sámi context expectations to fit the image of Sáminess is the main definition of ethnostress, Antone and Hill (1992) also mention such expectations of authenticity as one of the facets of ethnostress. According to them, ethnostress also includes the issues of “culture under glass”, which is freezing Indigenous culture in history and expecting Indigenous people to match this image:

Many of us still remember being the victims of ridicule, humiliation, attack, and isolation because we did or did not talk in a particular way, because we like or disliked a certain kind of music, and in many other ways. We may have been told that we were not legitimately native or native enough. (Antone and Hill 1992, 6)

In the Sámi community ethnostress has been discussed and written about in various contexts, ranging from scholarly to media, and conversations among mainly young people. This is how people make sense of the various tensions they face as a minority Indigenous group in the dominant society. These tensions include meeting various expectations of authenticity, always representing the entire group to the dominant society, dealing with colonial trauma legacy, and feeling the need to do good for the Sámi community by preserving the culture.

I first encountered discussions of ethnostress in interviews and informal conversations in 2016 and 2018. During interviews, I also heard doubts about one's Sáminess and comparisons with "proper Sáminess". Once during the annual Skábmagovat Indigenous Film Festival, I was having a conversation with a local acquaintance. Before a lecture we were standing in the hallway and an important Sámi cultural figure who was participating in the discussion came over. This figure asked my acquaintance if they spoke Sámi or English (being from another part of Sápmi). This was probably what brought up the topic in my later conversation with the acquaintance. After the discussion, my acquaintance recalled the previous year's festival, telling me how difficult it had been to convince a friend to wear traditional Sámi clothing for the festival's evening party in the village. The acquaintance elaborated on the topic, saying that some of their friends felt ashamed to wear Sámi clothes, because they did not speak the Sámi language fluently. My acquaintance then explained to me that this was because of the people who were very active in Sámi culture and who knew the Sámi languages well. Others did not feel Sámi enough to wear traditional clothes, especially if they did not speak Sami, although they were Sámi (paraphrased, fieldwork notes, 2018).

Later, more people have shared their experience of not feeling "proper" Sámi. This was related to a lack of knowledge of traditional activities, lack of language skills, engagement in crafts, not being from reindeer-herding families, or a lack of engagement in activism. Maria and Máret, both of whom live in Sápmi, described these experiences to me during interviews:

I actually feel more Finnish than Sámi. Because I grew up in a very Finnish family. So I grew up, like, and I sometimes say, I don't even feel like I'm proper Sámi, because I'm not doing traditional things, I barely speak the language anymore and I'm not an activist or something. I feel like I should be doing something more to be a proper Sámi. (Interview 2018, Aanaar, alias Maria, aged about 25)

I also many times notice myself thinking that I'm less in the way when I think about me being half Finnish and half Sámi, and sometimes I feel less, because I can't yoik, or I don't have reindeer, or I can't make my own gákti. (Interview 2018, Aanaar, alias Máret, aged about 24)

Later, during my fieldwork in 2023–2024, when people asked what had brought me to Sápmi and I explained my research topic, some responded by saying that they experienced ethnostress with expressions such as "Oh, I

have it too!”. These were young people in their 20s and 30s. Their familiarity with the term and their feelings of being “incompetent” Sámi were evident in these reactions. These reactions pointed to a broader awareness of the concept of ethnostress within Sámi society and to the wider relevance of issues related to Sámi identity, belonging, and perceived markers of Sáminess.

These experiences can be understood through two interconnected dynamics. First, assimilationist policies made many Sámi people lose their language, cultural practices, and connections to their community. The subsequent pressure to reclaim what was lost may produce feelings of being “not properly” Sámi. Second, despite the existence of Sámi autonomy and certain rights in Finland, Sámi people continue to live within a settler-colonial structure that reproduces expectations of Indigenous “otherness”. These expectations often require Sámi individuals to demonstrate recognizable forms of cultural difference in order to legitimize their identity both to themselves and to others. If individuals feel unable to meet these expectations, they may feel that they are not “proper” or “enough” Sámi. When this leads them to identify more strongly with Finnishness than with Sáminess, it does not reflect a personal choice alone but rather the workings of a settler-colonial system that continues to reproduce assimilation, particularly when Indigenous people cannot meet imposed expectations of cultural “otherness.” At one point during fieldwork, I asked a research partner to describe what Finnishness meant to her when she was questioning her Sámi identity.

Heidi, who lives in Aanaar, embraced both of her identities, Finnish and Sámi. However, she doubted her Sáminess saying that she felt uncomfortable wearing Sámi clothing: *“And maybe I have to <...> at some point I told this to one friend of mine with the costume thing that maybe I am just too Finnish already. Cause I don’t feel it myself <...> costume.”* (Interview 2023, Aanaar, alias Heidi, aged 35+). When I asked what Finnishness meant to her, she struggled to explain until she mentioned, laughing, some widely known associations with Finnishness, like sauna, being quiet and shy, and drinking alcohol (Interview 2023, Aanaar, alias Heidi, aged 35+). In contrast to Sáminess, Finnishness, as the dominant ethnicity, does not rely on similarly visible markers. As in many nation-state contexts, belonging to the dominant population tends to remain implicit, whereas belonging to a minority group must be continuously demonstrated. Without such recognizable markers, minority identities risk becoming socially invisible and individuals may seem to be absorbed into the dominant group.

In practice, coloniality and identity politics often appear in everyday expectations of Sámi “otherness.” Although many cultural symbols are meant to express pride in Sámi heritage, within a settler-colonial framework they can

also function as informal “tests of authenticity”. For some individuals, this turns such encounters into experiences of ethnostress. Many people described being asked questions about their Sáminess by Finns from southern Finland, for example, whether they spoke a Sámi language, owned a reindeer, or otherwise fit common images of Sámi life. Biret, who lives in Aanaar, described it as follows:

I think it comes from this colonialism that people are, like, if you don't have, if you are like blond and tall you cannot be Sámi because Sámi people are short and dark (laughs a bit) and small, and and if you don't have a reindeer, you are not Sámi, you don't speak Sámi – you are not Sámi, you live in a city – you are not Sámi. It happens in real life all the time. And it's all those, always it's, like, a white non-Sámi person that it's like... questioning. (Interview 2023, Aanaar, alias Biret, aged about 25)

Similarly, Sámi are also often questioned by tourists and visitors. I encountered a disappointed tourist couple at Airbnb in Luleju (Luleå) after they had visited a Sámi market in Jáhkâmáhkke (Jokkmokk). When I asked them how the market was, the man answered that they actually were disappointed because they had expected it to be a “Sámi market”, but instead it was very tourist-oriented and expensive. They said they had expected to find “true” Indigenous things like drums, etc. When I replied that Sámi people were also modern people, the woman said that she preferred things that were closer to nature (Fieldwork notes, 2024). Their preconceptions of what is “true” Indigenous Sámi led them to the conclusion that they had not experienced an “authentic” Indigenous Sámi market, not to mention that such things as drums would never be sold in the market. There are many more such stories. An acquaintance in Aanaar (Inari), who works in tourism, told how tourists complained that they had not met “real” Sámi because those they met were too “white” (Fieldwork notes, 2024). Similar observations from fieldwork experience can be found in Nuccio Mazzullo’s article on tourism and authenticity issues in Finnish Sápmi (Mazzullo 2022).

Another dimension of authenticity expectations, specifically the demand to conform to images of pre-modern or even “primitive”, emerges in interviews published in *Helsingin Sanomat*: one with Sámi history professor Lehtola in 2022, whose scholarly work on ethnostress was discussed in the previous subchapter, and another with Siida Museum staff, curator Aile Aikio and director Sari Valkonen in 2019. Both articles point to expectations of authenticity as a significant source of ethnostress. In the interview, Lehtola

discusses caravans, the exotization of the Sámi, and their voluntary participation in so-called human zoos. He reflects on colonialism, noting its particular manifestations in the Nordic context as compared to that experienced by Native peoples in the US, and frames ethnostress in this setting as the pressure to embody “primitiveness”:

The cases underline the power of images and prejudices. The Sámi have lived under Western influence for hundreds of years, but Westerners still expect them to be primitive. Veli-Pekka Lehtola says that the pressure on young Sámi people to realize their own national identity increases when they learn about colonialism. There is a word for it: ethnostress. To alleviate the problem, he offers a tip he heard from a friend. “The life that a Sámi lives is more than enough to be a Sámi life.” (cited in Heikkinen 2022, my translation)

Aile Aikio and Sari Valkonen complemented Lehtola’s perspective by emphasizing the ongoing processes of creating and recreating Sámi culture and identity:

Instead of mourning what has been lost, we see our own in the foreign and the old in the new. Is this the solution to the eternal question: how to preserve native culture when the dominant culture imposes its own customs and objects? According to Aikio, Sámi culture survives through adaptation. “It will become different,” Aikio explains. Museum director Sari Valkonen says: “Sámiism is not something that was left in Utsjoki in 1939.” In those days, reindeer herders skied. It was not until the 1960s that snowmobiles arrived, which some claim destroyed Sámi reindeer herding in its purest form. The first users of the new technology in Finland were precisely the Sámi reindeer herders. From the north, sleds spread to the south. So skis were replaced by snowmobiles, but: “A reindeer herder who skis is no more Sámi than a reindeer herder who rides a snowmobile,” says Aikio. (cited in Heikkinen 2019, my translation)

Following this they define what ethnostress is:

A member of an Indigenous people may experience a condition called ethnostress.

Áile Aikio says it means anxiety and uncertainty about whether you

qualify as a Sámi. Do you know the language, are you good at jewellery, can you light a campfire in the rain? And when was the last time you visited a sieidi, a sacred place?

Aikio comforts again. A modern-day sieidi can be a state of mind, not just a boulder on a fell.

“That’s an idea you can rely on.” (cited in Heikkinen 2019, my translation)

The examples above point to a broader tension between ideas of tradition and modernity, which are often framed through essentialist assumptions about “pure” cultural forms. Indigenous cultures, including Sámi culture, have frequently been imagined as static, authentic, and rooted in the past, while change and adaptation are associated with loss or inauthenticity. Such expectations reflect a wider colonial logic in which indigeneity is recognised only insofar as it remains visibly distinct from modernity. However, as both Lehtola and the Siida Museum representatives (who are Sámi representatives) suggest, Sámi culture has always been dynamic, shaped through ongoing processes of adaptation and reinterpretation. The persistent association of “real” Sámi identity with pre-modern or “primitive” forms reveals how authenticity is constructed through external expectations rather than lived reality. In this sense, the dichotomy between tradition and modernity is not a neutral description but part of a discursive framework that produces ethnostress by positioning Sámi individuals in relation to unattainable ideals of cultural purity. Young reindeer herder Mihkkal criticized the idea of an unchanged culture by referring to his own work:

As new technology we can use it as soon as it gets that cheap that we can afford it. For example, like snowmobiles, ATVs, GPS, drones, phones, and so on. <...> So, if it wasn’t a living culture and changing, developing, we would belong to the Siida museum. (Interview 2024, Aanaar, alias Mihkkal, aged 22)

Hence, cultural authenticity is both challenged and criticized by Sámi themselves, while at the same time being internalized in many ways because of the burden of expectations and questioning related to the performance of otherness which does not happen in the case of the dominant society, in this case Finns.

4.3. In Between Two Cultures

Such cultural purity can also be visible in the expectations and internalised understanding of being “half Sámi”. Often people described themselves as half Sámi, not full Sámi when one of their parents was non-Sámi. Even though it is widely accepted in public discourse and knowledge that Sáminess and indigeneity are not determined in percentages or fractions, but rather through culture, as mentioned in the previous chapter, many see themselves as “half” or not full Sámi. This reflects the influence of the dominant Western approach to ethnicity, blood quantum and ideas of “purity”, because such categories have been imposed on Sámi people and subsequently internalized. For example, one of the research participants, Risten, who grew up in a small Sámi village in a family with a Sámi father and Finnish mother explained:

[T]hat's little bit hard, because then you are in the middle. And you don't know who you are, or what you are. Well, actually, I know who I, who I was. I was... not Sámi (laughs). <...> Not Sámi. By the definition in my area. (Interview 2018, Aanaar, alias Risten, aged about 40)

She further expressed her doubts about this “not full Sámi” definition, and that it depended on the area:

And now in January I spoke with one guy from Inari, he's half Sámi. His mother is Finnish also. And one guy from Utsjoki and also his father, mother is Finnish. And they didn't agree with me when I said that we are not, we are half Sámi. And they said: no, there is no such thing as half. (Interview 2018, Aanaar, alias Risten, aged about 40)

However, people are navigating between those two aspects of their identity and are not always consistent but rather situational about expressing it. During the same conversation, Risten also mentioned that she was Sámi, and it was very clear and sure. Five years later she talked about some other person with identity crisis:

And then I told her because I couldn't understand and then I thought I don't understand what your problem is. If your grandfather's from Utsjoki, uh he's like a full Sámi thousands of years. So what is the problem? Why are you so unclear? Like why do you feel this? Like I told her I don't understand you don't have any reason. It's clear on

every paper that you are Sámi. (Interview 2024, Aanaar, alias Risten, aged about 45)

What this shows is that people simply balance between two ethnicities, two different expectations and discourses. More importantly, they navigate the majority and minority cultures where understandings of ethnicity of the dominant group and the minority group are of unequal power relationship, are internalised and then challenged and manifest not as consistent identification or understanding but rather conflicting and situational.

Feelings and experiences associated with ethnostress, such as being between two cultures, identity confusion and search, processes of reconnection, and various expectations, have also been addressed in literature and poetry. Kuokkanen (1999) analyzes the poetry collection *Silkeguobbara lákca* (1996) by Inger-Mari Aikio, specifically the beginning of the section called “Juoksihkki” containing six poems. According to Kuokkanen,

[A] typical feature of this section is a certain kind of duality: Sáminess is indeed part of the speaker's self, but at the same time it causes conflicting feelings. On the one hand, the poems highlight the consequences of colonialism, on the other they both criticise and respect Sámi society. (Kuokkanen 1999, 101, my translation)

One of the poems reads:

*we too have value
if strangers
say so.*

(Aikio 1996, cited in Kuokkanen 1999, 101, my translation)

Kuokkanen interprets the poem by emphasizing the contrast between Sámi and outsiders who, in the poem, have the authority to define their value. The researcher highlights how colonialism has made the Sámi to internalize the belief that recognition must come from the majority rather than from their own culture:

Such a view has been caused by the colonial way of taking control of the mind of the subordinated people as well, not only of their lands or features of their material culture. The ethnocentric views of the dominant society have led the Sámi to consciously, but especially unconsciously, accept that only the majority population can grant

them value — that they themselves cannot do so, and that value does not come from within Sámi society itself. (Kuokkanen 1999, 101)

Kuokkanen concludes her discussion of the poems by observing the conflicting feelings that produce ethnostress – inability to meet expectations of Sáminess imposed by colonizers and internalized by Sámi society itself pressuring the individual. However, she ends on a positive note, moving beyond the lack of positive identity pattern, and showing the opportunity ethnostress can provide – to create a new understanding of Sáminess:

Aikio's poems do not romanticise Sáminess, but neither do they attempt to break it. The speaker in Silkeguobbára lágka depicts their own society as they see it, presenting both good and bad sides. However, this causes the lyrical speaker conflicting feelings, from which arises ethnostress: the inability to be Sámi, i.e., to meet the real or imagined demands imposed by society, but at the same time the inability to be non-Sámi, i.e., to adapt to the dominant society.

In this way the lyrical speaker of Aikio's poems is in a sense "between two worlds," which creates conflicting emotions, but which can also give birth to a new kind of Sáminess. (Kuokkanen 1999, 103)

Another example from literature is the novel *Halla Helle* (2021) by Niillas Holmberg set in the Sámi homeland of Sápmi that explores questions of identity, culture, and the relationship between Sámi people and the Finnish majority society. The story follows Samu, a young man and a son of a priest from southern Finland, who becomes fascinated with Sámi culture and moves to the northern municipality of Utsjoki. There he meets Elle Hallala, a well-known Sámi artist known as "Halla Helle," whose life and work revolve around Sámi culture and activism. Over the course of the novel, Elle withdraws from her successful art career and returns to a quieter life closer to the land and traditional ways. Through Samu's attempts to understand Elle and Sámi culture, the novel explores themes such as colonial history, cultural misunderstanding, and the pressures placed on Indigenous people in contemporary society.

The novel also reflects the concept of ethnostress even though not analysed specifically. In *Halla Helle*, this appears in the expectations placed on Elle as a prominent Sámi artist who is often seen as representing Sámi culture to outsiders. These expectations create tension between personal identity and public cultural responsibility. The interactions between Samu and

Elle also highlight the difficulties that arise when members of the dominant culture try to interpret or define Indigenous identity. By portraying the pressures of cultural representation, the impact of colonial history, and the struggle to balance personal life with community expectations, the novel illustrates how ethnostress can affect individuals navigating both their own cultural traditions and the expectations of the majority society.

This subchapter shows how ethnostress emerges through experiences of being “in between” cultures, where individuals navigate conflicting expectations from both Sámi and majority societies. It highlights how ideas of cultural purity and external definitions of identity are internalised, producing uncertainty, ambivalence, and situational identification. At the same time, these tensions are not only constraining but can also open space for rearticulating Sámi identity in more flexible and plural ways.

4.4. Ethnostress and Cultural Reconnection

Experiences of ethnostress are not uniform and often depend on people’s upbringing and social context. People who were raised in cities, or more Finnish dominated villages often had fewer opportunities to practice language or spend time with their Sámi relatives from whom they could learn various practices. Gender expectations may also have an influence. Moreover, the term “ethnostress” is something mainly discussed by younger generations since they are the ones whose parents did not have language or did not teach them Sámi as a result of assimilationist policies.

In the interviews with people who grew up and live outside the Sámi area, the notion of reconnection and stories of their bonding with relatives and people in Sápmi were an important part of conversations. Karoliinná’s mother is Sámi and even though Sáminess was present in their family – she had connection and visited Sápmi, and there were various objects at home – it was never much of the topic or part of her self-identity until recently. For Matti, who was raised in a metropolitan area it was also a connection with family, childhood memories from Sápmi, various unconscious cultural traditions, however, he never learned a language and at certain points in his life his connection grew more distant. Niilla acknowledged the life in the city as a source of ethnostress, however, he spoke the language that was strongly maintained in the family. Often, for people who grew up outside the Sámi area, connection to Sápmi and family is a very important aspect of their Sáminess, but the lack of language and various other skillsets becomes sources of ethnostress. Mihkkal, who grew up in a reindeer herding family, speaks Sámi as his mother tongue, comments ethnostress:

It's a term of the people who come from the south to regain their language, lost language. And that they take that courage and so on. They express the term little bit more often but, nevertheless, everyone has their struggle on their own and like I mentioned it's a problem, I think everyone feels ethnostress but just in a bit different ways. (Interview 2024, Aanaar, alias Mihkkal, aged 22)

Karoliinná recalled the beginning of her reconnection, and the hardship to realise that she was Sámi while it had never been emphasized in her family. She had always known her mother was a Sámi, however, she doubted her own Sáminess or did not see herself in that way before starting to reconnect with culture:

Like, um, it just became like this beacon in the darkness that was, like, guiding me in some way. So, um, that was the start of the process like five years ago. But prior to that, there was also, there was always this sense of connection, but I didn't really deal with it because, uh, I had the mental state that I was always telling people that, yeah, my mom is Sámi, but I never really thought that maybe I'm Sámi myself. But my Sámi friends were always to me like of course you are Sámi. I was like well I'm not sure if I'm like comfortable declaring that I am. (Interview 2023, Rovaniemi, alias Karoliinná, early 30s)

Her reconnection process began with learning the language and making small handicrafts, during a period in which she was reflecting on and reexamining her identity. Since then, she has been more and more comfortable with her Sáminess:

I got very sick maybe five years ago because <...> And when I was in the hospital because I had, I didn't have energy, anything real in my life. I couldn't handle my relationships or my school work or anything. So I started to study Sámi language, Northern Sámi, in the hospital and it kept me like doing something in the middle when I was doing nothing. And then I started learning the language, and then I started doing jewellery. And then I realized that I was also I was just thinking about like these major questions in life that who am I? Where do I come from and stuff like that. So I think that when I was in the lowest point of my life in regards of my mental health, starting reconnecting with my Sámi identity, like, gave me so much these

positive feelings in my mind. (Interview 2023, Rovaniemi, alias Karoliinná, early 30s)

For Matti who lived in a metropolitan area, Sáminess has always been a natural part of his life through his father's family and relatives, but it was not something he explicitly identified or expressed as Sáminess. For him, going to the north and seeing family working with reindeer, fishing, and being in community was such a naturalized part of life he never thought of it in terms of Sáminess vs. Finishness. Matti remembered:

When I was a kid, I really didn't talk about it that much, like, oh, we are Sámi or something like that. It's kind of, like, for me, that was just, like, my experience. Of course, like all of my... not all of my, but most of my relatives, like, reindeer herding. And for me as a kid, I always saw that, like, everyone had reindeer. It's like what are you doing in summer? <...> and fishing and whatever, and kind of living it within the community there. And it was very natural to me to be very in contact with my relatives, and many of my relatives, like my uncles and aunts, they have lived with us as in our apartment. Also something I thought that's like normal for Finnish people, apparently not. It's like they would spend time there for what like work or whatever. So it was like, um, it was like, um, like, there's little slight differences, I think, that I didn't notice until I kind of grew up and realized that. Yeah. It's not something you talk about when you're a kid or realize it. (Interview 2023, Helsinki, alias Matti, early 30s)

However, this changed after his Sámi father passed away during his teenage years, which led to a loss of connection to Sámi culture and a growing awareness of ethnic boundaries and differences. Matti shares the difficulties he had with relationship to his Sáminess after passing of the father:

I've been thinking about, like, what is what it is to be a Sámi person and how difficult it has been all my life to kind of recognize myself as a Sámi person. Because as I said, my father passed away when I was 14, and he was... we spent all of our summers in Vuohčču. So there was this, like, this discrepancy, kind of like this is, like, Finnish life, and this is, like, the Sámi life. And then I didn't really. (Interview 2023, Helsinki, alias Matti, early 30s)

As an adult Matti started to reconnect with his Sámi background, and family back in Sápmi. For him it was very important to find a meaningful connection and experiences as an adult to feel Sámi:

I went to take care of my grandmother, and then I spent Christmas in Vuohčču as well. And then, uh, I kind of reconnected very strongly with my aunt, with my uncle and her, um, I call her aunts <...> Of course, we had been in contact previously, but it was just kind of like we had this connection during that Christmas. And they kind of took me under their wing like for my aunt and their family. And it kind of was really important for me to have that experience as an adult. Because, of course, when you're a kid, you go to your grandmother's place, you have all of your 40 cousins in the North Pole, but you know, all of your cousins there, all of the families living under the same roof during the summer, when the reindeer herding start fishing whatever, and then, um, when you're independent, that kind of you cannot lose that. (Interview 2023, Helsinki, alias Matti, early 30s)

Later he mentions an important aspect to him – handicrafts he learned from the family. Reconnection as an adult and being part of his Sámi family meant learning this important Sáminess marker:

So I kind of also was part of a very integral part of their kind of family structure as well. And it was, um, it was super important for me just like personally, but also because my uncle's wife told me how to do, like, leather working. And, um, leather working stuff like traditional handicrafts and weaving and all that, because she knew how to do them. <...> it's about reconnection for me. It's like we kind of have always, I've always known I'm a Sámi person. That's not a question. But it's like what is the weight of importance for me when you're living in a Finnish society with no connection whatsoever to any other Sámi family. (Interview 2023, Helsinki, alias Matti, early 30s)

Consequently, Matti later reflected that he had not experienced ethnostress in relation to handicrafts. Overall, for Matti the reconnection was very important to his Sáminess. It meant getting to know his Sámi family better, spending more time up north, and engaging in various practices. He summarized that this need of reconnection was an ethnostress, a feeling that a person had to do something about it:

And if you are reconnecting with your culture, you have to create that connection, which has been severed. But it also always have to go back around, like, in a circle because you have to, kind of, I don't know if you have to, but this relates to ethnostress, I think, like, usually you might have a feeling that you have to do something. (Interview 2023, Helsinki, alias Matti, early 30s)

Taken together, for many Sámi who grew up outside Sápmi, ethnostress is closely tied to processes of reconnection. Efforts to rebuild relationships with family, language, and cultural practices often bring both a sense of belonging and feelings of inadequacy, as individuals negotiate expectations of “proper” Sáminess. In this sense, reconnection is not only a source of empowerment but also a key site where ethnostress is experienced and worked through.

4.5. Ethnostress as Cultural Competence and Markers

Many Sámi also describe feeling pressure, both from themselves and their communities, to learn traditional practices and speak Sámi fluently, and engage in traditional livelihoods. The work of maintaining and revitalizing language and culture can become experienced as a personal obligation, where cultural preservation and activism appear as responsibilities for each individual Sámi. When these expectations cannot be met, individuals may feel assimilated or not “proper” Sámi. Within a settler-colonial context, such pressures are closely tied to the expectation that Indigenous people demonstrate recognizable cultural differences in order to legitimize their autonomy. Yet these expectations are placed on communities that have endured long histories of assimilation and marginalization. Ethnostress thus signals not only the historical loss of language and cultural practices but also the continued reproduction of essentialized images of Sáminess, leaving little space for diverse, fragmented, and evolving ways of being Sámi today. Ironically, one research participant, Mihkkal, who described himself as “100 percent Sámi” – a Northern Sámi speaker and reindeer herder living in Aanaar – responded to the question of what ethnostress meant with a short but sharply sarcastic remark: “<...> well how I describe it? *Ethnostress means that you need to be more ancient Sámi*” (Interview 2024, Aanaar, alias Mihkkal, aged 22).

According to the research participant Rahko, a Sámi who grew up in the city and who works in the mental health sector, ethnostress is connected to the realization of one's cultural background and the awareness of how much there is to learn:

One of our parts is that you have the acknowledgement that everything that you have or if you want to make gákti what you have to know about that. What you have to do before you can make gákti or if you want to go with the reindeer and herd reindeer, what you have to do when you go there or you want to go fishing, and what you have to do... like there is so much information on what you have to learn that you just when your identity starts to be ready you have like this eye-opening moment that you see everything. And when you see everything, it's enjoyment that you know that I know about these things. But then you have this stress. I have to know more. And the young people, they usually... they don't see life as a continuing path. They just see the moment. And in that moment they feel stressed because in this moment I should know everything about these things. (Interview 2024, online, Niila Rahko (THL) aged 33)

Other participants often described how people reconnecting with Sámi culture felt a strong pressure to learn and practice as many cultural elements as possible. Risten, who grew up in a small Sámi-dominated village and now lives in Aanaar, described how classmates in her programme frequently attended handicraft courses in an effort to learn these skills and strengthen their connection to Sámi culture: *“But of course she can see everyone is going to the handicraft course is like crazy and you know that tells something”* (Interview 2024, Aanaar, alias Risten, aged about 45). Reflecting on this dynamic, she noted that such efforts may stem from a feeling that reconnecting individuals must continuously accumulate cultural markers in order to feel legitimate in their identity: *“Because you know ‘I’m not enough now and now I speak the language now I need the dress and I have to make all the parts myself’”* (Interview 2024, Aanaar, alias Risten, aged about 45). At the same time, participants also emphasized that this pressure to fulfil multiple cultural markers can create insecurity even among those who would not seem to have issues. As Matti, a Sámi who grew up and lives in the city, notes, individuals may still feel vulnerable if they perceive themselves as lacking certain skills or cultural practices:

Well, firstly, I think everyone has weak spots, so to say. <...> For example, with the handicraft stuff, it was like I know people who are, as I said earlier, who are like Sámi as one you can be, and they feel so vulnerable when you talk about handicrafts because they can't make them, even though they will know everything else. It feels like there's always someone or everyone has something. If you're just dealing

about, you know, those markers. (Interview 2023, Helsinki, alias Matti, early 30s)

These reflections illustrate how cultural markers can function both as important means of reconnecting with Sámi identity and as sources of pressure, insecurity, and self-evaluation. These accounts suggest that ethnostress is not only connected to questions of cultural knowledge or belonging, but also to a deeper need for recognition and validation from oneself and from other Sámi people. Reflecting on his experiences in political life and community discussions, Matti suggests that validation lies at the core of ethnostress:

[E]thnostress probably deals a lot with validation. Like, that is the very core of that. <...> see how these traumas affect people's ethnostress. Because I've seen that a lot of my friends have ethnostress, like all of my friends have ethnostress. <...> We don't really talk about that much but it's just like... The validation is such at the core of things, I think. (Interview 2023, Helsinki, alias Matti, early 30s)

Taken together, these accounts show that ethnostress is closely tied to the expectations of cultural competence and the accumulation of recognizable markers of Sáminess. Language, traditional practices, and cultural knowledge function not only as means of connection to Sámi identity but also as sources of pressure and insecurity when individuals feel they cannot fully meet these expectations.

Language

In many stories and opinions of research participants, language emerges as the primary source of ethnostress. Its erosion is largely rooted in the assimilatory era of boarding schools, when many families either lost the language, chose not to pass it to their children, or found its preservation increasingly difficult. Even today, despite the availability of language instruction and Sámi-language education in Sápmi, sustaining its everyday use remains a significant challenge. Biret, a Sámi speaker, part time reindeer herder with a career also in another field, does not feel ethnostress about the language. She comments that she feels lucky to speak the language, and she understands the stress of those who do not:

But I don't know, if I've ever seen in, like, in a big city and or if I didn't know how to speak Sámi it might be, like, harder. Or more ethnostress for me. Because I think they are, like, the biggest things, especially, the language one people stress about. But yeah, I am lucky enough that it's my mother-language so I yeah. It hasn't ever been, like, a problem for me. But I understand that people that don't speak Sámi that it's, it's a painful thing. (Interview 2023, Aanaar, alias Biret, aged about 25)

When asked if she ever talked about this with other people, Biret answered:

Yeah, they do like a... Like people my age, they feel kind of, like, maybe guilty or sad that their parents have decided not to speak Sámi with them. Even though it's, like, it's because of the schooling system. When they had to send the kids for school, and they were not allowed to speak Sami there. And they were taught that Sámi language is, is basically like, it doesn't... what is it? it's useless <...> And like, they feel, like, that they are missing something that they are not the whole Sámi (laughing slightly). (Interview 2023, Aanaar, alias Biret, aged about 25)

Biret emphasised an important aspect of not having the language – the guilt of not having it and feeling missing something important to one's Sáminess. Echoing Biret's comments on language-related ethnostress, Karoliinná – who began reconnecting with her Sámi identity and family five years ago – explains that language remains her greatest challenge and the primary source of ethnostress. She told about other Sáminess markers and sources of ethnostress like handicrafts, living away from Sápmi, and reconnecting, saying that she achieved those markers and that language continues to represent the most significant challenge for her:

I guess the biggest stress gives me that I don't speak the language because me and my family have been reconnecting with making duodji so we have that part covered in a way because my grandmother is teaching us how to do it and then my eadni [mother] who just dropped off the gift is a phenomenal sewer so it's been really like easy for her to learn how to make. We've made a gahpir [Sámi hat] and the gáktis and so that's been really nice and <...> also it's a positive side effect that it has brought us so much closer. We're closer than we've ever been because it's just not making handicrafts, it's spending time

together and cooking and just so in a way that also is very healing, but I don't feel any like negative stress about that I live in a city, for example. Because I know that that gives stress to some people. Because I lived in Inari, so I feel like I've built a community there. (Interview 2023, Rovaniemi, alias Karoliinná, early 30s)

Karoliinná's language stress was exacerbated by an incident at a party where she was bullied by other Sámi people for wearing a Sámi hat despite not speaking Sámi. This left a mark on her and deepened her language-related ethnostress:

*It was definitely not the case a couple of years ago when someone... there was this very awful event that I was drugged at this annual ball thing and then I was like out of my mind in a bar like really crazy like super um... "sekaisin" [spaced out in Finnish]. And then I was wearing a gahpir [Sámi hat] and someone came to me and was like oh are you Sámi? And I was like yes. And they tried to speak the language to me, like Northern Sámi, but then I was so out of it so I couldn't reply and then they asked me where are you from? And then because I didn't reply they started like really bullying me these two persons and really aggressively because I didn't speak the language but I was wearing my gahpir and that was like a very traumatizing thing for me to be like first drugged and then like verbally abused and then I remember the next day I like messaged a lot of my Sámi friends and told them what happened and they immediately were like well those were fu*king j*rks that like don't care about them and or what they say. (Interview 2023, Rovaniemi, alias Karoliinná, early 30s)*

These experiences often leave a lasting impact, making the use of the language more personally difficult. Many people share a sense of blockage or fear when speaking Sámi, particularly during the learning process. At the Sámi Education Institute or other Sámi language courses, students are often informed that Sámi learners may face psychological challenges and a range of strong emotions when engaging with the language. At the same time, negative experiences involving other Sámi, such as criticism or judgment, can further intensify these difficulties. Karoliinná reflected on this:

But I felt like that left a very huge mental stamp for me that even though now I speak the language so much better and I understand and I can write, I still feel a mental block in the Sámi community when

using the language. It just gives me, like, I'm gonna freak out because I don't speak that well and I'm not very confident with it. So even though I live in the city and I know Sámi people who live here also that's not an issue to me at all, but it's the language and I feel like that's a barrier also for me that even though Sámi people always say that they accept everyone who doesn't speak the language and they understand that it's not a personal thing. (Interview 2023, Rovaniemi, alias Karoliinná, early 30s)

Even though there is a broader understanding within the community that not everyone speaks Sámi, individuals may still feel and at times can be treated as lesser Sámi because of it. Karoliinná continued:

And even though they know that it's generational trauma that has caused the language breakage I still feel like some Sámi people I feel, like, look down on me and they don't wanna even get to know me or they don't wanna, like, connect with me. And I felt this in Ijahis Idja [Indigenous music festival], for example, but definitely not with all people just some people. <...> It might be not because of it but because of my mental mind I'm thinking that it's because I don't speak the language and it's when someone comes to me: "Bures, gos don leat eret?" start asking me, that I'm, like, I say to the Sámi that I do speak a little Sámi but not so well that I try to, like, explain myself and but yeah it's definitely the question of language. (Interview 2023, Rovaniemi, alias Karoliinná, early 30s)

These challenges were further intensified by comments from Karoliinná's Finnish father regarding her efforts to reconnect with Sámi culture. She recalled that he questioned her choices, which, combined with her insecurities about language, deepened her experience of ethnostress:

I think this also has the echo of my father saying that you will never learn the language as like a native speaker. So I maybe hear his echo and it even though I try to get over it in a way that it's okay if I don't still speak perfect Sámi. So many people, Sámi people, I know have learned the language and they are now comfortable using it so why couldn't I do the same but it's because I haven't had the time to do study it so much and also being in an environment where I would be forced to use it, like, in Sakki [Sámi Educational Institute] or something because I live here and so it's not my everyday life. But

now I feel like I'm more comfortable using it a bit more but I'm still, I feel, like, in a linear thing I feel like I'm in the very beginning yet.
(Interview 2023, Rovaniemi, alias Karoliinná, early 30s)

Karoliinná's story and Biret's comments show that language occupies a central place in experiences of ethnostress, shaped both by historical language loss and contemporary expectations of authenticity. While it can enable reconnection, it also produces strong emotions of inadequacy and exclusion, making it a key marker through which Sáminess is negotiated.

Duodji and gákti



Figure 8. Duodji. Sami Laiti's and Laiti family collection. Personal archive. 2026.

Sámi *duodji* is an important marker of Sáminess and has significance in Sámi culture and everyday life. Roughly translated as handicrafts, these are, for example, handmade knives, *guksi* (traditional cups made of birch burl), silver jewellery, traditional clothes and shoes from natural materials, family and regional variations, and traditions. There are professional handicrafters selling their production, annual markets are organized, and people learn to make many items by themselves. Many participants described experiencing ethnostress in relation to *duodji*. They reported feeling an expectation – often

self-imposed – to produce their own traditional clothing, shoes, and engage in other forms of handicraft as part of sustaining Sámi culture. Biret, a Sámi speaker and part time reindeer herder mentioned above, shared that her ethnostress was related to handicrafts which she did not like making:

Well handicrafts are a like big, was a big thing for me. Because of course all Sámi women have to know how to sew reindeer shoes, gákti, and everything. And when I'm a reindeer herder, they of course expect me to know like how to slaughter a reindeer, and cut the meat, and how to drive a snowmobile or an ATV. And I do know how to do that, but I don't...haven't time for handicrafts. I have kind of, like, I made the choice to learn about the stuff that I have to do when I'm in the forest herding reindeer. (Interview 2023, Aanaar, alias Biret, aged about 25)

As discussed in previous subchapters, Matti and Karolinná have described how learning to make handicrafts was an important part of reconnection and that they did not feel ethnostress regarding that. However, not only making handicrafts, but also wearing traditional clothes (part of *duodji*) can be experienced as ethnostress. Often people feel that they cannot wear Sámi clothes if they do not speak the language or feel uncomfortable in doing so. A Finnish research participant, who has Sámi children and has been living in Sápmi for decades observed:

I think, for me and what I understood and what I experienced and what I talked to people, it's the language that makes the difference. It's very hard to claim your Sáminess or even feel that you're Sámi, if you don't know the language. Very hard. Maybe you can, but you wouldn't even publicly say that you some kind of ashamed of your, not be a proper Sámi, because you don't know the language. Once you have it, the language, even if it's kind of not perfect, you can start wearing the costume and be one. (2018, Aanaar, alias Helena, in 40s)

Heidi speaks some Skolt Sámi but she learned it as an adult and does not practice it much. She comes from a mixed Finnish and Sámi family, and brought up her Finnishness a lot in our conversation saying that she is both, but maybe more Finnish. This also leads to discomfort in wearing Sámi traditional clothes even though she makes them for others:

But I have worn it. Maybe I had it one time at my friend's sons who I'm god mom to. Uh, it was christening. I wore it then. And then the

other time was my other friend's son who I'm also a godmother to. I wore it there. And then I had one time, in seventeenth, when they had this big event [probably talking about church confirmation] of uh, maybe two years ago, three years ago, I had this big event. <...> Some kind of celebration. In Sevetti or whatever. I don't remember. But maybe three or four times that I wore it. And I can say that it doesn't feel natural. So after that, it's been in the closet, and I'm pretty sure that it's not gonna... I'm not gonna wear it anymore. Sadly, but. I think so. (Interview 2023, Aanaar, alias Heidi, aged 35+)

When asked why it does not feel natural to her to wear Sámi dress, she replied that the dress she had made was not instructed by Skolt Sámi and feels different, and at the same time she does not feel comfortable declaring her Sáminess, especially coming from a mixed background:

Well, I don't... I just don't feel like myself. And somehow, of course, I made it at the school. The teacher wasn't, uh, Skolt Sámi. Of course she had, like, seen costumes. And, like, she has a friend who makes them and all that, so I know that she knows a lot. But then in that way, it felt for me a bit stupid that I learned it from someone who's not supposed to. <...> I feel like it's not the right kind. And also for myself, I hate actually dresses. I like pants. (both laughing) So when I put it on, it's it's also that. I don't like it. And I don't know. I just I feel like when I put it on, then I am a Sámi person. And then somehow, I think people only see me as a Sámi person, which is, for me, awkward. Because I don't feel like comfortable in that person. <...> Which I feel I'm completely not. Because I'm also Finnish. Quite a lot, actually. Because of my background, like, family and all this. (Interview 2023, Aanaar, alias Heidi, aged 35+)

On the other hand, Sámi traditional clothing has only relatively recently become a strongly politicized symbol of Sáminess. Historically, it was worn in everyday and ceremonial contexts, such as church, confirmations, weddings, and funerals, and followed established rules related to family and regional identity, including specific patterns and forms. While non-Sámi could wear the clothing in certain circumstances, such as through marriage into a Sámi family, its use was primarily regulated within community norms rather than public identity politics. However, with the rise of the Sámi ethno-political movement, increased visibility, and broader processes of politicization, traditional clothing has taken on a more explicit role as a symbol of identity and a visible means of expressing and asserting Sáminess. While this becomes

a very important aspect of identity and reconnection and activism to others it starts to appear exaggerated. Heidi who told about being uncomfortable wearing Sámi dress, wondered:

But I also think that why do you have to show people that you are Sámi? Why do you have to make let everyone know that you're Sámi. Like, you can be one and you do't have to show it to everyone. (Interview 2023, Aanaar, alias Heidi, aged 35+)

Risten shared similar attitude towards unnecessary display of Sáminess:

[F]or whatever special occasion we would wear, of course, yeah. But it wouldn't be, like, in here is just more for the sake of it, and, I think, it's more for christening and confirmation and wedding and, you know. But it's not for to show that you are Sámi, it's just because <...> it's just a festive dress, like, respectful dress. In here, I think, it's more show off. (Interview 2024, Aanaar, alias Risten, aged about 45)

Risten also pointed out that people who reconnected and engaged in activism brought this new practice of display of Sáminess:

And most of the activists are half Sámi. (laughing). And most of them they left and then suddenly they found their Sámi inside. And I think, for example, the area where I am from, where it was very strong always and everybody is Sámi, I told you this before, like, it was very strange when I came to Inari and... and everybody is wearing scarfs everywhere. <...> And you're, like, that is uniform. And I was, like, do I even have that, you know? And then I had to take one from home and start wearing that because you are supposed to show, you know. (Interview 2024, Aanaar, alias Risten, aged about 45)

These accounts highlight the ambivalent role of *duodji* and *gákti*: while they serve as important tools of cultural connection and identity, they can also produce pressure and insecurity when expectations of authenticity are not met. This illustrates how cultural markers simultaneously enable and constrain expressions of Sáminess, and can become a site of disagreement over the performativity of Sáminess and the use of symbols.

Traditional Livelihoods

Reindeer herding has become one of the most visible symbols of Sáminess, alongside other nature-based livelihoods. This image was

reinforced through Lappology and museum representations, which portrayed Sámi people as exotic Indigenous reindeer herders of the north. However, Sámi livelihoods have always been more diverse: only a portion of Sámi were engaged in reindeer herding, while others practiced fishing, lived in lake regions, such as Aanaar, or in coastal areas in Norway. Despite this diversity, the dominant image of the Sámi as reindeer herders persists and contributes to ethnostress, as individuals are often questioned, particularly by outsiders, about whether they own reindeer or otherwise fit the stereotype. Matti reflects on how these external expectations shape experiences of authenticity:

It's as if I would have to be a reindeer [herder]. It's very what was the word? Um, when you are being an... or what's the word for it? Authenticized. Yeah. Like a lot of fantasies. (Interview 2023, Helsinki, alias Matti, early 30s)

However, Karoliinná noted that she does not experience ethnostress related to traditional livelihoods, as, contrary to Matti, she does not come from a reindeer-herding family. In her case, the absence of a direct connection to this livelihood meant that it was not a source of pressure or expectation in her identity formation. This highlights how experiences of ethnostress are shaped by individual backgrounds, with certain cultural markers becoming more or less significant depending on one's family history and social context.



Figure 9. Reindeer round-up in cooperative. Aanaar municipality. Personal Archive. 2016.

Risten, being not from a reindeer herding family, referred to reindeer herding as a source of ethnostress, though not in terms of personal inadequacy. Rather, she emphasized that reindeer-herding Sámi tend to receive more attention in Sámi matters, including within Sámi society itself. She complains:

And this is if we talk about the ethnostress, this is where I feel the stress, the ethnostress. <...> racism towards non-reindeer herders.
(Interview 2024, Aanaar, alias Risten, aged about 45)

In addition to reindeer herding, people within Sámi society might feel ethnostress related to other traditional livelihoods. For example, one participant described feeling like an inadequate local, lacking knowledge of the environment and skills, such as living in the forest. Initially, she did not associate these feelings with ethnostress, as she understood it mainly in relation to explicitly Sámi cultural aspects. However, through conversation with another person, she came to recognize that these experiences could also be understood as a form of ethnostress (Fieldwork notes, 2023).

Taken together, this subchapter demonstrates that ethnostress is closely tied to culturally valued markers of Sáminess, such as language, *duodji* and *gákti*, and traditional livelihoods, which function as key sources of both connection and pressure. While these markers enable reconnection, belonging, and cultural continuity, they also generate expectations of competence, authenticity, and visibility that many individuals feel unable to fully meet. As a result, ethnostress arises not only from historical processes of assimilation but also from ongoing negotiations of identity within both Sámi society and its external representations. Importantly, the significance of these markers varies depending on individual backgrounds and life trajectories.

4.6. Ethnostress and Burden of Representation

Ethnostress has also been widely discussed in media articles. In the media, ethnostress is often depicted as a burden of representing Sámi. In the 2020 interview at Yle, Niina Siivikko, who had been living in Turku for over 10 years, was asked if she was good enough Sámi. The interview took place on Sámi National Day, when the Sámi National flag was raised for the first time in Turku to mark the occasion. During the interview, she told about her experience of being Sámi and living in the city with a very small Sámi population. Reflecting on ethnostress she spoke about the pressure of being a representative of Sámi people and feeling guilty for not engaging in representative activities, such as talking in schools: *“I wonder if I’m a good*

enough Sámi now or what a Sámi person should be like. When I move among people, I also represent all Sámi people” (Lähteenmäki 2020, my translation).

Like Siivikko, quite a few people I met, also mentioned Finnish high-school textbooks that lack information about Sámi. My own review confirmed this gap. This absence of information in the Finnish education system about Sámi people creates space for stereotypes, and burdens Sámi to explain about themselves. In 2014, Yle published an interview with Northern Sámi archaeologist, Anni-Helena Ruotsala, and Inari Sámi rapper, Mikkal Morottaja, about Sámi in the cities, Sámi images, and ethnostress. Similarly to Siivikko, Ruotsala told that she felt ethnostress because she always had to explain about Sámi culture to others – something Finns did not need to do: *“I don’t want to be a walking Sámi dictionary”* (cited in Honkanen 2014, my translation).

In 2025, Helga West gave an interview to the magazine *Sana*, about her literary work, ethnostress and returning home to Sápmi. In the interview, West, who is both a writer and a scholar, described how, while living in Helsinki, she was constantly positioned as a representative of Sámi culture and expected to explain it to others: *“I participated in public discussions, I went to conferences, I gave lectures. I repeated myself, I was a puppet”* (cited in Aartolahti 2025, my translation). She further observed that this knowledge gap reflected shortcomings in the Finnish education system, which largely omitted teaching about the Sámi and the history of settler colonialism:

We can’t seem to get to the point that Finland was built on the lands of the Sámi, and that Finland is a typical settler-colonial country, and is no different from, say, Canada, the United States, or Australia. We have a deep structural knowledge gap: the Sámi are constantly being studied, but very little, if any, of that research ends up in national curricula <...>.

Many people from outside Finland, and even Finns, apologize to me for not knowing much. I tell them that we should all learn about these things in school. Being an object also involves constantly explaining it, constantly opening it up, constantly telling about it. I hear my own voice explaining, but shouldn’t it be someone else’s job to fill that knowledge gap. (cited in Aartolahti 2025, my translation)

Such widespread gaps in knowledge about Sámi history and culture affect both the majority population and the Sámi themselves. They contribute not only to the burden to represent, but also to the lack of knowledge about your own culture. As some participants noted, a lack of access to this knowledge can itself become a source of ethnostress, shaping how individuals engage or choose not to engage in conversations about Sámi issues. One participant described how feelings of insufficient knowledge and confidence affect their ability to respond in such situations:

I kind of don't really engage in those conversations [political debates]. I feel like I'm not strong enough, just feels, yeah, I really try to do my part through art. Like, trying to get more Sami films, trying to get Sami language more present and trying to send the message through films, cause I, yeah. That's how I feel powerful and I would never take part in that kind of political debate. I just feel my self-confidence it's not that good and also my knowledge is not that good. We had a conversation with some Finnish guy and he said a bunch of things I knew it was not right, but I didn't have strong arguments, so I was just like, this is fucking horrible, but I don't know... I don't think I have enough information to <...>. (Interview 2018, Aanaar, alias Máret, aged about 24)

Torikka, a journalist for the Finnish broadcaster Yle Sápmi, back then an intern, addressed another aspect of representation, when Sámi background became more important than anything else a person did, which was particularly visible in public life. In her article she provided examples of famous singers:

For example, Solju singer Hilda Länsman said that she received feedback that she was not a real Sámi because she did not sing in Sámi.

Also in the Swedish Eurovision qualifiers there is a Sámi, Jon Henrik Fjällgren, who also won Sweden's Got Talent. However, interviews show more interest in the singer's Sámi identity than in his music. (Torikka 2015, my translation)

During the fieldwork, I interviewed Torikka to talk more about her inspirations to write an article on ethnostress and on the topic itself. During the interview she explained:

Yeah, and I used, like, an example about Isac Elliot who is, like, one of the biggest pop stars in Finland. And he is this what is it suomenruotsi – Finnish-Swedish, Swedish speaking Finnish. And I used him as an example that no one asks him about “how it’s like to be Finnish-Swedish?” and stuff like that. Because it felt, like, every time there is Sámi in publicity then they kind of just want to know about Sámi and <...> you are not a musician – you are a Sámi musician! (Interview, Torikka 2024)

Torikka further explained that in her opinion, it was unfair that one person of minority suddenly represented the entire group:

And they are putting you on the stand to represent all the Sámi. And I think it’s ridiculous <...> why the one Sámi about you are writing in a big Finnish newspaper, why does she or he have to be, like, the voice of all of the Sámi? It feels, like, unfair. But I don’t know, it feels, like, it’s in Finland, like, a habit or something that if you are any minority, you are representing your minority. Always. (Interview, Torikka 2024)

Such representation issues are visible not only in relation to public figures or individuals, but also influence opinions about Sámi political life. Such images form expectations of homogenous Sámi, and can mislead the Finnish public when there are internal debates within Sámi community:

For example, in the Sámi Parliament of course they are disagreeing about things and stuff, it’s normal. We don’t think that Finnish Parliament is <...> that Finnish people they can’t decide anything, they are just fighting. It’s normal, of course! You can’t agree on everything. But why are they expecting that Sámi people should agree on everything? (Interview, Torikka 2024)

This subchapter shows that ethnostress is closely linked to expectations of representation, a theme that appears more explicitly in media articles but is also present in interviews. A lack of knowledge about Sámi history and culture in the education system contributes to stereotypical understanding in the dominant society, placing Sámi in the position of having to constantly explain and represent themselves. At the same time, these knowledge gaps also affect Sámi individuals, who may feel uncertain about their own knowledge and pressured to compensate through additional effort.

As a result, ethnostress emerges not only from external expectations, but also from internalized insecurity shaped by structural inequalities in knowledge and education.

4.7. Ethnostress as Social Position

Gendered Ethnostress

Discussions with research participants suggest that ethnostress is often experienced in gendered ways, with women describing a particularly heavy burden of expectations that combine both traditional and contemporary roles:

I don't have time for handicrafts. I have kind of, like, I made the choice to learn about the stuff that I have to do when I'm in the forest herding reindeer. Because I think Sámi society expects a lot from women nowadays. Women have to be like, they have to be educated, and they have to have a good job, but still they have to have time to do handicrafts and like these traditional foods, and herd the reindeer, and everything. <...> I think it's harder for women. (Interview 2023, Aanaar, alias Biret, aged about 25)

This account highlights how gendered ethnostress emerges at the intersection of cultural continuity and modern societal expectations, where women are expected to “manage” multiple roles simultaneously. Biret’s reference to *birget* further emphasizes this cultural expectation of endurance:

I think that... Because we have this...it's called, like, birget – to manage. Like, even, even if the sky is falling, you have to just manage. It's in our culture that we have to. Despite anything what happens we have to, like, manage. <...> I don't know, maybe they are thinking that Sámi women are some kind of superheroes or something (laughing). (Interview 2023, Aanaar, alias Biret, aged about 25)

Resilience appears not only as a valued trait but also as a normative expectation, which can obscure the emotional and practical limits individuals face. While historical accounts of Sámi family structures emphasize the strength and central role of women, in contemporary contexts this can translate into an intensified pressure to embody both tradition and modern success. This gendered dimension is also recognized by male participants, who point to structural and practical inequalities:

[W]e live in the equal world. Women can do same as men but reindeer herding... Yeah it's possible. Little bit harder for a woman than a man. (Interview 2024, Aanaar, alias Mihkkal, aged 22)

Socially and physically, practically. A combination of all of them. Even though in ancient times women were were also part of the reindeer herding work because you didn't live in the house and you travelled with reindeer. So and... my father's mum, she was a tough one. Her husband passed away, when I don't even remember how old he was but their eldest son was just 18 and they had 6 children combined. She managed to raise them alone and keep the herd. That is why tough. Yeah. And she knows reindeer a lot better than any of locals seen. (Interview 2024, Aanaar, alias Mihkkal, aged 22)

These reflections reinforce the idea that while women's strength is recognized and valued, it is often framed through narratives of endurance and toughness, which can further normalize unequal burdens. A similar critique emerges in Helga West's book *Puhu nukke*, where she reflects on the expectations placed on Sámi women. In this collection of essays, the author combines personal experience with broader social critique to show how Sámi women are often expected to be both resilient and politically engaged while also carrying cultural responsibilities. Mikko Saari, editor-in-chief of *Kirjavinkit*, reads a wide range of books, but mostly new books written by women noted:

Indigenous women are often portrayed as strong, but this often truthful portrayal carries within it the normalization of a transgenerational burden: these women are strong because they have to be. Time and energy must be sacrificed to fight for big issues, and not enough space is left for one's own, smaller but equally important issues. (cited in Saari 2025, my translation)

Rather than simply celebrating strength, West's work highlights how this expectation can become a form of pressure, leaving limited space for vulnerability or personal needs. In this way, both ethnographic material and literary reflection point to a shared pattern: gendered ethnostress emerges not only from external expectations, but also from culturally embedded ideals of endurance, responsibility, and strength.

Sápmi vs. Urban Centres

The famous Sámi film director, Suvi West, writer Helga West, and politician Pirta Näkkäljärvi address ethnostress as a consequence of living away from Sápmi and trying to keep Sámi culture alive in the city in the south. In 2013, in the interview with *Tiedontantaja*, Suvi West told about the TV series *Njuoska bittut* (Fin. *Märät säpikkäät*) created together with Kirste Aikio. In the interview she also talked about ethnostress since she was living in Helsinki at the time. Ethnostress for her manifests as constant thinking about the future of the Sámi people and culture. She mentioned several factors, including the ways in which identity was defined differently in the south:

For a Sámi, every single Sámi is important. In the north, a person is defined by community and family. Here in the south, instead, they find themselves developing as individuals. (cited in Korvela 2013, my translation)

West then reflected on language learning, noting that although it was possible to acquire the language in the south, the lack of a supportive environment made its sustained use and vitality difficult. She raised a further concern regarding the land in Sápmi:

There is room for everyone else in the north except for us. The rights of the Sámi are being taken away all the time. They are not allowed to go into the forests, but they are being harnessed for the needs of tourism and the mining industry. Tourism is not in the hands of the Sámi either, with a few rare exceptions. The money goes elsewhere. (cited in Korvela 2013, my translation)

In 2025, Helga West gave an interview for the *Sana* magazine about her literary work, ethnostress and returning home to Sápmi. The writer mentioned the fear of her village on the River Teno dying out and her decision to come back to live in her ancestral lands. She shared her fears of being assimilated while living in the south:

I have returned to Teno River Valley with my children, where an elderly Sámi woman now lives in addition to us. The village school was closed at the turn of the millennium, which accelerated the decline of the entire village. My own counterattack is that I physically moved back to my dead village <...> I was afraid that I would become

one of those Sámi people who involuntarily assimilate and disappear from their own community. (cited in Aartolahti 2025, my translation)

In the interview with Helga West, the word ethnostress was mentioned twice, in the title and later in the text of her book *Puhu Nukke* (2025) on moving back to Sápmi and letting ethnostress go. The author of the article in the *Sana* magazine, Riitta-Sisko Aartolahti, noted:

West writes about how returning with her sons to her childhood home, which her father, or áhčči, had carefully looked after, felt as though the ethnostress and vague sense of heaviness she had unknowingly been carrying with her had slipped from her shoulders onto the hallway floor. When the moving truck arrived, West slept for two months. She was so tired. (Aartolahti 2025, my translation)

In a 2012 article in *Helsingin Sanomat*, a journalist interviewed politician Pirita Näkkäläjärvi who had returned to live in Sápmi after 17 years away. The title of the article refers to ethnostress and experiences of living away from Sápmi: “Returning migrants suffer from ethnostress”. Näkkäläjärvi expressed concern about not knowing how to sew Sámi clothing, noting that *duodji* constituted an important marker of Sámi identity: “*Pirita Näkkäläjärvi returns to Sámiland after 17 years. She still needs to learn how to sew in Lappish style*” (cited in Salomaa 2012). She also gave a definition of ethnostress:

According to Näkkäläjärvi, ethnostress is a common problem among active young Sámi people who are concerned about the preservation of their culture. “Stress can be related to knowledge of the Sámi language or traditional skills, in my case, to crafts. I can’t sew a Lappish jacket.” (cited in Salomaa 2012, my translation)

Thus, the absence of certain knowledge or skills is described as a source of stress, linked to the fear of being unable to preserve Sáminess. The article further highlights that this burden is particularly acute for those living outside Sápmi:

There are many Sámi outside Finland like Näkkäläjärvi. Already 65 percent of the approximately 10,000 Sámi in Finland live somewhere other than the Sámi homeland. (cited in Salomaa 2012, my translation)

Similar observations on fear of losing culture were shared by the mental health professional, Rahko, in his interview on the Sámi Youth Council website. In the article Rahko defines ethnostress as:

In his work, Rahko has noticed that many people are in a kind of search for their own cultural background and place. Many are preoccupied with finding their own cultural background and place, and this is especially emphasized by those who have lost their language. In general, many Sámi people experience a fear of losing their culture, which manifests itself as ethnostress. “Am I good enough as a Sámi? <...> (The Sámi Youth Council website, my translation)

However, the Sápmi–city distinction may be experienced differently by those who grew up in urban environments compared to those who moved there later for work or education. While Karoliinná feels secure in her identity as an urban Sámi, she has also noticed that others sometimes react with disappointment upon learning this. Karoliinná reflected on unmet expectations of what constituted an “authentic” Sámi identity:

I also feel, like, in certain spaces when some people find out that I live in a city and not in Sápmi, they’re, like, not so interested. They’re, like, oh, okay. Because they think that being Sámi is living in the north with reindeer and wearing muvttahat [clothes / garments] every day. So when I tell them that no, I’m from city and I live here, they’re, like, oh, whatever. (Interview 2023, Rovaniemi, alias Karoliinná, early 30s)

This subchapter shows that ethnostress is often intensified by living outside Sápmi, where maintaining language, cultural practices, and a sense of belonging becomes more difficult. Many Sámi describe feelings of responsibility, fear of assimilation, and concern about cultural loss, particularly in urban contexts where supportive environments are lacking. At the same time, experiences vary, as some urban Sámi feel secure in their identity while still encountering external expectations that associate “authentic” Sáminess with living in Sápmi.

Ethnostress as a Choice of Livelihoods

Interestingly, conversations with participants have revealed unexpected forms of ethnostress. While scholarly literature typically associates ethnostress with constructed markers of Sáminess, participants also identified pressures extending beyond identity performance. Two Sámi-speaking reindeer herders described the hardships of their livelihood, highlighting challenges related to climate change and the demands of sustaining an uncertain profession that allows little space for the standard comforts available to others. Reflecting on her recent experiences, Biret spoke with sadness about the impact of climate change on reindeer herding and the difficult decision to give up this way of life:

Of course, climate change is kind of the threat that is happening, like, all the time and there is not much that you can do about that because it's already happening. You can't, like, prevent it anymore. We just have to adapt to it. And it's that it's really hard, this winter also it seems it's going to be hard for reindeer. Because the mm when... the ideal would be that there would be like, what is it pakkanen? <...> That it, yeah, so that first would come frost and then the snow would come. And so that the earth is or the ground is like dry. But now it was wet. Because first came snow, it melted, the ground was wet, then it like froze and now there's snow. So it's frozen and the reindeer can't... <...> So it's really bad. And was it last winter? It was, it didn't freeze but was too wet when the snow came so it umm, what is it? There, there was like mould.

[W]e have to feed them. <...> I've been thinking that for me the limit is that when we have to like feed them like cows or something. That it's not reindeer herding anymore if they can't be in the forest. If we have to like take them all in and feed them like some other animals. Then it's not, it's not the same anymore. But yeah, I don't know, we'll see. I just thought, I knew that reindeer herding is not going to be easy. And, and I know that there are going to be more difficulties with reindeer herding. But also I don't like, it would be so sad if the reindeer herding like stopped now in our family because it has been in our family like for like always (laughing). Since, like, forever. So yeah. Like, I have to at least try. And if it doesn't work out then, then it doesn't. But I have to try. (Interview 2023, Aanaar, alias Biret, aged about 25)

She also reflected on a reindeer herding job and its hardships and worries:

So maybe reindeer herding is, like, it's I think the best thing in my Sámi life (slightly laughing), but also the hardest thing. Um yeah. It would be so much easier just to like be at 9 to 5 job and not worry about reindeer. But I think if it comes to that that I have to quit reindeer herding then I think I would be really, like, then have an identity crisis. Yeah, cause reindeer herding it's, it's not just something we do but it's it's like our whole life and everything, everything in our life it's, like, um because of the reindeer herding we do. It's very, like, seasonal. So, so every season of the year has a meaning and we do, we do like certain things at certain time of the year, and yeah. <...> So, it would be really difficult not to have reindeer (laughing slightly sadly). (Interview 2023, Aanaar, alias Biret, aged about 25)

Mihkkal described what ethnostress was for him as a Sámi reindeer herder:

That well I never feel am I Sámi enough, am I doing enough? But... for, like, I think I speak on behalf of many reindeer herders. They could go on the world and get a fancy job, fancy living, <...> pay for enough work and salary every month, fancy house, and nice vacation a few times a year. But I think it's about ethnostress why we chose this path. Not alone, of course. It's not all darkness and difficulties but it has its own part, I think. (Interview 2024, Aanaar, alias Mihkkal, aged 22)

When asked why he chose reindeer herding, Mihkkal replied:

Well my great grand... great great great great grandpa had been doing this in peace time and so on. So, I cannot stop. Show must go on. (Interview 2024, Aanaar, alias Mihkkal, aged 22)

And when asked what ethnostress was for him, he said:

Well, mine is that stay with your reindeer and don't go to school. It's your job now, and you have to make your living with that and I'm at the mercy of nature. Of the winters, and summer, and everything. It's a very risky business but (clicks his tongue) that's how it is. (Interview 2024, Aanaar, alias Mihkkal, aged 22)

This subchapter demonstrates that ethnostress can also be tied to the choice and continuation of traditional livelihoods, extending beyond questions of identity performance. For reindeer herders, it emerges from the tension between maintaining cultural continuity and facing increasing challenges such as climate change and economic uncertainty. While deeply meaningful, these livelihoods also involve pressure and responsibility, making ethnostress part of sustaining a vulnerable yet central way of life.

4.8. Ethnostress as Pressure: External Expectations, Internalized and Communal Pressure

There are various pressures of ethnostress Sámi have to navigate. These come from both individual need and wish to do good for Sámi community, make sure culture is alive or be an activist, as well as from external expectations of authenticity by dominant society, and from pressure and questioning one's Sáminess by the community. In her article, Torikka accurately described these pressures. According to her "[t]he term *ethnostress* means belonging to an ethnic group and feeling pressure to act in the best interests of the ethnic group in every matter" (Torikka 2015, my translation). She used examples to explain that a person's Sáminess is perceived before anything else about them, including their profession. According to the journalist, these pressures arise both externally, through expectations to encounter the Sámi as an exotic people, and internally, as members of the Sámi community themselves emphasize visible markers of Sáminess, creating pressure for others to do the same. As a result, young people may feel compelled to conform to all the recognized markers of Sámi identity:

Young Sámi people also experience pressure about being Sámi. They think that they should speak perfect Sámi, do Sámi crafts, joik, have reindeer, or be active in Sámi politics. It is especially difficult for young Sámi people living in the south to maintain and find their own identity. (Torikka 2015)

Young Sámi people's descriptions of these pressures illustrate that ethnostress is not limited to a single source or social arena. Rather, it emerges through the intersection of external expectations, community dynamics, and individuals' own sense of responsibility toward cultural continuity. The pressure to embody multiple markers of Sáminess simultaneously can transform identity from a source of belonging into a source of anxiety and self-

monitoring. Understanding these different forms of pressure is therefore essential for analysing how ethnostress is experienced in everyday life.

External Expectations

External expectations have played a significant role in shaping public perception of Sáminess. In political contexts, Sámi identity has often had to be articulated in ways that fit the expectations of the state and its frameworks for recognizing Indigenous rights. As Gaski (2008) argues, Sámi public discourse on identity and nationhood has at times developed essentializing tendencies partly because Sámi claims must be expressed within a dichotomous interpretive framework that contrasts Indigenous culture with the dominant national society. These expectations can also manifest in concrete political encounters. For example, when the former president of the Sámi Parliament discussed financial support for Sámi sports with the Norwegian Minister of Culture, the minister reportedly stated that support could not be given for ordinary skiing, but only for “skiing with a lasso”, implicitly suggesting that Sámi cultural practices must conform to stereotypical notions of Indigenous authenticity (Gaski 2008, 234).

Such expectations are closely connected to broader colonial and racialized perception of Sámi identity. As Kuokkanen (2022) notes, although Sámi people are often perceived as white due to their location in Europe, they do not occupy the position of normative whiteness. Instead, Sámi have historically been racialized as an “ethnic minority” and scientific discourses in the late 19th and early 20th centuries attempted to classify them as belonging to an inferior “Mongoloid race”. These histories continue to shape contemporary perceptions, in which Sámi identity is often interpreted through contradictory lenses: on the one hand, Sámi are sometimes romanticized as “white Indians” of Europe, while, on the other hand, their claims to indigeneity may be questioned precisely because they do not fit stereotypical racialized images of Indigenous peoples (Kuokkanen 2022, 292–293).

External expectations are also evident in everyday public debates about how Sámi people should live. As filmmaker and artist Suvi West notes, “[f]irst, the state, the school system and the church wanted to make us Finns. Now, when we live with the changes in the world, people criticize why not all Sámi people make a living by herding reindeer. Or that it is somehow wrong for a reindeer herder to have a mobile phone” (Korvela 2013, my translation). Such views reveal a persistent expectation that Sámi culture should remain static and tied to particular traditional practices, even as Sámi communities themselves navigate changing social and economic realities. Tourism of

course plays a significant role in producing and reinforcing expectations of authenticity, as mentioned earlier in this dissertation. However, when it comes to personal experiences of pressure related to Sáminess, the expectations coming from within the community are often described as the most difficult to negotiate.

Community Pressure

Research participants described how pressures to conform to a “proper” Sámi identity arise not only from outside stereotypes, but also from the Sámi community to the extent of inspecting if one is not a fraud (inauthentic Sámi). This understandably creates questions and uncertainty about people’s own identity and perpetuates questions around it. Matti commented:

It’s not just that I have ethnostress but a person, of course, can cause with their behaviour to another person. And usually when it comes from within, it is the worst. And <...> whatever the Finnish people say, I don’t care. I don’t care. Everyone knows. But if it comes from within, if it comes from your family, if it comes from your relatives, if it comes from your, uh, those nearest and dearest to you, it hurts. (Interview 2023, Helsinki, alias Matti, early 30s)

Such expectations and pressures from within the community often come from the older generation to younger ones, who see Sáminess rooted in traditional ways. The pressure from community is evident in different ways, for example, people checking and correcting each other’s use of the Sámi language:

All the reporters at the Sámi radio always say that they never get the feedback of their stories, and they get feedback every day about their language. Like the language and the words they use at the ..., in the news and the stories. (Interview 2018, Aanaar, alias Helena, 40s)

Another form of pressure is simply examining and questioning other people’s Sáminess on the basis of their skill sets. One research participant described how another person questioned their Sáminess just because they asked for help to put on a traditional scarf:

I asked the women, like, can you put the..., because that’s what we do where I am from, normally you don’t put it yourself. Somebody else

puts it because it's easier, I guess, I don't know. And then I asked her to do it, and then this girl, who wanted to be mean to me, said that I don't even, like, you have to ask her how to put the scarf. And it's, like, you know, small things that she wants to, like, she says by what she wants to show that I don't, I am not enough Sámi and I don't speak Sámi and you have lost the language. (Interview 2018, Aanaar, alias Risten, aged about 40)

Similarly, Gaski (2008) described questioning Sáminess in Norway, particularly when their views challenged dominant political or cultural positions. The scholar noted that Sámi individuals who expressed dissenting opinions in political debates in Norway had at times been accused of being “Norwegianized”, acting on behalf of the state, or lacking sufficient knowledge of Sámi culture. Such accusations function as a way of delegitimizing their voices, effectively framing them as outside the collective “us” and therefore disqualified from participating in the discussion (Gaski 2008, 223–224).

Ethnic backgrounds are, therefore, questioned and measured. People who come from Sámi and Finnish-background families (which many of the families in the village of Aanaar are), have experienced doubts about their identity quite often, when others did not take them as fully Sámi. One of the research participants in their 20s told me:

But I've experienced here in Inari, like, my mum is Finnish and my dad is Sámi and, yeah, it's been like the kids from the same age didn't think that I was Sámi, because I have a Finnish mum. And then even later, I remember that somebody came up to me saying that some people back in the day when I was a child thought that it was unfair that I was in Sámi-speaking kindergarten. (Interview 2018, Aanaar, alias Máret, aged about 24)

Moreover, identity could be questioned by the act of others performing their Sáminess. A friend once explained to me that some people feel more Sámi than others, and they have to emphasise it all the time (paraphrased, fieldwork notes, 2016). During one interview, another research participant explained to me that being in the middle is probably the hardest, which means neither being outspoken activists, nor leaving a place (paraphrased, interview 2018).

Hence, doubting Sáminess happens not only at an individual level but also by people in the community. This causes individuals to doubt their own

identity, telling about it feels shameful and people feel inadequate if they are unable to fulfil expectations of being a “proper Sámi”. As a consequence, people fear being judged as not being “proper” Sámi or as trying too hard:

So there is a sense of, like, self-doubt and I do think it's a very common feeling that people might have this, like, ideas that these people are talking behind me behind my back or something. I think that's a very common experience. But in the context of ethnostress, I feel like maybe they're thinking that I'm doing too much or something. (Interview 2023, Rovaniemi, alias Karoliinná, early 30s)

The research participant, Matti, noted that inner community aspects causing ethnostress are important to deal with, but they never have their time since there are other urgent issues related with state interventions and colonialism that need to be addressed politically:

[T]his is an important thing to discuss, but something we haven't had the space to discuss because of all the activism about the Sámi Parliament Act, windmills there, mines there, deforestation there. It, kind of, doesn't leave that space for our community to grow in a healthy way. And this is these things are, like, under there's an undercurrent of toxicity. Depending on, of course, in which circles you are and which family you belong to and whatever, but I think there is still this kind of unspoken toxicity that has gone a little better, but it's still kind of there. (Interview 2023, Helsinki, alias Matti, early 30s)

He further reflected that, in this sense, living outside the community could sometimes feel easier, explaining:

[F]or me, it's also, kind of, easy in a way that I don't have to face the community in a way. <...> When I'm there, I'm there, but I'm not bound to any of the villages. <...> in my daily life, I am disconnected from the villages and their gossip. (Interview 2023, Helsinki, alias Matti, early 30s)

Overall, these examples show that ethnostress emerges from a complex interplay of external expectations and internal community dynamics. While dominant society imposes stereotypical and often contradictory ideas of authenticity, pressures within the Sámi community, such as evaluation, correction, and questioning of identity, can be even more difficult to navigate.

As a result, ethnostress becomes not only a response to external structures of power, but also an ongoing negotiation of belonging, legitimacy, and self-definition within the community itself, not to mention individual pressures to maintain the culture.

Concluding remarks

The experiences described in this chapter suggest that assimilation should not be understood solely as a historical process associated with state-led Finnicization policies. While the loss of language, cultural knowledge, and community connections often originates in earlier assimilation policies, their effects continue to shape contemporary experiences of Sámi identity. Ethnostress reveals how assimilation operates in the present through everyday negotiations of authenticity, belonging, and recognition. While often discussed in relation to cultural preservation, the analysis demonstrates that ethnostress is deeply embedded in broader structures of settler colonialism, where Sáminess is continuously evaluated, performed, and negotiated. Participants described how not meeting expectations of Sámi authenticity could lead to feelings of inadequacy and stronger identification with Finnishness.

A key insight of this chapter is that ethnostress can take multiple, sometimes unexpected forms. It is not limited to clearly defined cultural domains but can arise in various aspects of life – language use, clothing, livelihoods, place of residence, gender roles, or even personal preferences. In this sense, ethnostress may appear as if it can be anything. However, what unites these experiences is that aspects of life that would otherwise remain unmarked become politicized and interpreted through the lens of identity. Practices, choices, and abilities that would not require justification in the dominant society become sites of evaluation for Sámi individuals. This reflects the conditions of living within a settler-colonial framework, where cultural “otherness” must be continuously demonstrated, and where everyday life becomes a terrain for performing and negotiating that difference.

Mihkkal described this struggle of keeping and performing distinct culture well:

[Y]et, still adapting from a different culture to Finnish culture and then trying to maintain the original Sámi culture, which is the eternal minority struggle. (Interview 2024, Aanaar, alias Mihkkal, aged 22)

Rahko also made a comment after telling how Sámi youth tried to meet all Sáminess expectations:

They are speaking about those things, but they don't understand that it's the ethnostress – it is stress about your culture and yeah, it's just stress about being different. (Interview 2024, online, Niila Rahko (THL), aged 33)

Importantly, ethnostress is not only externally imposed but also internalized and reproduced within Sámi communities. As shown throughout the chapter, pressures stem from multiple directions: expectations of authenticity from the dominant society, responsibilities toward cultural continuity and activism, and forms of evaluation and questioning within the community itself. These intersecting pressures create a constant need for validation and contribute to feelings of inadequacy, self-doubt, and comparison. In this way, ethnostress operates both as a social condition and as an internalized experience.

One particularly significant dimension that emerges from the empirical material is the affective intensity of ethnostress, which can take the form of anxiety or even what participants describe as “paranoia”:

[I]t might be more, like, of my own paranoia than actual truth. But I also feel like that because I'm taking these stands in social media and posting about important things, I have also this paranoia that they might see me that I'm trying too hard or something. <...> I'm not trying to be something other than I'm not. I'm just being myself but I do have the ethnostress that I'm not in the position to be like this. Do I have, like, permission to it or something? which is in conflict with the feeling that I have that I'm just trying to live my life and just be myself. So it's more like anxious paranoia than actual truth behind it. (Interview 2023, Rovaniemi, alias Karoliinná, early 30s)

As Karoliinná's account illustrates, individuals may feel scrutinized or judged even in the absence of explicit criticism, questioning whether they have the “right” to express their Sáminess or to speak on certain issues. This anticipatory self-monitoring reflects how deeply the pressures of authenticity and representation are internalized. Ethnostress, therefore, is not only about actual external expectations but also about imagined judgments and fears of not being “enough”, revealing its psychological depth.

At the same time, these experiences generate efforts of cultural reconnection, identity negotiation, and collective action. Thus, contemporary Sámi life is characterised not only by the continuing effects of assimilation but also by diverse forms of resistance, revitalisation, and the emergence of hybrid expressions of Sáminess, which are explored in the following chapter.

5. DEALING WITH ETHNOSTRESS: INDIVIDUAL AND COMMUNITY STRATEGIES

This chapter examines how Sámi individuals and communities respond to experiences of ethnostress in everyday life. While the previous chapters analysed how authenticity expectations operate as a mechanism of settler-colonial power and how these expectations are experienced through ethnostress, this chapter focuses on the ways people negotiate, reinterpret, and challenge such expectations in practice. Drawing on ethnographic material, it explores how individuals manage pressures of “proper” Sáminess through cultural reconnection, redefining identity boundaries, seeking validation through kinship and community relations, and embracing more plural understandings of Sámi identity.

Rather than treating Sámi people as passive recipients of authenticity expectations, this chapter examines everyday practices through which those expectations are regulated, contested, and transformed. It argues that dealing with ethnostress is not only a matter of coping with personal insecurity, but also a process through which essentialized perceptions of Sáminess are negotiated and, at times, de-essentialized. In this sense, the chapter moves from analysing colonial mechanisms and their effects to examining the forms of agency through which people create alternative ways of imagining and living Sámi identity. While broader institutional efforts, including language revitalization programmes, Sámi political institutions, educational initiatives, and the Truth and Reconciliation process, also address the historical effects of assimilation and colonialism, the focus here is on the everyday practices through which people negotiate belonging, authenticity, and cultural continuity in their daily lives.

This analytical approach draws inspiration from James C. Scott’s *Weapons of the Weak* (1985), which highlights the everyday forms of agency and resistance through which marginalized and oppressed groups navigate structures of power. Following Scott, academic discussions of resistance have increasingly moved beyond a focus on overt collective action to examine the political significance of small, routine practices embedded in everyday life. In *Weapons of the Weak*, Scott conceptualizes everyday acts such as evasion, foot-dragging, gossip and rumour, feigned ignorance, theft, pilfering and sabotage, and minor noncompliance as rational responses to unequal power relations in which overt resistance and confrontation would be too costly. So what looks like passivity, actually is strategic behaviour. His later work further develops this perspective by distinguishing between public performances of compliance and offstage forms of critique, commonly described as “hidden

transcripts” (Scott 1990). In *The Art of Not Being Governed: An Anarchist History of Upland Southeast Asia* (2009), Scott argues that many upland societies in Southeast Asia developed social structures, livelihoods, and cultural practices specifically designed to avoid state control, taxation, and forced labour, demonstrating that marginality can be a deliberate strategy of autonomy.

This focus on everyday practices resonates with broader approaches in social theory that emphasize practice over intention or ideology. Michel de Certeau’s *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984 [1980]) is a foundational work in cultural theory and anthropology in which the author examines how ordinary people navigate and subtly resist structures of power in everyday life. De Certeau distinguishes between “strategies,” used by institutions and systems of authority to organize and control social space, and “tactics,” the creative and often invisible ways individuals adapt, reinterpret, or circumvent these structures in their daily practices. Through examples such as walking in the city, reading, speaking, and consuming media, he shows how people actively reinterpret imposed systems rather than passively accepting them. The book therefore highlights everyday practices as sites of agency, creativity, and subtle resistance within dominant social orders. While de Certeau is less concerned with domination in a strict sense, his work has informed analyses of how power is negotiated within daily life rather than directly opposed.

Subsequent scholarship has extended the concept of everyday resistance to a range of contexts, including urban informality and governance in the Global South. Asef Bayat (2010), for example, conceptualizes practices such as squatting or informal economic activity as “quiet encroachments” that gradually reshape political and economic arrangements without formal mobilization. These approaches emphasize how dispersed individual actions can collectively constrain authority while remaining largely invisible within conventional political frameworks. At the same time, the literature has cautioned against treating all noncompliant practices as inherently resistant. Lila Abu-Lughod (1990) notably warns against romanticizing resistance, arguing that attention to everyday opposition should also illuminate how power operates and is reproduced through culture and social relations. This critique has led to more careful conceptualizations that recognize the ambiguity of everyday practices, which may simultaneously express accommodation, survival, and critique. Stellan Vinthagen and Anna Johansson (2013) explore the concept of everyday resistance, originally introduced by Scott, and critique existing theories, particularly Scott’s and de Certeau’s, for their limitations in addressing the complexity of power-resistance dynamics. Vinthagen and Johansson propose a new theoretical framework that defines everyday resistance as a practice and oppositional act,

focusing on the act itself rather than the actor's intent. They highlight the intersectional and entangled nature of power and resistance, advocating for research that recognizes resistance's heterogeneity and contingency within social contexts.

As the previous chapters have shown, Sámi communities also have a long history of resistance, including both organized political action and contemporary activism. Alongside overt political action, Sámi communities have also developed traditions of quiet or everyday resistance – subtle, everyday practices to express disagreement and protest. One well-known symbolic example is wearing *gákti* inside out to signal dissent. As Lehtola notes, Sámi strategies of dealing with the state often operate through small, indirect acts. Silence itself can function as a form of disapproval; as reflected in old Sámi sayings, silence does not signify agreement but rather protest, and “the greater the insult, the deeper the silence” (Lehtola 2015a, 227, my translation). This dynamic can also contribute to reluctance to appear in public debates or media, as constantly having to defend Sámi perspectives can be exhausting (Lehtola 2015a, 228). At the same time, Sámi communication may involve multilayered speech – public statements that convey one meaning to the Sámi community while presenting another to the wider society (Lehtola 2015a, 229). Despite challenges such as anti-Sámi rhetoric and hate speech, media spaces, such as blogs, have also become important arenas where Sámi voices can articulate their perspectives and engage in broader societal discussions (Lehtola 2015a, 229–232).

Overall, this body of work demonstrates that resistance is not limited to formal politics or collective action, but is often embedded in routine practices shaped by structural constraints. Rather than evaluating whether specific acts constitute resistance in a strict sense, recent scholarship emphasizes how everyday practices negotiate and delimit power. This perspective provides a useful framework for situating dealing with ethnostress as part of these broader debates on informal and low-visibility political agency. Here I examine not only strategies of coping with ethnostress but also the ways in which people de-essentialize Sáminess and create space for diverse Sámi experiences. This analytical perspective is informed by the concept of *narrative imagination* developed by Finnish narratologist Hanna Meretoja (2018), who distinguishes between *narrative unconscious* and *narrative imagination*. While narrative unconscious are a normalised and unquestioned narratives of certain social phenomena, narrative imagination are the alternatives people can imagine. This distinction prompted me to analyse the data by asking: What is the alternative story to “proper”/“real”/“authentic” Indigenous Sámi identity? How is this alternative

being constructed by individuals and by the community? How does the alternative story navigate tensions between settler-colonial expectations and cultural revival or “taking back” culture and language? An attempt to answer these questions gives insights into how the Sámi community is dealing with essentialization of ethnicity under settler-colonialism. It offers a lesson to learn on how ethnicity in general anthropological theory is essentialised and de-essentialised according to the needs of a given historical moment. The remainder of this chapter discusses these strategies in Sámi society.

5.1. Cultural Reconnection and Learning

Processes of cultural reconnection and learning emerge in the ethnographic material as practices through which people navigate expectations and pressures associated with ethnostress. Rather than trying to fulfil all expectations of Sáminess at once, people approach their relationship with culture as a gradual and ongoing process. This may involve reconnecting with relatives in Sápmi, learning the Sámi language, acquiring cultural practices, or spending more time in Sámi environments. This was mentioned by the participants who grew up in cities. Two research partners Karoliinná and Matti who live outside Sápmi talked about reconnection. Even though they had been visiting Sápmi when growing up and kept relationships with the family, the process of reconnecting for them was to find out more about their Sáminess and start learning the language which, in Matti’s case, was unavailable during his school years. In Karoliinná’s case, her mother did not learn the Sámi language because her father – Karoliinná’s grandfather – had attended a boarding school and, like many Sámi of his generation, felt ashamed of being Sámi and did not pass the language on to his daughter. A very important aspect for both Karoliinná and Matti was to connect better with relatives in Sápmi and spend more time there. While this example speaks especially to the experiences of Sámi who grew up and live outside Sápmi, it also illustrates that learning the Sámi language and culture is an ongoing and gradual process. Karoliinná described her and her mother’s reconnection process:

But I feel like the more I reconnect and what I’m doing it also decreases our both stress. Also because it’s just a journey of trying to find your place in the world and just, you know, existing as you are. Just being yourself. And I think we’re both [she and her mother] more comfortable with it every day even though there are some dilemmas of course like language and stuff. (Interview 2023, Rovaniemi, alias Karoliinná, early 30s)

Reconnection for some people can also be coming back to their homeland. Sámi writer and theologist, Helga West, told in an interview she had returned as a counterattack to the emptying home village and was worried about it. She told in the media article: *“I was afraid that I would become one of those Sámi people who involuntarily assimilate and disappear from their own community”* (cited in Aartolahti 2025, my translation). While living in Helsinki, West became tired of constantly representing Sámi identity rather than simply being able to live as Sámi without scrutiny. The writer noted in the interview: *“Now in my home village I don’t have to think about who I am. The first physical change when I returned home to the Sámi heartland was the change of language to Northern Sámi. I returned because I just wanted to be myself”* (cited in Aartolahti 2025, my translation). Returning to the homeland can allow a person to step out of the constant position of being a minority in a majority society, where they are expected to represent and explain their culture. At the same time, it can ease the anxiety that Sámi culture and community are disappearing or being abandoned. On the other hand, Áile Aikio, a museum professional and researcher at the Sámi Museum Siida, suggested in an interview that nurturing connection with Sápmi can also be in one’s mind and thoughts. Sari Valkonen, director of the Siida museum, added that:

[A] compassionate approach to identity reduces the barriers for identifying as Sámi. For various reasons, many people who belong to the majority population have also had to abandon the berry-picking or fishing places of their childhood, or these have been replaced by roads and cities. A connection to nature can and should be maintained, at least in one’s thoughts. (Heikkinen 2019, my translation)

At the same time, reconnecting with Sámi culture often involves an active process of learning. For many people, this includes plans or ongoing efforts to acquire new cultural knowledge, most commonly the Sámi language. Many emphasize that it is a very different process than just learning the language. People encounter a lot of stress, identity questions, anger and shame of lost language and historical generational trauma topics. Despite being mother tongue Sámi speaker, Biret described the common challenge people face:

And when <...> you might think that you are Sámi and you don’t know the language then you just go to the Sámi language course and that’s

fine. But it's actually, like, really, like, this mental process that you have to make think that it, like, brings a lot of emotions – why I don't know this language? And why is it like stolen from me? And yeah... That it's not, it's different to that if you are Sámi and you don't know the language, it's like a lot of easier for you to learn how to speak Spanish than how to speak Sámi. (Interview 2023, Aanaar, alias Biret, aged about 25)

This process of reconnecting with and learning Sámi culture was also described by research participants as a particularly sensitive period, often accompanied by self-doubt and heightened expectations of authenticity. Rahko referred to this stage as a vulnerable moment in which individuals might become overly critical of themselves while trying to reclaim cultural practices or knowledge. As he explained, the difficulty often lay not in the reactions of the community, but in the internal pressure individuals placed on themselves:

Sensitive time when you are taking your culture back <...> the Sámi society is not bad for the person who is taking the culture back <...> she or he is enough. But how she or he feels in a moment makes everything look negative. (Interview 2024, online, Niila Rahko (THL), aged 33)

Rahko further described this as a coping mechanism in which individuals sought perfection in their attempts to reconnect with culture and gain recognition from others:

It's some kind of coping mechanism when we are trying to achieve something that our mind is seeking for the perfection <...> thinking that everyone has to accept me, even though everyone accepts you. And it's part of the ethnostress when you are taking your culture back, you are very sensitive. (Interview 2024, online, Niila Rahko (THL), aged 33)

Nevertheless, pressures to learn are not only individual, but also coming from other members of the community. There are stories people tell how their Sáminess has been questioned because they do not speak the language. However, Matti also pointed out a growing understanding among Sámi speakers regarding language barriers. He suggested that younger generations had become more sensitive to the unequal experiences

surrounding language learning and more aware of the historical and emotional burdens connected to language loss:

And, um, but I think the newer generation is a little more considerate, and have understood that, okay, like, this is something, this is actually a privilege that they have. That we who did not learn, it was not our fault, and that the trauma and learning the language itself can be so traumatizing. (Interview 2023, Helsinki, alias Matti, early 30s)

People sometimes receive comments about their language skills, but many research participants also described the Sámi community as supportive and accepting, especially toward language learning. Those reconnecting with Sámi culture most often emphasized learning the language, while participants who have lived their whole lives in Sápmi or speak the language, also spoke about learning other aspects of Sámi culture considered to be Sáminess markers. Although many acknowledged that they could not fully meet all cultural expectations at once, and mastering traditions remained an important goal for the future:

I just like, I just had to accept that I don't have time to, to learn everything and do everything. Maybe later, I don't know. When I'm like older (slightly laughing). And maybe I have time then to learn how to do handicrafts. (Interview 2023, Aanaar, alias Biret, aged about 25)

I want to make films myself instead of just showing them or watching them. I'd love to be full time filmmaker. <...> and also I would love to learn more about handicrafts and love to learn yoiking. Yeah, so, I guess, I have everything here. (Interview 2018, Aanaar, alias Máret, aged about 24)

In some cases, the learning and taking back language becomes a generational aspect. Helena tells how her son developed strong Sámi identity because of the language nest programme he was attending as a child – learning Sámi as a mother tongue, while his father would feel insecure of his Sáminess because of language he does not have:

He [father] says he's always felt himself as being, like, a bit, like, not so good, or not so, like, how to say, not good enough Sámi, because he doesn't speak the language, but then he says, but Lásse [name

changed] has really now, like, got this strong Sámi identity. And the reason is the language nest. (Interview 2018, Aanaar, Helena, 40s)

The proactive strategy of reconnecting and learning was one of those I often observed and heard from people. Many people often told me that they had experienced or continue to experience ethnostress. For those who had managed to learn the language, the feeling of ethnostress diminished as they reconnected with their culture and community. Others learned to lower their expectations and accept the fact that they would not try to meet the “proper” Sámi expectations.

5.2. Managing Expectations

Another way in which research participants described responding to ethnostress was through processes of acceptance, endurance, and the conscious management of expectations. Rather than attempting to fulfil all ideals associated with “proper” Sáminess, many individuals emphasized the importance of recognizing personal limits and learning to live with the pressures surrounding cultural authenticity. This approach involves lowering self-expectations, setting boundaries, and accepting that not every aspect of Sámi culture can be mastered at once. In Sámi discourse, these attitudes resonate with the concept of *birget*, which refers to the ability to cope, endure, and carry on despite difficult circumstances. From this perspective, managing ethnostress does not necessarily mean overcoming it entirely, but rather learning how to navigate and live with these expectations in everyday life.

To Endure: Concept of *birget*

One of the ways people spoke about dealing with ethnostress was by reference to the Northern Sámi word *birget*, which means to manage, to cope, and make it through. The concept of *birget* appears more broadly in Sámi cultural and political discourse as a notion of resilience and endurance. The Norwegian Truth and Reconciliation Commission describes *birget* (paralleled by the Kven term *pärjätä*) as “*the ability to confront problems and endure difficult times. Although individuals recount hardship, discrimination, and sorrow over the loss of language, cultural expressions, and ways of life*” and also as an inner strength developed in relation to community and environment (Norwegian Truth and Reconciliation Commission report 2023, 625, my translation). Commission further reflects based on the hearings that *birget* is also not the position of victimhood but resilience: “*Their stories show that although many Forest Finns, Sámi, and Kvens live with the consequences of*

Norwegianization today, they do not position themselves as victims. Despite hardship and difficulties, they both articulate what has been lost and develop strategies to face challenges and continue building meaningful lives” (Norwegian Truth and Reconciliation Commission report 2023, 625, my translation). The term is also present in contemporary Sámi cultural narratives, for example, in Sámi writer’s from Swedish side Ann-Helén Laestadius’s novel *Stolen* (2023), where *birget* is used to describe a life strategy of managing and carrying on through adversity. Research participants referred to it as a cultural practice of coping with harsh situations on one’s own. One of the research participants, Biret, talked about this concept with me:

Because we have this this...it’s called, like, birget – to manage. Like, even, even if the sky is falling, you have to just manage. It’s it’s in our culture that we have to. Despite anything that happens we have to, like, manage. (Interview 2023, Aanaar, alias Biret, aged about 25)

She explained it in relation to the cultural history of the Sámi people, who had always faced a lot of hardships and threats from bigger powers, states, companies, etc.:

So, we have been talking about it a lot in Sámi society that why why do we have to like always manage? But, of course, it’s if we think about Sámi history it’s always been some kind of the threat or something that has made Sámi, Sámi life harder. And people then didn’t have any choice but to manage. And nowadays when it could be easier, and it’s easier to ask for help, but it’s still we have this, this culture of managing (smiling). (Interview 2023, Aanaar, alias Biret, aged about 25)

Biret continued commenting on various conflicts and that people had to be always ready for another battle.

Yeah, I can’t remember who was it, but someone said that every Sámi is in a way or another some kind of activist even though, even though they don’t want to be (laughing). But um yeah, when I was thinking if I would continue with umm, with the reindeer then I did really, like, think about that. That there’s always something. Whether it’s like forest logging, which is the big problem in our area. Or the railway, or the... um especially now it’s, they are trying to like greenwash like wind, windmills and, and that kind of stuff. It’s, like... It never stops

(sadly laughing). Like, you have to be always ready for another battle or something. So it is, it is kind of... it's not easy (slightly laughing). (Interview 2023, Aanaar, alias Biret, aged about 25)

However, Biret concluded the interview in a positive light, saying that people have the power to make a difference. Even though this is not directly about expectations of authenticity, it shows the coping strategy to think of hardships as collective projects and advancing community matters.

Yeah! We have to remember that all of us have the power to even try to make a difference. And even though it feels sometimes we are fighting against like these big machines and we don't have any chance, the Fosen case shows that there is a chance. (Interview 2023, Aanaar, alias Biret, aged about 25).

With reference to expectations of authenticity and Sáminess, often people lose their will or strength to manage and meet the expectations of “proper” Sámi. During my fieldwork, I often heard phrases like “maybe I am more Finnish than Sámi”. People questioned their Sáminess because they felt unable to meet all the expectations of being a “proper” Sámi. Helena, a Finnish woman raising Sámi children, who has lived in Aanaar for decades, shared her observations:

Just like all these right young Sámi people, who go there to study and then they come here to look for a job, but she was, like, really, I'm gonna burn my Sámi costume and I'm just gonna go to Helsinki or somewhere and just disappear and don't give a shit. And she was not the only one, there were others, who were saying the same then. Yeaah, it's just one method of survival. I think, like, either to disappear and leave everything behind and that's what people have been doing for ages. That's one way to do it. Then the other way is to go to totally opposite direction and become an activist. Be, like, absolutely hardcore, outspoken. But, like, being somewhere in the middle is probably the hardest. (Interview 2018, Aanaar, Helena, 40s)

Helena's reflection illustrates how expectations of authenticity can shape different responses to ethnostress. Some individuals withdraw from Sámi identity as a way of coping with these pressures, while others move toward strong cultural or political engagement. Navigating a position between

these extremes can be particularly difficult, as individuals continue to face expectations they may feel unable to fully meet.

Setting Boundaries and Accepting Limitations

At first glance, the ways people respond to expectations of Sáminess may appear as simple acceptance of cultural demands or pressures to meet certain standards of authenticity. However, the interviews suggest a more complex process. Research participant, Matti, observed that the culture of “managing” could sometimes become toxic, and that it was important to establish boundaries regarding one’s own expectations and responsibilities:

[T]here’s a word birget. It’s about, like, you have to be self-sufficient which can be toxic. There is an underlying culture that you have to hold your head high. You have to survive whatever is thrown at you. <...> Manage within harsh situations. <...> And you know, one situation is bad, you know, you you will deal with it, and sometimes you don’t maybe get, uh, maybe you don’t necessarily get help from other people, or you feel like you have to be alone for it to survive, and that’s a little toxic. For me personally, I’ve had to come to the conclusion that I just, I have to set boundaries for myself, and that some of these expectations are made within my mind as well. (Interview 2023, Helsinki, alias Matti, early 30s)

Later he commented that the term *birget* should also mean to manage by putting your boundaries:

[I]t’s just like an idea that came to my mind, like, maybe perhaps these is one of the reasons for mechanisms to find this kind of feelings of birget <...> that you need the validation, but at the same time you need to stand up for yourself. And and how those two relate, that’s an interesting thing as well. (Interview 2023, Helsinki, alias Matti, early 30s)

Biret shared how she stopped feeling stressed about Sáminess expectations. Although she once felt pressure and stress about not making handicrafts, she gradually came to accept that it was not something she had the time or opportunity to pursue:

And now when I think about it, I am not sure if it is from our people or does it come from the outside. Because I am not good at handicrafts (Biret and I are laughing) at all, I can’t do it. But, of course, umm,

like, my relatives and people in our community 'aaa did you do it yourself?!' 'no, I didn't!' (both giggling). Because I can't do anything. But, actually, it is more from outside that they are expecting that you have to, of course, of course, it is easier to me because my mother-language is Northern Sámi and we do have reindeer (laughing), and that kind of stuff. But yeah, it's hard. But now when I'm older, I don't care (laughing). <...> I made, like, peace with the decision that I can't do anything or everything. I just like, I just had to accept that I don't have time to, to learn everything and do everything. Maybe later, I don't know. When I'm, like, older (slightly laughing). (Interview 2023, Aanaar, alias Biret, aged about 25)

Biret further spoke about the possibility to learn handicrafts in the future. Biret is a reindeer herder, Northern Sámi speaker, and grew up in a Sámi-majority village. Despite this, she experiences ethnostress, and especially in connection with Sámi handicrafts, which she does not enjoy making. Nevertheless, as a woman she feels pressure to master them. She described a turning point as simple acceptance that no one can do everything, or have time for everything. However, she does not reject the possibility of learning handicrafts in the future but sees it as a slow step by step process, not an immediate obligation. Similarly, referring to slow process and future, Matti shared his struggles to learn the Sámi language which has to be done slowly and step by step:

I've talked with so many people about this, and that they always, like, they really, really want to, but something is holding them back. Either work, everyday life, or just, you know, that they feel that it's too hard. And it's such a shame. It's like, for me, for example, like, I feel like I never have the time. I mean, I never have the time, so I have to do, like, baby steps. Like, because I understand maybe 40–80 percent, like, everyday conversations. But I'm, like, trying to do, like, at least every morning when I smoke a cigarette and go have coffee, I will listen to "Buorre idit Sápmi" [Good morning, Sápmi – a radio programme] for fifteen minutes and have that kind of a fill of mine, you know, language. Because I don't hear it anywhere in my everyday life. (Interview 2023, Helsinki, alias Matti, early 30s)

At the same time, people do many other important things for the Sámi community. During our conversation I pointed out to Matti that managing expectations is also about how one chooses to allocate one's limited time

among different aspects of Sámi life, which in his case was a lot of activism and political work. He strongly agreed saying:

Yeah! At least I don't feel, I mean, I guess it also has to be guilt, because I don't feel as guilty of not learning it, because I know, like, I've done this and this and this, like, and if someone would say, why don't you learn it fast enough? It's, like, well, do you wanna go to the lobby of the Parliament? <...> I don't feel guilty for not learning fast enough, even though I want to. (Interview 2023, Helsinki, alias Matti, early 30s)

For Heidi, the feeling of being “not Sámi enough” emerged as another form of personal insecurity, comparable to the many other ways people may doubt themselves. Upon recognizing this, she chose to accept it and intentionally shifted her focus away from it:

And I don't know. The thing that I'm not enough something. This or that? I can continue it. I'm not thin enough. I'm not beautiful enough. I'm not... It's always something I'm not enough something. And it's just those are just, people have just different kind of I'm not enough something. And all it's just about I think the basic thing, you're okay. You're not confident of yourself. You're, for me for example, my self-confidence is not that good. I'm trying to build. So in a way, like, that's one part that I have realized that I cannot do enough of something. <...> Because I have so many other things that I've done. Yeah. It's my own. So that's not the thing I'm gonna think about. (Interview 2023, Aanaar, alias Heidi, aged 35+)

Heidi emphasised that ethnostress was part of other insecurities people have to deal with in life. At the same time, she also emphasised what Matti and Biret expressed – different roles important for Sáminess and community, besides the lack of some skills. Then she talked about accepting herself for who she was, stressing that culture and language should be taken back when one feels to do so:

Like, I just accept that I am Finnish and I am Sámi. And maybe I'm more Finnish, but what can I do about it? It's like that. I just have to accept it. Yeah. Like, there are things that I have lost. Of course, I can try to try to get them back, but I don't see the point of struggling so much to get something back just because it's it's a trend now. That you

have to take them back. Your culture and language, and all that. I have to take them back if I really feel like it.

And I think also maybe the language, the year of studying the language, it was a bit of course, it was good, but somehow, I kind of forced myself the idea that I have to learn the language because my father, like, grandfather spoke it, and I want to continue the line of speaking it. I need to learn it because I don't want to lose it. But then I just realized that... that I have to lose something to stay sane somehow cause I cannot just try to fix everything in me when there is so much other stuff weighing in my past with my, like, years of being bullied at school and and being ten years of single mom, over ten years, like, thirteen years of whatever, like, being alone with the kid and surviving from that and and almost went down. (Interview 2023, Aanaar, alias Heidi, aged 35+)

Doubting about her Sáminess comes from the fact that she does not feel she has the strength and energy to work on it, despite struggling with mental issues for many years and being a single mother for the past 13 years. Such examples also point to the importance of already existing pressures people face in their lives, histories of generational trauma, and school bullying. Ethnostress is one of many stress factors and people must choose to prioritize their mental health over efforts to reconnect with culture.

While research participants expressed a commitment or wish to maintain or learn Sámi language and cultural practices, they also reflected critically on the expectations placed upon them and on their own capacities to meet them. Rather than attempting to fulfil every possible marker of Sáminess, individuals often described learning to set boundaries and acknowledge personal limitations. In this sense, coping with ethnostress sometimes involves redefining what is realistically possible within the constraints of everyday life. Participants emphasized that engagement with culture does not necessarily require mastering all traditions or fulfilling every expectation at once; instead, it can take place gradually and according to one's own circumstances.

Finding one's Personal way to Give to Community

During the interviews, participants also described another way of dealing with ethnostress: by focusing on finding their own personal way to contribute to, or “give back”, to Sámi society and culture. Rahko, emphasized that there is no single correct way to be Sámi or to support the community. Instead, he highlighted the importance of recognizing one's own strengths and

finding a meaningful personal role within Sámi society. Rahko noted that it was important to find one's own way in Sámi society to contribute to it:

[E]veryone has some kind of work doing what they do and path that they are going to go and everyone, not everyone is a gákti maker or not everyone is a reindeer herder and not everyone is a joik professional. But we always have some kind of our own path that we can do for our Sámi, for Sámi. Like my path is the mental path and bring it to acknowledgement for the other professionals about how to treat Sámi. And trying to, like this way, trying to make better for the Sámi young people and Sámi people to live, but everyone has like their own place and... the your Sámi, like you are not better Sámi even if you know everything about everything about you can know about Sámi culture and you can do everything that you can do with your hands, but you are "proper" Sámi when your Sámi, when other Sámi know that you are Sámi. (Interview 2024, online, Niila Rahko (THL), aged 33)

For Sámi politician and activist Matti, who went through the reconnection process himself, an important aspect of reconnecting is giving back to the community. He explained how one might feel ethnostress in a sense that you feel a need to do something. So according to Matti, similarly to Rahko's perspective, it should be done in small steps individually giving back to the community:

But I believe still that you have to give back to your community once you are part of it. It doesn't have to be like you are in every activism event, or every music festival, or you don't have to have everything, but you have to know. Maybe it is that you try to get your children to learn the language, or maybe it's that you teach your husband's nephew traditional handicrafts. Like, kind of like creating a cycle of good within. From the community, from each individual back. So it doesn't have to be something amazing. Right? It's just like the people have their everyday lives. Now, it is that not everyone has the capabilities to learn the language or whatever, but they can strive to make their children or other people in a small way. So I think that's kind of something that I feel because our culture can be when you do something good, it just the pressure just keeps on going harder. It's not like, okay, you've done good. It's like, okay, and next, you will do

this. You will do this. And <...> that's very much, I think, part of the ethnostress. (Interview 2023, Helsinki, alias Matti, early 30s)

Research participants also addressed the importance of personal boundaries in coping with ethnostress. Both Matti and Heidi spoke about their personal experiences when dealing with their own individual wishes:

For me personally, I've had to come to the conclusion that I just I cannot, I have to set boundaries for myself, and that some of these expectations are made within my mind as well. Like, that you feel like nobody says to you, necessarily says to me. But of course, people ask for stuff and I help. That's a different thing. Sometimes I feel like there's some pressure to do something. And then it's like, okay, well, I'm sorry. I don't have the spoons for this. When we were talking about these pressures that come to my mind. Because usually I feel that these pressures are also in your subconscious. So boundaries are the answer, mostly for myself. But if people have asked me to do something I can't do, then I just said that, I'm sorry, but I can't. It's very hard to say no. (Interview 2023, Helsinki, alias Matti, early 30s)

Heidi told a story how she was contacted more and more to talk publicly about making handicrafts. She used to accept invitations which, according to her, portrayed her as someone who was making culture stay alive. However, she felt a lot of stress over whether she was making Sámi handicrafts in the right way and worried that people would criticize her after seeing her shows or articles:

I don't even know if this is the real way, like, to do all this because I haven't done it so much yet. So and then they post it in the magazine, and everyone thinks that it's the real way. And then someone who really does it reads it and, like, says that, oh my god that's not the way how you do it. How can you say that? I have so much thought about, like, thinking about it, what other people think about my sayings. From the handicrafts and, uh, all this culture stuff. (Interview 2023, Aanaar, alias Heidi, aged 35+)

Then Heidi decided not to be in media anymore and refused the invitation:

I'm not gonna do it anymore. Like, I don't want to be the one, I don't want to be the one whose face is in the pictures. Like, she's really, like, keeping the culture alive, and she's doing all these handicrafts

to to make it, like, to make the culture stay alive and all that. I don't want to be the one. Like, I don't want the pressure on myself that I would be public figure. Because I have seen so much that there will be this one face who's like... And, like, people have taken themselves this kind of, uh, I don't know, role that's that they are keeping keeping the culture or the music or leud [traditional singing], or joik, or whatever. They are preserving it and keeping it alive, and they want to be the ones who are doing it. Um, then because, of course I don't know. I just feel like I don't have to do it. If the culture dies because of that, that I don't do it, then I'm sorry, but I won't do it. Like, I don't have the energy and the the time and the willingness to be the one. So, I said to her, if anyone asks, please don't call me. Yeah. Um, it's been so quiet after that. (Interview 2023, Aanaar, alias Heidi, aged 35+)

Finding one's personal way to give to the community was a strategy articulated in interviews for reducing ethnostress and the whole variety of expectations of what “proper” Sámi should be like from being a language master, tradition keeper, to being a public figure and activist.

Laughter and Mocking

Laughter is a well-known strategy for coping. Mocking and making fun of tourists and researchers, is sometimes an important strategy to take back the power and in this way deny the image of the authenticized Sámi people. Sámi radio and TV *Yle Sápmi* (part of the Finnish National broadcasting company) has a radio program *Sohkaršohkka*, which produces short comedy sketches on Instagram about Sámi youth life, including mocking tourists who expect to meet an “authentic ancient” Sámi, or other Sámi who discipline others, the languages they mixing. For example, in one sketch, the main Sámi character meets a tourist in the forest while berry picking. The tourist has been looking for Sámi people, and the main character tells them that they are Sámi. The tourist, however, answers that the person does not look like a “proper” Sámi (*Yle Sohkaršohkka* 2022). When I asked in the interview, one of the producers of the show, Torikka, about the idea and decision to address these matters in sketches, she told:

There are... stuff like this happens in real life. Especially when... I think it comes from this colonialism that people are like if you don't have, if you are like blond and tall you cannot be Sámi because Sámi people are short and dark (slightly laughing) and small, and and if

you don't have reindeer you are not Sámi, you don't speak Sámi – you are not Sámi, live in a city – you are not Sámi. It happens in real life all the time. And it's all those, always it's like a white non-Sámi person that it's like questioning. And yeah it's something that is relatable. Cause... I think it's easier for young people to, like, make a sketch and watch it on Instagram then, like, have those panel discussions or something like that. And also I think life for Sámi people is hard enough so that's important that there is also like joking and making fun, and that kind of stuff. (Interview 2023, Aanaar, Xia Torikka, aged about 25)

When asked how people react to these sketches, what comments they get, she answered that people related to the topics of the show: *“Yeah, mostly positive. And they just say that it's relatable and they were like reposting then and commenting that 'yeah, I know that feeling' (Torikka and I are giggling). So it was nice”* (Interview 2023, Aanaar, Xia Torikka, aged about 25)

Humour and satire are also employed beyond everyday comedy sketches. Since 2012, the anonymous Sámi art collective, *Suohpanterror* (meaning “lasso terror”), has used parody, memes, and the appropriation of well-known visual imagery to challenge colonial narratives, racism, and stereotypical representations of Sámi people. Describing its work as “artivism”, the collective combines humour with political critique, reworking familiar popular culture and political iconography to expose the continuing effects of colonialism and the denial of Sámi rights. *Suohpanterror* reverses the gaze by inviting both Sámi and majority audiences to laugh at the absurdity of colonial stereotypes and dominant assumptions. In this sense, satire becomes not merely entertainment but a strategy for reclaiming narrative power and articulating contemporary Sámi identity through irony and creative resistance (Junka-Aikio 2018) reaching national and international audiences.

Encounters with tourists are portrayed in other media too. The acclaimed film *Stolen* based on the book of the same name written by Ann-Helén Laestadius and featuring on Netflix, depicts how tourists touch and praise Sámi traditional clothing at the market causing distress. While, the film conveys the situation more critically and serious, the research participant, Mihkkal, jokes about getting asked for money for photos tourists want to make when you are dressed in traditional clothes:

Like exactly, like, well this is an easy peasy scenario when it's a festival and you have been, you have, what's the word in English? Put

on your fancy clothes and people want to, tourists want to take pictures. (Interview 2024, Aanaar, alias Mihkkal, aged 22)

When asked if that happened frequently, Mihkkal replied: *Well, it does happen but as a new tourism entrepreneur my mum, so I will always smile and of course. That will be 5 euros*” (Interview 2024, Aanaar, alias Mihkkal, aged 22). Comic comments and situations do happen. My friend told me that once her 6-year-old son was in the balcony of their house in the village, calling her and pointing to a human walking far away asking “mom, is it a human or a tourist?”. We both had a good laugh.

Similar jokes are told about the researchers who are very common in the area. Once an acquaintance was joking in a circle of our Sámi friends that she received an email from another researcher who was asking to stay with her and her partner. She was joking that it would be awkward to live with him making notes of observations of how her partner played video games. She concluded by saying that “oh, we don’t have children, but we are planning to take a second researcher into our family” (Fieldwork notes, 2018). Everyone laughed, including me, even though it was a bitter laughter. Back then, it increasingly started to bother me and added to the already existing research-related stress in an over researched places. Only many years later did I finally come to understand that my distress and people’s jokes about researchers were a way to balance the power relationships between researchers who have power in creating knowledge and Sámi who live in society experiencing research fatigue. Once I recognized this strategy, the jokes became less bitter.

One informant, Karoliinná, remembered a comedy show in 2012–2013 on TV called *Njuoska bittut* (Northern Sámi) (*Märät säpikkää* [Finnish]) and directed by famous Sámi filmmakers, Suvi West and Anne Kirste Aikio. The show was reversing the power dynamics of stereotype creation. The series followed two Sámi women as they arrived in Helsinki from Lapland and explored Finnish urban culture through humour, satire, and interviews. The central aim of the show was to challenge stereotypes about Sámi people and comment on Finnish society by laughing at both majority and minority cultures. Karoliinná remembered:

I remember one time I was in high school and it came on TV and my mom said to me you should come and watch this with me it’s about, like, stereotypes and how Finnish how it’s about changing how the Sámi people behave in Helsinki, how Finnish people behave in Sápmi. And I remember that we were watching it together and I thought it was hilarious and that was a nice memory that I have that we were

*watching it together <...>. It's so fu**ing funny. It's the most funny TV series I've ever watched. And also just you know because Suvi West is the master of you know being very nice but in a way very ironic and sarcastic that people it just goes over their head that they don't understand that she's being, like, she's doing satire or something. It's just she's the master of comedy.* (Interview 2023, Rovaniemi, alias Karoliinná, early 30s)

Other humorous topics are also addressed in a joking manner. Another short sketch from the *Sohkaršohkka* programme shows a woman putting on her traditional clothing while another woman comments on whether she is doing it correctly. Although humorous, it is also a very serious critique of a significant aspect creating ethnostress, the feeling that makes others doubt their Sáminess. Hence, the humour is used as a well-recognized strategy for coping with hardships and addressing power imbalances. It enables individuals to reclaim a sense of agency in a significant way, by finding enjoyment and laughter in the very challenges and injustices that are being satirized.

Taken together, these accounts suggest that managing ethnostress often involves redefining the expectations placed on Sáminess rather than attempting to fully meet them. Research participants described strategies such as enduring pressures through *birget*, setting personal boundaries, joking and mocking stereotypes, and recognizing the limits of what one can realistically achieve in relation to language, cultural practices, or public engagement. At the same time, many emphasized the importance of finding one's own personal way to contribute to Sámi society and culture, rather than trying to embody every possible marker of a “proper” Sámi. Such approaches allow individuals to remain connected to culture while also acknowledging personal circumstances and capacities. As Rahko explained, engagement with culture could be understood as a lifelong process rather than an immediate obligation to master everything:

I think the most important thing is to remember that everyone has the place in their own ethnic culture, that you don't have to master everything. <...> your life is going to be long and you have time to learn and teach and live your life in your culture. (Interview 2024, online, Niila Rahko (THL), aged 33)

This perspective resonates with a reflection shared by Lehtola in a media interview, where he recounted advice from a friend: “*The life that a*

Sámi lives is more than enough to be a Sámi life” (Heikkinen 2022, my translation). Overall, these reflections highlight an important counterpoint to pressures of authenticity, suggesting that Sámi identity can be grounded in lived experience and personal engagement with culture rather than in the fulfilment of fixed or idealized expectations.

5.3. Collective Validation and Social Belongings

Family Relations

Many research participants emphasized that dealing with ethnostress was closely connected to experiences of social belonging. Instead of grounding their Sáminess solely in personal skills or cultural knowledge, individuals often referred to family relations, kinship ties, and community recognition as sources of validation. Kinship and family relations play an important role in Sámi culture. Sáminess is strongly a collective identity which means that people have to know one as a Sámi person. This type of knowledge is typically associated with one’s family and kin relations and allows others to identify a person’s Sámi family lineage. According to Lehtola, kinship-based Sámi identity is a strong social institution that remains invisible to those outside this culture (Lehtola 2015a, 257, my translation). Lehtola maintains that kinship-based Sámi identity is a strong social institution that remains invisible to those outside this culture (Lehtola 2015a, 257).

Since family relations are a very important marker of Sámi society and individual and collective identity, no wonder that this aspect also plays a role in dealing with ethnostress. When explaining why they do not practice one or another tradition, or speak the language, people tend to emphasise their connections to “traditional” Sáminess through family and relatives and their living practices. For example, they may refer to a brother who is a language master and activist; a cousin who is a reindeer herder; a grandmother who is a seasoned language master or a sister who is skilled in Sámi handicrafts.

When I asked Biret in the interview how she deals with situations in which she feels pressure to make handicrafts herself, or how she responds to such expectations, she said:

What did I say last time somebody asked that? Well my sister does handicrafts. So it’s, it’s kind of fun. So that maybe it has also made it like easier that we have somebody in our family who does handicrafts. So I can say it “my sister did it” (Biret and I are giggling). It’s almost,

almost the same as I if I did it (Biret and I laughing). (Interview 2023, Aanaar, alias Biret, aged about 25)

After sharing with me in the interview her struggles with wearing the *gákti*, including the discomfort, stress, and insecurities it evokes regarding her Sáminess, I asked Heidi about her brother since she had mentioned him earlier, and our conversation shifted to him. She explained that her brother was seriously involved with language and politics. Emphasizing that this was not the role for her, she always referred to her brother when asked by other Sámi people what family she was from:

We have this thing with my sister. Like, if everyone like, if we say who we are, our name, and the last name comes, and they are like, well, who you are, like, where are you from? And then we say, well, we're Jovvna's [name changed] sisters. And they said, oh, yeah. Okay. (Interview 2023, Aanaar, alias Heidi, aged 35+)

Matti, on the other hand, hoped that his political position could be helpful for his family to validate Sáminess through known family connections. Matti emphasized an important point of Sámi collective identity, that one was a Sámi when community members knew you were Sámi. It is very common when meeting a person, to first ask who the person was and who were their family and relatives. The more the family member was known in the community, the more validation it gave and reduced ethnostress. Matti reflected:

I'm just assuming that it's also important for my [relative] who is not anything like me, is not an activist or or doesn't live in Sápmi and doesn't have gákti, for example. That's, like, it might be important <...> can say that I am her brother if someone asks. Like, we do when we meet each other, it's very normal to ask who are you and who are you related to and are we related? And I think that also has alleviated kind of her thinking of her own Sáminess, because she can just say, well, this person who's in [politics] is now is my [relative]. So there's no question either. It's like, this is an idea. This is just assuming. (Interview 2023, Helsinki, alias Matti, early 30s)

A very common practice is to refer to one's Sámi-side relatives in the Sámi language even if one speaks Finnish or English. In this way ethnicity is emphasised, Sáminess is performed and separated from other non-Sám

relatives. For example, in a conversation with a friend, a person would use the word *áhku* to refer to his Sámi grandmother. Similarly, in the book *Stolen* (Laestadius 2023), the main character refers to her Sámi grandmother and grandfather using Sámi terms, while she refers to her maternal grandparents, who speak Swedish and are considered Swedish, using Swedish terms (Fieldnotes 2023–2024).

Karoliinná who is going through a reconnecting path with her Sámi identity confided that she did not have a large Sámi family. She did not know her Sámi grandfather well who was like many Sámi of that generation struggling with alcohol, was a former boarding school pupil, and moved from his original home region by government decision. She explained:

But there was always the part that I don't have a lot of Sámi relatives because I didn't know my grand my great grandfather, nor my grandfather that well. But and that was also when you think about like Sámi identity that was always like stopping me that I don't have a large Sámi family like other people have. (Interview 2023, Rovaniemi, alias Karoliinná, early 30s)

For Karoliinná, her Sámi friends, many of whom were going through reconnection, were her very important family:

[M]y Sámi friend circle that has grown in these, like, last years. Everyone is so supportive and I've made lots of Sámi friends who are then also in their reconnecting path. So it's the sense of community. <...> But I think it's sort of I could use this queer terminology that I have my Sámi chosen family. (Interview 2023, Rovaniemi, alias Karoliinná, early 30s)

Family members and relatives are important not only as carriers of specific Sámi cultural markers or “traditional” aspects of Sáminess, but also because their affirmation and support play a crucial role for individuals who are reconnecting with their Sámi identity. Karoliinná tells a story of her first and latest *gákti* making. Both *gákti* were made by her godmother who also taught her how to dress it, and, as she tells, has “*always been very supportive also and encouraged me*”. While making another *gákti*, she contacted her mother’s cousin to learn the family’s patterns and methods so that the *gákti* could be made in what she described as the “proper” family way. For Karoliinná, this guidance, recognition, and support from relatives living in Sápmi became deeply meaningful for both her Sámi identity and her reconnection process:

When we made my newest gákti, which was last spring last spring <...>, I connected through Instagram to my mother's cousin. And I sent her a message that 'can you send me the details of your gákti? What you and my grandfather's sister are wearing.' And she sent me accurate and detailed information on the sewing of kaava [sewing pattern/template] <...> And that was the gákti that is like a similar model as my grandfather's sister and my mother's cousin. And then when we finished it we sent them a photo and then they were both, like, yeah that's so good! And they were, like, super excited and they said that it looks proper, it looks good, it's the same as ours and she was the one, my mother's cousin, who was like, said that of course we can use the same patterns and we are family. And it was so heartwarming because I don't know her. I've met her as a child and then as an adult once and she's always been so nice to me and supportive but that was when she gave me the affirmation that we are family of course you can use the same model <...>. (Interview 2023, Rovaniemi, alias Karoliinná, early 30s)

Another strategy connected to family is the use of Sámi names, including the decision to adopt or restore Sámi family names. Names may function as markers of cultural belonging and reconnection, particularly for individuals whose families experienced assimilation or name changes in earlier generations. Changing one's surname can therefore be understood both as a personal process of reclaiming identity and as a visible assertion of Sámi belonging.

My surname was Koskinen [name changed], which is like Smith, because my grandfather was Finnish as well, so patriarchal system. But I changed it when I started to reconnect with my kind of like a decolonization of reconnection. I never felt myself as Koskinen [name changed]. Never. (Interview 2023, Helsinki, alias Matti, early 30s)

Sámi increasingly use their Sámi naming traditions, which are long names showing your relatives names across generations, so that your lineage would be easily traced by other Sámi. One can see these names more often in media articles or festival programmes. This also contributes to making Sáminess more visible and can be understood as decolonising the dispossession of cultural traces.

Another important aspect connected to family is teaching the language to children. Sámi language nests have been confirmed to be a great

solution for increasing the language speaker numbers in the 1990s. Many parents enrol their children in Sámi language kindergartens or school classes which are more available today. Therefore, if language was lost during the assimilation period in boarding schools, for the past 30 years efforts have been made to restore language skills through kindergartens and schools. Whereas previous generations often chose not to teach Sámi language to the children on purpose, today parents choose the language nests and Sámi classes for the exact opposite reason. Today, language learning does not occur without various issues of influence of the majority Finnish language, which often becomes more dominant, or extra hours of school children have to do if they choose Sámi language as a separate subject which they often refuse to do or at least struggle to attend. However, learning the language helps to deal with language ethnostress.

Heidi studied language for a year at the Sámi Educational Institute and briefly before that. However, after graduation she did not practice it much. During the interview, she explained and justified her reasons of not practicing and keeping a language alive. Then, suddenly the conversation turned to her son, who was her own way to keep the language alive. Heidi told about the guilt of not putting effort in preserving the language:

[T]he motivations were quite the same as mine, just to learn the language, which was, like, my grandfather's first language. So I felt like when I applied to school, I felt like I wanted to learn it. Like, I was supposed to. Supposed to want to learn it. So I felt like I wanted to learn it. Of course, I can say that I wanted to learn it, but yeah. Because I haven't spoken it and I haven't really done anything to preserve the language. For my for myself, I haven't listened to any programmes or written, like, we have to read. Any books. Or I haven't done anything to maintain it. So that's a bit, um, I don't think I feel well, maybe I feel a bit guilty. <...> Since since I left from there. That I haven't done my share to keep the language. As I spent a year there to learn it. (Interview 2023, Aanaar, alias Heidi, aged 35+)

When I asked what she did with that guilt feeling, she answered:

Try just to let it go. Yeah. It's not not everyone has to be the one. Trying to keep it alive. I have my own way. Mhmm. I tried to I tried to get my son to read it. (Interview 2023, Aanaar, alias Heidi, aged 35+)

To sum up, as Sámi family and relatives are important markers of Sáminess, they are also used as a way of dealing with ethnostress. People often refer to “traditional” aspects of Sámi life, such as relatives who practice handicrafts or engage in reindeer herding, to demonstrate their connection to Sámi culture and affirm their belonging. Others manage their ethnostress, particularly regarding the language knowledge, through their children by supporting language learning in the next generation. For those who are reconnecting with their Sámi identity, affirmation of their Sáminess from relatives can be a significant step.

Support, Talks and Discussions

Sharing feelings and thoughts about Sámi identity was emphasized as an important factor by Rahko and other research participants. They highlighted the importance of support from friends, family, and relatives, as well as the value of connecting with others who are going through similar experiences and questions about identity. Rahko explained:

I think the sharing would be the good way of coping with ethnostress that you can share with others about your feelings and what you think about your culture and find the same things from other families, and then you could feel that I'm not so special that I don't have so huge weight on my shoulders to carry on, carry this knowledge and everything that I have, but there are also others who have the same thing. And they are doing their part. I think that would be very important to find this group where you can share your feelings and acknowledge and hear about others. And I think that would be also beneficial for your identity. (Interview 2024, online, Niila Rahko (THL), aged 33)

He then added: “*I think that that is the most important thing, because I think that ethnostress is like your culture is calling you to work with your culture*” (Interview 2024, online, Niila Rahko (THL), aged 33). Research participants conveyed similar perspectives based on their own experiences. Karoliinná shared the importance of her friends supporting her way through the process of reconnection with her Sáminess:

[T]hey were supportive from the day that I started and they were rooting for me and encouraging me. So there was the community around me started to strengthen and grow and as I started

reconnecting. And that had played a very big role of where I am today.
(Interview 2023, Rovaniemi, alias Karoliinná, early 30s)

Since reconnecting with Sámi identity can be an emotionally sensitive process, Karoliinná emphasized the importance of this supportive environment making this process feel safer and less pressured. Rather than questioning or demanding explanations, friends who responded with encouragement and respect for personal boundaries helped create a space where identity exploration could unfold gradually. Karoliinná reflected on how the careful and sensitive attitude of her closest friends was particularly meaningful during her early stages of reconnection:

Because my friends have always stood by me, my closest friends, and they were very beautifully sensitive about it that in the beginning they weren't asking like these intimate questions but they were like: that's so good for you, I'm so happy for you. And they were very very supporting, and also proud, and they never crossed the border of asking, like, because I felt, like, that in that time period it was maybe too much. But in a way I feel like it wasn't a surprise for them when I started reconnecting. I felt more like they maybe <...> weren't surprised at all and well there and <...> it wasn't like why? why are you doing this? They weren't like questioning at all that they were very rooting so maybe that was also a positive note to me that this isn't something totally off for myself. Because I had been very vocal about Sámi rights in my social media and posting a lot of Sámi content. So they knew that I was somehow connected to Sámi community but they never actually knew how. (Interview 2023, Rovaniemi, alias Karoliinná, early 30s)

The support and encouragement from other Sámi and Sámi communities was significant in many ways too. The support of a Sámi friend in learning the language, was the beginning of reconnection and learning the language for Karoliinná. She reflected more on supportiveness from the community and being able to ask questions and get answers in this sensitive period of time:

But it's also a beautiful thing because when this community has been opened it also creates pathways to open communication and there are not like barriers and I've done this with many people that I've just sent them a message on Instagram or something and asked them like

guidance in some things and they've always been so supportive and like gave me advice and how to do like really thorough answers.
(Interview 2023, Rovaniemi, alias Karoliinná, early 30s)

In addition to support from friends, close social circles, and community participants also emphasized the importance of talking openly and sharing experiences with other Sámi who were going through similar questions about identity. Heidi talked about her experience in the Sámi language learning class at the Sámi Education Institute in Aanaar, where she attended the Skolt Sámi language intensive course for a year. She recounted that they shared and talked about their feelings and identity questions, and the history of their families:

But we had it for a long time after the school ended [class chat]. Yeah. And, uh, I don't know. Maybe I just because it was so intense to think about all this. Of course, we had these culture lessons also about, like, all this, uh, what's happened. And then because we talked a lot among ourselves, there came a lot of things from, like, each person, like, what they have experienced. Mhmm. So in that way, thinking all of that stuff and your own thoughts and all that, in that way, it was a bit harder. <...> we had such a tight group. Like but it almost felt like a small family. (Interview 2023, Aanaar, alias Heidi, aged 35+)

Heidi noted that for her it was very important to see that there were similar people experiencing similar emotions around their Sámi identity:

And, also, we talked a lot with other students there about the same or maybe not the same, but, like, all these feelings. Maybe it's like having having someone else also go through the feelings. And talk with them. It's what... that you found out that you're not the only one thinking about this stuff. That's why I think it's great that I was part of that year's class because we were also kind of the same. Kind of same age almost. Few years, like, few of us older and few of us younger, but still, like, kind of the same. Had the same experiences. In a way.
(Interview 2023, Aanaar, alias Heidi, aged 35+)

Support in various ways from close friends and family circle is very important, the environment to share the feelings, and other people who are experiencing the same issues related to identity are crucial aspects of coping with ethnostress. The Sámi example also shows how institutions and

educational environments can become a sensitive place to form those connections, and acknowledge the possible feelings which prepares students and legitimises their emotions.

Kinship ties, shared cultural practices within families, and recognition by other Sámi often function as powerful forms of validation that alleviate doubts about belonging. Through relatives who practice cultural traditions, shared family histories, or supportive networks of friends and “chosen family”, individuals find ways to affirm their Sámi identity. In this sense, Sámi identity is not only an individual attribute but a relational and socially recognized position within networks of kinship and community. Support from close social circles and opportunities to share feelings and experiences with others facing similar identity questions are therefore crucial for coping with ethnostress. Such supportive environments may also emerge in institutional and educational settings, where acknowledging these experiences can help legitimize emotions and foster connections among those navigating similar challenges. These forms of collective belonging help ease the pressure of authenticity by situating Sáminess within shared social life rather than individual performance.

5.4. Acknowledging Multiple and Hybrid Identities

Another strategy for dealing with ethnostress involves reframing identity by acknowledging the multiplicity and hybridity of personal backgrounds. Rather than attempting to conform to narrow definitions of Sáminess, some individuals reduce the pressure of authenticity by embracing identities that are simultaneously Sámi and Finnish, thereby challenging rigid or essentialized notions of belonging.

Anthropology has long recognized that identities are multiple, hybrid, and flexible (e.g. Bhabha 1994, Jenkins 1996, Eriksen 2010, Hall 1990). It is no coincidence that such knowledge is grounded in the experiences of Indigenous peoples and minorities, which offer alternative frameworks for Western conceptions that often promote a mono-dimensional identity constructed through the lens of dominant, privileged social norms and notions such as blood quantum. These rigid frameworks are not only limiting but also become internalized, and unlearning them can be a crucial step in addressing ethnostress.

Research participants have expressed multiplicity of their identities – being Sámi and Finnish at the same time. Some emphasized that it was very important for them to realise that they did not need to choose one of the identities. Máret, while feeling more Sámi, acknowledged both of her

ethnicities. Born to a Finnish mother and a Sámi father, she has lived her entire life in Sápmi:

But I totally identify myself more as a Sámi than a Finnish, but I'm still proud of being both. I think it's easier understand the Sámi current situation in Finland because I know both of cultures well. I guess everybody knows because we are living in the Finnish driven society. (Interview 2018, Aanaar, alias Máret, aged about 24)

For Karoliinná, hearing someone publicly acknowledge and speak openly about having both Finnish and Sámi backgrounds helped her recognize similar experiences in others and validated her own feelings and thoughts. This reduced her ethnostress by making it easier to accept herself as both Finnish and Sámi, rather than feeling pressured to choose between the two identities:

I was struggling also with my identity that well am I now Sámi or am I Finnish or which one and am I and that has been like major conflict in me because I don't feel full Sámi like 100 percent because I didn't grow up in the community and culture the same way that my Sámi friends and relatives have, but I also don't feel Finnish 100 percent that it's like I'm in the middle. But I think it's also this colonial middlism that's created that you either have to be like something and now I'm more comfortable. And now I saw this one documentary where [a person] introduced herself that "mun lean Sápmelaš ja mun lean suomelaš". She said that she was Sámi and Finnish and I was like okay well she said that I'm doing that also so that's what I've been really more comfortable. Because then I felt like I have to choose either one, that I can't be both. But now I'm more comfortable saying that I am Sámi and I'm also Finnish. And that has like decreased the stress so much. The pressure to choose either one. <...> It was also the first time that I heard a Sámi person say it. Because until that point I felt like all of my Sámi friends were like 100 percent Sámi. (Interview 2023, Rovaniemi, alias Karoliinná, early 30s)

Discussions about Sámi identity often begin early in childhood, when children encounter simplified or essentialized ways of categorizing ethnicity shaped by dominant societal understandings. Concepts such as being "half Sámi" reflect a monocultural logic that treats identity as divisible or measurable, often drawing on ideas of blood percentage historically imposed

by colonial and state frameworks. Research participants reflected on how such classifications can create confusion for children who are growing up within multiple cultural backgrounds. Helena, a Finnish mother raising Sámi children, shared a story that illustrates how these categories appear in everyday interactions and how families navigate them:

I think, half Sámi is kind of, I kind of used to think that it's kind of, I don't... It sounds like you're not good enough Sámi. Yeah, that you are, like, counting some blood percentages. Kind of like Indian and that was imposed by white people, like, that counting those blood percentages. And, yeah, it's like, like I think I said it before, like this one, somebody has said to my friend's son and like "Oh, you're a half Sámi". And he was little, like five years old and then he had later asked his mum, like, "OK, which part of me, like, is it, like, right half of me or left half of me that is Sámi and then is Finnish?" And then, I heard it as an example many many times before it. (Interview 2018, Aanaar, alias Helena, 40s)

Then she continued explaining about how she explained to her children their multiple identities:

You know, there is no such thing as half and that's how I've been saying to my sons too, that, you now, you are Sámi and you are Finnish. But if you want to be only Sámi, that's fine, you just Sámi and you don't feel Finnish, but I am Finnish, like, it's like up to you, who you are you say you are, but it's just I need to know. (Interview 2018, Aanaar, alias Helena, 40s)

Subsequently, Helena emphasized that identity was a personal choice and gave an example of her sons' cousins who had the same heritage but did not identify as Sámi:

Lásse's [name changed] and Máhte's [name changed] cousins who are my age, mostly in their 40s, they would not say they are Sámi. But, although, they are exactly the same. Like, they have exactly the same grandmother and heritage. But that they feel themselves Finns and Finnish. (Interview 2018, Aanaar, alias Helena, 40s)

Karoliinná has faced challenges in understanding her Sáminess due to the way her father framed it, explaining her identity in terms of being "partly Sámi" according to blood quantum. For her, the realization that it is not the

right way to see her identity, was an important aspect for reconnecting with her Sáminess. Rejecting the blood quantum framework allowed her to approach Sáminess as a lived, relational, and cultural experience, rather than a quantifiable attribute:

*[W]hen I was little my mother, she never, she rarely spoke about like Sámi identity. And when I was a child it was my father who always reminded me of my Sámi. But he's Finnish so he has a very colonial idea of what it means to be Indigenous. So he was always telling me that you're one eighth quarter Sámi or something. <...> Well I it always was so puzzling to me that why do you speak in this like quarters or percentages because if you are who you are you are a whole identity you are not quarter something or 20 percent something. But I started understanding more when I studied my Sámi and Indigenous studies in the university and also when I spoke to my very close friend who supported me through the letter and I said to her well my father said this and she was like well that's just complete bull*hit. And actually, yeah, she was the one who told me that that it's a very, like, Western approach to identity and that made me realize that. (Interview 2023, Rovaniemi, alias Karoliinná, early 30s)*

In the conversation with Heidi, the significance of appreciating her Finnish background emerged as an important theme. She observed that within certain contemporary Sámi contexts there could be an implicit sense that being Finnish was undesirable, leading some Sámi individuals disregard or underplay that part of their identity. Heidi, however, rejected this dichotomy. Instead, she embraced both her Finnish and Sámi heritage, expressing pride in holding and integrating Finnishness aspect of who she was:

I have this friend that she's actually said it. She says a lot stuff in the social media. And then she said there also out loud that she's Finnish or not like she's, like, Caralean. Carelean and Skolt Sámi. And they are kind of combining somehow. It has lots of same stuff. But I don't know I don't know why is it so bad somehow to say that you're Finnish because I don't think that there's anything wrong with it. <...> I think I can proudly say that I'm Finnish. But I'm also Sámi. I can proudly say that. I cheer for Finland (inaudible). You know, it's just I don't I don't want to separate those things. (Interview 2023, Aanaar, alias Heidi, aged 35+)

Earlier in the conversation, Heidi criticized the rigid division often drawn between Finnish and Sámi identities, as well as the tendency of others to emphasize only one aspect – Sáminess – as their background. She expressed frustration, sometimes even anger, toward individuals who disregarded or erased the other parts of their heritage. This reaction also revealed her own uncertainty about how to reconcile and integrate these identities. The exclusive emphasis on a single background not only challenged her sense of balance but also prompted her to question and at times doubt her own experience of belonging to both.

But for me, at some some times I feel that because it's so I think it's so rough sometimes the limit that you are either Sámi or you're either something else. And for me, I am Sámi and I'm Finnish. And that's just it. I cannot be either one. I'm both. Um, and to say that out loud is I don't know. For some people, it's okay because they think about it, like, the same way. But for some people, they are just so sad about it. So you're so fed up with it that you have to, all the time, make a, like, lift yourself. Like, I understand it. I understand it. And those people also I know that they also Finnish. They're not just Sámi. They are also Finnish. So, of course, I understand if I feel like it's fine, but I think that they shouldn't forget that they are also Finnish. (Interview 2023, Aanaar, alias Heidi, aged 35+)

Hence, acknowledgment and respect of both backgrounds but also an active personal choice as in the case of Helena's children are important to navigate multicultural backgrounds. Heidi criticized the not only the rigid lines of two ethnic identities but also emphasized hybridity:

And I think I sometimes laugh at myself in my head for those people because they make so much nonsense about this Sámi thing. And then they are just like me. Like, not all. They are half Finnish. And so I don't know why you have to why you have to forget, like, set aside the other part of you. Because you can't take it away. I think you can't just decide that, okay, my father is Sámi and my mother is, like, Finnish. I'm just gonna be a Sámi from my father's side. What about the other, like, relationships from mother's side?

Well, I understand that people don't want to take them to social media and everyone else's because I don't want to. So I don't mind that they don't. But I'm just a bit angry that they just talk about this Sámi stuff

and bring that up that they are Sámi. And why do you have why do you have to make so harsh line. Because people say that we are colonized and melted to the Finnish culture and all that. And that's why that, that is one reason I feel bad about saying that I'm Sámi and Finnish because I'm part of the, I'm the result of that, of melting. But I cannot take it away from me. It's I am part of it. The result of that. Of course, it's somehow from my parent's sides always, but of course, it's like that. It's your family that makes you what you are. (Interview 2023, Aanaar, alias Heidi, aged 35+)

However, the power dynamics in choosing and emphasizing these identities are not always equal. The many expectations associated with Sáminess may lead individuals to emphasize their Finnish identity when they feel they cannot meet the standards of what is considered “proper” Sáminess. Even though Heidi states that she is both Finnish and Sámi, later in the conversation she emphasized “half” identities revealing ongoing uncertainty about which of the cultures are stronger in her case. She returned to the topic of her not feeling comfortable to wear Sámi traditional clothes:

And somehow, of course, you make yourself also, but the family and the the relationships they're they are the foundation. And, uh, I don't know. Maybe I'm just too Finnish because I don't want to fight for the Sámi people. I don't know. I can't say. Yeah. But I just don't want to be either one. And maybe I have to, at some point, I told this one friend of mine with the costume [Sámi traditional dress] that maybe I'm just too Finnish already because I don't feel it, the costume.

When asked what her friend said about it, Heidi replied:

She was just like that's, like, well, of course, she's not like that. Like, yeah. But she wasn't like well, she's supportive and understanding and all that because I know that they are thinking about, uh, same stuff also even though they have more of the culture to themselves from their father's side left. They have I think they haven't lost so much of the language and culture as I think that I have. Maybe that. (Interview 2023, Aanaar, alias Heidi, aged 35+)

Research participants frequently emphasized that acknowledging multiple backgrounds and identities can help alleviate distress and reduce the uncertainty associated with questioning one's identity. For some, this means

being both Finnish and Sámi equally, for others this process involves embracing the hybridity of both backgrounds, yet for others it means choosing primarily one identity. However, identification is shaped not solely by heritage but also by the degree of engagement and contact with the culture itself. Thus, while such acknowledgment can ease tensions within one's self-identity, it may still prompt doubts about the depth of cultural immersion. Such uncertainties often manifest in relation to the markers of Sáminess. However, addressing and actively choosing and framing ones identity, acknowledging rigid lines of ethnic boundaries, can minimise the ethnostress. Hence, pluralizing and de-essentializing of identities in public eye is another crucial step.

De-essentializing and pluralizing Sámi identities

During conversations with people and my own observations, it became evident that even though Sáminess is most often understood in relation to community, living culture markers of Sáminess, and validation of a person as Sámi, there are many different forms of ethnostress and different Sámi backgrounds and experiences, which shape what markers of Sáminess are more significant in a person's identity construction. The plurality of Sáminess reflects the diverse ways individuals embody and relate to their Sámi identity. What it means to be Sámi can vary significantly depending on one's geographic location, lifestyle, and personal or familial history. For an urban Sámi activist living in the city, like Matti, Sáminess may manifest through cultural advocacy and political engagement. For a traditional reindeer herder, like Mihkkal or Biret, it may be closely tied to land-based practices and livelihoods. Yet, even this connection can come with profound hardship. Reindeer herding is not only a demanding way of life but also a source of ethnostress, as it requires navigating a complex intersection of tradition, economic pressure, and identity.

In the case of Matti and Karolinná, their connection to Sáminess emerges from ties with one side of their family, and is often expressed through efforts to reconnect with their relatives and Sami culture, and by doing some important political and scholarly work for the community. The fact that Sámi identity was not openly discussed in their families, or that, like Matti, faced mockery in urban settings, highlights the emotional and social challenges of claiming a marginalized identity. Their response to this hardship is both personal and political. For mental health professional Rahko, who knows the language, lives away from Sápmi and deals with ethnostress questions as a

mental health professional, the important aspect of Sáminess is cultural knowledge – something rarely visible in dominant Sámi markers.

The representations of plurality and in this way de-essentialisation of Sáminess is an important aspect in coping with ethnostress. For example, as mentioned before, Karoliinná found it as a crucial turning point in her relationship between Finnish and Sámi identities and backgrounds when seeing a documentary where a person told that she was both Sámi and Finnish. Karoliinná emphasized the significance of representation: *“it was definitely the question of representation that I realized this through. So it has played a major part in this realization because I saw this documentary”* (Interview 2023, Rovaniemi, alias Karoliinná, early 30s). Media representations of such complex identities validate the experience, allowing people to see that others have similar thoughts. This guides in dealing with distressful feelings of identity.

Matti told about Instagram stories he started to make to change the narratives about the Sámi people. He illustrated various Sámi characters recognisable for Sámi people, not always so clear for outsiders as they did not match “traditional” representations of Sámi people. However, these representations were more relatable and real from the perspective of contemporary everyday life:

*But, like, this kind of models that we have. <...> when I started making them, the Sámi people find that hilarious because they can relate to them. <...> the Sámi people knew exactly, okay, this is that, and it's not necessarily as obvious to those who are not Sámi what these archetypes are. <...> But in the Sámi context, everyone can immediately have an image of their mind of them. <...> I think part of what I'm also trying to do is to change the narratives in a kind of a way. That's why I actually started to do more English stuff as well <...> so I can do that and then cater to also the people who follow me who are researchers or whatever. But, yeah, those markers are or what it is to be Sámi. <...> you can be a fu*k boy who plays hockey or something. And it doesn't make any less Sámi for the Sámi people, but the pressure is most I think the pressure is mostly from the outside <...>. (Interview 2023, Helsinki, alias Matti, early 30s)*

A similar effect can be observed in the previously discussed *Sohkaršohkka* sketches, which use satire to challenge both external and internal constructions of essentialized and “authentic” Sáminess. By humorously exposing stereotypes and rigid expectations surrounding Sámi

identity, the sketches open space for more flexible and plural understanding of what it means to be Sámi. Comparable discussions also appear in media debates addressing so-called “ethnostress” and the legitimacy of diverse Sámi identities, including urban Sámi experiences. For instance, in a journalistic piece by Honkanen (2014), conversations with Morottaja and Ruotsala highlight that living outside traditional Sámi areas or in urban environments does not make one less Sámi. Similar reflections appear in Heikkinen (2019), where employees of the Sámi Museum Siida discuss contemporary identity negotiations and emphasize that Sámi identity can take multiple forms in modern contexts. Moreover, the inclusion of diversity of experiences of Saminess can be visible in the renewed Siida museum exhibition which presents diverse representations of Sámi identities, including urban Sámi, queer Sámi, small Sámi groups, language revival, and religious traditions, highlighting the multiplicity of contemporary Sámi experiences. Video narratives also reveal internal debates about identity, such as differing views on language, cultural practices, and the voluntary or imposed nature of Sámi identification (Fieldwork notes, 2018).

These examples disrupt and reframe the dominant narrative, undermining its perceived legitimacy. It is important to note that the forms of Saminess discussed here are not exhaustive. Rather, they represent individual narratives and my observations, offering a glimpse into the diverse and evolving expressions of Sámi identity. These accounts also demonstrate the agency of Sámi individuals in shaping how Saminess is understood and lived in everyday life. By questioning rigid expectations of authenticity and presenting diverse experiences of identity, they contribute to the gradual de-essentialization of Sámi identity and expand the range of what can be recognized as Sámi.

5.5. Collective and Institutional Responses to Ethnostress

During the research, people pointed to the various institutional problems in connection with the feeling of ethnostress. Sámi society is working on them and has been addressing those issues through the Sámi Parliament, projects, and advocacy. Recently it has also been addressed in the Sámi Truth and Reconciliation Reports (2025). One of the most common issues people were referring to, is the lack of information about Sami people in the Finnish education system. The lack of information and teaching about Sámi people fails Sámi themselves since they feel they do not know enough about their own people and history, and cannot answer or explain things when asked by outsiders. This deepens the feeling of ethnostress – a need to learn

more, know more, and feeling not good enough Sámi at a given time. Máret remembered her school years in Finnish speaking class which used to be common experience among Sámi children in the 1990s and 2000s:

Especially because I didn't go to the Sámi speaking class, like I explained, I was going to Finnish speaking class, but there are so many things that they don't teach at school, it's not only harmful to the Finnish, but the Sámi people. Cause there is so much, so many historical people and events that we don't learn at school, so we kind of have to learn it ourselves, like, you go to university or you read a book, but it's like not the part of the Finnish history education. (Interview 2018, Aanaar, alias Máret, aged about 24)

According to Máret and Biret the introduction of more history and information on contemporary Sámi society into Finnish school education would help to solve problems of racism among people, and inform the law makers about Sámi issues:

I think, it would be very big asset for us that the school system would start teaching [about Sámi], because then those who go to the Finnish Parliament, would know about our culture and things really don't go forward, because they don't know even the basics about our culture, or they haven't even really been here. So, it all just seems this mythological not existing thing and we are seen as Finns. And the Sámi culture as is seen, kind of, oh it's kind of a side path of Finnish culture. So, that's still how assimilation is still continuing. (Interview 2018, Aanaar, alias Máret, aged about 24)

...I don't know if it's, like, one page in the history books that tells about Sámi. So actually if, even though you live in Sámi area but you're not Sámi, you don't learn about the Sámi in the school <...>. And if your parents have some kind of, I don't know (slightly laughing) opinion about Sámi people then yeah... So I think the Finnish education plan is like a key to end the racism. (Interview 2023, Aanaar, alias Biret, aged about 25)

Another key theme that has emerged was the institutional preparation of the mental health sector. With the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, the Sámi psychological help organization Uvjj – Uvjâ – Uvja emerged offering Sámi speaking help in three languages. The psychologists

would have same cultural understanding, which otherwise was often an obstacle for Sámi to seek psychological services. They had to explain so much cultural background and ethnostress to Finnish psychologists. Biret felt very grateful with the Uvjj – Uvjâ – Uvja initiative:

Like a support centre. So it's really good. And that they have, like, professionals that are Sámi themselves. Because I also have like experience about when I go to see some kind of like professional (slightly laughing) and when I try, and when I try to, like, speak about things that, like, stresses me or something. But it's always, like, if you go to speak to someone so called professional but you have to first, like, teach them about everything (Biret and I are laughing), and why is it important, and why it could be stressful, and, yeah, it doesn't work. So, Uvja is really good. (Interview 2023, Aanaar, alias Biret, aged about 25)

Rahko gave a detailed account on major stages of ethnostress in humans and how mental health services in various institutions should be taught to recognise the stress and provide support. Rahko pointed out five stages of life: childhood when the child starts attending the school and is immersed in different cultural background and might experience bullying because of being different; search for identity between teenage years and 30s; having first child and experiencing stress of passing the culture; when retiring and entering an elderly care institution where a person must be able to practice cultural things one practiced in childhood and did not have a chance to do while working; and fifth is related to death, that is, mourning time for community and cultural knowledge lost with the deceased one. In most of these stages there are school, hospitals, and elderly care institutions involved, where professionals have to be prepared to recognise ethnostress and meet the needs by including cultural elements into services they provide. Rahko explained that these moments require culturally informed support from institutions:

I think there are some key moments in our lives when we find or need protection because of our culture. <...> The first one is when child goes to school. Then you have to somehow prepare the child for going to the different kind of cultural background <...> they might try to bully you and you might be thinking you're different <...>. Then next one is when you are searching for your own identity <...> from 16 <...> to the 30s <...> the key point there is that our school health

system should be informed that Sámi people who are feeling this ethnostress or distress <...> then you should take the Sámi background and try to take the cultural elements in your work you are doing <...>. And the next one is when you are thinking or waiting to give your first child <...> that's one of the ethnostress things that we have to Sámi people <...> we have someone with whom to tell and teach what we have learned so our culture is going on. <...> our healthcare system should be informed <...> take the cultural elements and give Sámi materials <...>. <...> Second last one is when you are retiring <...> then you are going to the elderhood and then there are things that you have to, like, give cultural support that do the things that you have done in the childhood. <...> And then the last one is when a person dies <...> because always when a Sámi person dies she or he takes everything that she has learned with him and everything that she or he hasn't told and taught dies with that person. So it is a very stressing time in Sámi culture when someone dies <...>. (Interview 2024, online, Niila Rahko (THL), aged 33)

Good examples of institutional management of ethnostress are the SOGSÁKK teaching practices in Sámi language and culture. When I attended the Northern Sámi class, during one of the first lessons, the teacher approached the question of possible difficult feelings when Sámi students were learning Sámi. The teacher informed that one might become harsh on themselves, that they did not succeed as well as their non-Sámi coursemates or expected too much of themselves, and this is related to language loss trauma. Later, the teacher acknowledged that these feelings were normal and commonly experienced by Sámi students. The teacher then showed a slide of the Uvjj – Uvjâ – Uvja psychological support service and encouraged students to seek help if needed. While interviewing research participants who were attending Sámi language and culture studies at SOGSÁKK (an intensive one-year Sámi language programme), I also asked about the trauma related aspects of language learning and teachers' strategies to mitigate them. Risten described how students often experienced an identity crisis while teachers being supportive prepared students in advance for what might happen during their studies: “<...>she might say, like, yeah you know it's normal that you feel insecure and it's normal if you cry in here and we can cry and you can tell how you feel <...>” (Interview 2018, Aanaar, alias Risten, aged about 40). Such moments would appear in the classrooms during the year and people would discuss these experiences together in a group. Heidi remembered her year of language studies:

[I]t was so intense to think about all this. Of course, we had these culture lessons also about, like, all this, uh, what's happened. And and then because we talked a lot among ourselves, there came a lot of things from, like, each person, like, what they have experienced. So in that way, thinking all of that stuff and your own thoughts and all that, in that way, it was a bit hard year to find out that. (Interview 2023, Aanaar, alias Heidi, aged 35+)

However, she also admitted that it was a difficult year and she probably deliberately tried to forget some of the experiences:

I was quite tired from the year. Thinking a lot about all the stuff and saying out loud. And I have to say, I don't even remember all those. I think I have wanted to forget some of the feelings and all that to go on, like, forward. Because I have already once, like, dealt with them. (Interview 2023, Aanaar, alias Heidi, aged 35+)

These examples can be understood through the concept of cultural safety (Māori: *Kawa Whakaruruhau*), first developed by Irihapeti Ramsden together with Māori nurses in Aotearoa New Zealand (Ramsden 1990). Cultural safety shifts the focus from the professional's self-assessed competence to the experience of the client, patient, student, or community member: safety cannot be declared by the institution or professional but must be experienced by the person receiving the service (Ramsden 2000; Curtis et al. 2019). This perspective is particularly relevant in the Sámi context, where encounters with schools, health services, and mental health professionals may reactivate histories of assimilation, language loss, and cultural humiliation. Rather than focusing solely on professionals acquiring cultural knowledge or competence, cultural safety emphasizes critical self-reflection, cultural humility (ability to acknowledge inherited biases, see So, et al. 2024), recognition of historical and contemporary power relations, and institutional accountability for creating environments in which Indigenous people themselves experience services as culturally safe (Ramsden 2000; Curtis et al. 2019; So et al. 2024).⁵

Hence, institutional preparation, professional training, and knowledge of ethnostress are significant policy steps toward culturally safe education,

⁵ This synthesis also benefited from discussions with Niila Rahko (THL), whose work on culturally safe psychotherapy in Sámi contexts illustrates how the principles of cultural safety can be operationalized in Finnish mental health services.

healthcare, and mental health services. Reducing ethnostress requires not only individual sensitivity, but also institutional structures that recognize historical context, support Sámi languages, and respond to the needs defined by Sámi people themselves.

Celebrating Sáminess

While institutional preparation and culturally informed services play an important role in recognizing and addressing ethnostress, responses to these challenges also emerge through everyday cultural practices and community life. Beyond formal support structures, many Sámi emphasize the importance of collective spaces where Sámi identity can be experienced in positive, joyful, and empowering ways. Celebrating Sáminess through festivals, cultural gatherings, humour, and creative expression allows people to reaffirm belonging and pride, counterbalancing narratives that frame Sámi identity primarily through trauma or struggle. In this sense, moments of celebration and shared enjoyment become another important way of reducing ethnostress and strengthening collective identity.

Astri Dankertsen (2022) writes about activism as having fun. The author explores how young Sámi living in cities express activism through cultural practices that are often playful, creative, and social rather than overtly political. She argues that activities such as participating in festivals, sharing humour, using Sámi symbols in fashion or social media, and creating spaces of joy and community can themselves function as forms of political engagement. These practices challenge the stereotypes of activism as only protest or confrontation and instead show how celebration of Sámi culture, identity, and community becomes a subtle but powerful form of resistance and visibility. Dankertsen writes:

Studying fun as a part of Sámi resistance can give us new insights into how young Sámi negotiate ways of interacting and claiming Sámi space in a society dominated by non-Sámi lifestyles. They are finding ways of gathering young Sámi that give them the opportunity to define for themselves how they want to be Sámi. Sámi young people having fun can therefore also be a way of resisting the settler-colonial elimination (cf. Wolfe 2006) of Sámi communities. (Dankertsen 2022, 565)

The scholar also emphasises that the act of having fun also can change stereotypes of “authentic” Sáminess as living in non-urban environments and helps Sámi who live in cities to maintain their Sáminess and make it visible:

The urbanization of Sápmi is also of a conceptual character, relating to stereotypes and false notions of authenticity. From the perspective of the historical discipline of Lappology studies, the idea of urban Sáminess was an oxymoron, because Sáminess was strongly bound to ideas of northern, peripheral and rural areas, as well as being strongly bound to nature. Urban landscapes were seen as unnatural and unsuitable for the Sámi. In addition, urbanization in the north often involved a process by which the Sámi were written out of history in the new northern urban areas. (Dankertsen 2022, 565)

The text highlights that for many urban Sámi youth, having fun together through music, art, gatherings, and cultural expression can strengthen collective identity and contribute to broader Indigenous activism, particularly in contexts where Sámi identity may be marginalized or questioned. In this way, Dankertsen demonstrates that everyday cultural practices and enjoyment can operate as meaningful political acts within contemporary Sámi identity politics.

Similarly, Sámi writer and theologian, Helga West, in her Instagram post reminds how important it is to show to children the joy of being Sámi and Indigenous, alongside talking and seeing struggles. Sharing a photograph of herself wearing a *gákti*, she writes: “Teach Indigenous joy as much as you teach Indigenous trauma” (@helgasofe 2025). In her interview with *Sana* in 2025, West spoke about the importance of joy and gratitude. She expressed her appreciation of little things such as having specific technologies adopted to the environment, language that was precise to describe things, and a place to return home to, comparing herself with refugees and other Indigenous peoples who did not have a place to come back to (cited in Aartolahti 2025).

Sámi film director, Suvi West, also emphasised the importance of the joy. In her Instagram post during the Sámi National Day, she refused to talk about negative things, aspects of the Sáminess struggles:

Yesterday, the 6th of Feb was Sámi National Day. That is the only day in the year I refuse to talk about the problems and the fears. At the same time it's the only day when media and non-Sámi society cares about our culture and wants to lift all the horrible things that has and are happening to us.

I would love if non-Sámi could talk about ongoing colonialism around the year and not the day when we are celebrating the beauty of our culture. For me 6.2 is a happy day with full of love. This is the day I

witness how my culture is alive and vibrant even if the surrounding world tell the opposite <...>. (@suviwest 2025)

Torikka, the producer of the *Sohkaršohka* programme and the author of sketches on Instagram noted in an interview: “<..>I think life for Sámi people is hard enough so that’s important that there is also like joking and making fun, and that kind of stuff” (Interview 2023, Torikka).

Interestingly, having fun for youth is also escaping the Sámi internal conflicts. In her study Dankersten maintains:

Both Kristina and Márjá describe a kind of alienation in the ordinary Sámi meeting places because they feel that there are too many “old” people there. Márjá’s quote describes a situation in which she feels that there are a lot of conflicts. The description of the Sámi House in Oslo as a place with “a lot of old, grumpy people” can be analyzed as a way of distancing herself from the conflicts that arise there, which can be linked to more general disagreements and conflicts within Sámi society in general, due to political divisions, and personal conflicts specific to the Sámi House in Oslo. (Dankertsen 2022, 575)

The meetings with young Sámi and celebrations help to forget these conflicts and negative emotions around Sáminess. There are many Sámi and Indigenous music and movie festivals taking place in Sápmi, such as Riddu Riddu, Skábmagovat, Ijahis Idja, numerous markets like yearly Jåhkåmåhkke (Sve. *Jokkmokk*) market and Vuonnamárkanat in Vuonnabahta (Nor. *Varangerbotn*). These events bring Sámi together from across Sápmi, they celebrate and enjoy the culture with Sámi and guests, and make culture visible in a positive light. These events provide important opportunities for community to meet, reconnect, have fun together and in this way create shared feelings of belonging and acceptance.

Together, these examples show that responses to ethnostress operate both at institutional and community levels. Institutional initiatives, such as culturally informed mental health services, improved representation in education, and professional training to recognize ethnostress, play an important role in acknowledging the specific experiences of Sámi people and providing appropriate support. At the same time, collective cultural practices that celebrate Sáminess contribute to reducing ethnostress by fostering pride, belonging, and positive visibility. Festivals, humour, creative expression, and shared cultural spaces allow Sámi individuals to experience their identity in empowering ways that counterbalance narratives centred solely on trauma or

struggle. In this sense, both institutional recognition and everyday cultural celebration become complementary ways through which Sámi communities respond to ethnostress and strengthen diverse forms of Sámi identity.

Concluding Remarks

This chapter has examined a range of strategies through which people cope with ethnostress in everyday life. The ethnographic material demonstrates that these strategies are multiple, overlapping, and deeply embedded in both personal and collective practice. Approaches such as *birget* (managing or making it through), accepting personal limits in relation to cultural expectations, reconnecting with language and community, contributing to collective life, and seeking validation through kinship relations illustrate how people negotiate pressures surrounding authenticity and belonging. At the same time, humour, satire, and the de-essentialization of identity emerge as equally significant practices that allow individuals to question rigid expectations of what a “proper” Sámi should be.

While this analytical perspective draws inspiration from literature on the everyday forms of agency and subtle resistance, it also acknowledges critique and interconnectedness and overlap of these strategies, or may even appear contradictory. For example, like Heidi, individuals may verbally downplay the importance of certain expectations or express acceptance of their limitations, while at the same time emphasizing their Sáminess through family relations, cultural participation, or other markers of belonging. Some approaches conform to existing expectations while mitigating distress, whereas others actively challenge and redefine dominant narratives of Sáminess. Such apparent inconsistencies do not necessarily indicate confusion or lack of commitment; instead, they reflect the complex ways people navigate the pressures surrounding Sámi identity in everyday life. In this sense, the practices described in this chapter should not be understood as clearly defined forms of resistance or accommodation, but as flexible and situational ways of negotiating expectations of authenticity. These overlapping and sometimes contradictory practices illustrate how individuals manage ethnostress within the entangled dynamics of power, identity, and belonging. While the list of strategies presented here is not exhaustive, it demonstrates the diverse ways people regulate expectations of authenticity and negotiate their relationship to Sámi identity.

In this chapter, I examine not only the strategies of coping with ethnostress but also the ways in which Sáminess itself is actively reinterpreted and de-essentialized, drawing on the concept of narrative imagination

(Meretoja 2018). The ethnographic evidence suggests that Sámi individuals engage in precisely this kind of narrative work. Through everyday practices, conversations, and reflections, they question essentialized notions of ethnicity and create space for more plural understandings of Sáminess. While Sámi identity is often described in relation to community recognition, living culture, and collective belonging, the experiences documented in this chapter reveal a wide diversity of backgrounds and life trajectories that shape how individuals relate to cultural markers of Sáminess. What counts as meaningful expressions of identity varies depending on personal history, geographic location, and forms of participation in Sámi social life. For an urban Sámi activist, such as Matti, Sáminess may manifest through cultural advocacy and political engagement. For a traditional reindeer herder, like Mihkkal or Biret, it may be closely connected to land-based practices and livelihoods.

Rather than closing this chapter solely with a discussion of coping strategies, it is also important to consider how these practices contribute to broader ways of imagining Sámi futures. While research on Indigenous peoples often emphasizes the ongoing impacts of colonization, scholars such as Eve Tuck (2009) have called for approaches that move beyond narratives centred exclusively on damage and loss. Tuck's notion of *desire-based research* highlights the importance of focusing on the aspirations, creativity, and agency through which Indigenous communities imagine and enact their futures. In contemporary Sámi contexts, such future-oriented perspectives are increasingly visible in cultural practices, activism, and everyday community life. As Dankertsen (2022) notes, young Sámi people actively create new spaces for positive expressions of Sámi identity through creative practices, social initiatives, and cultural gatherings. These practices challenge dominant narratives that portray Sámi culture either as belonging solely to the past or as permanently damaged by colonialism. In this sense, acts of cultural celebration, creative expression, and community building can themselves function as subtle but powerful forms of resistance. Sámi communities continue to negotiate the meanings and boundaries of Sáminess through everyday practices of cultural renewal and adaptation. As the director of the Sámi Museum Siida, Sari Valkonen, notes, Sámi culture is preserved not by resisting change but by adapting: *"Instead of mourning what has been lost, we see our own in the foreign and the old in the new <...> Sámi culture is preserved through adaptation"* (Heikkinen 2019, my translation).

The strategies described in this chapter demonstrate that coping with ethnostress is not only about managing personal feelings of inadequacy but also about collectively re-narrating what Sáminess can mean in contemporary contexts. Through practices of acceptance, reconnection, humour, community

support, and identity reframing, Sámi individuals actively expand the boundaries of what counts as legitimate Sámi experience. In doing so, they challenge essentialized understandings of ethnicity reproduced within settler-colonial contexts and, more broadly, within anthropological discussions of identity. The strategies documented here therefore reveal not only resilience in the face of ethnostress but also the creative capacity of Sámi communities to reinterpret identity, imagine alternative narratives, and open space for multiple ways of being Sámi today.

CONCLUSIONS

This dissertation set out to investigate ethnostress as both a lived experience among Sámi people in Finland and as an analytical tool for understanding the enduring logics of settler colonialism in Sápmi. Through historical analysis, critical engagement with Sámi scholarship, examination of media narratives, and long-term ethnographic fieldwork, it has demonstrated that ethnostress is not merely an individual psychological phenomenon but a structural effect of ongoing settler-colonial power. It arises at the intersection of dispossession, assimilation, and the politics of authenticity, shaping how Sámi people experience identity, belonging, and recognition in contemporary society. This concluding chapter summarises the dissertation's key arguments, articulates its analytical contributions, and situates the findings within broader debates on colonialism, ethnicity, and Indigenous identity.

Main Findings: Rethinking Ethnostress Through Settler Colonialism

The first key finding of this dissertation is that ethnostress cannot be understood solely as a psychological consequence of historical assimilation or intergenerational trauma. Rather, it emerges through the ongoing conditions of settler colonialism and coloniality, where Sámi identities continue to be regulated by dominant epistemologies and unequal relations of recognition. Colonialism is therefore not simply the historical background against which ethnostress developed, but an active social condition that continues to shape how Sámi people experience themselves and are perceived by others. In this sense, ethnostress reflects the persistence of coloniality in everyday life rather than merely its historical legacy.

The main contribution of this dissertation is that it demonstrates that expectations of authenticity constitute one of the central mechanisms through which settler-colonial power continues to operate. Expectations regarding language, livelihoods, clothing, cultural knowledge, or ways of living are not simply cultural preferences but systems of recognition that define who can legitimately be regarded as “proper” Sámi. Ethnostress emerges from not matching this expected image of Sáminess, with some people starting to question their own Sami identity. In this way, authenticity demands work for settler-colonial logic of eliminating Natives and their identities. These expectations are reproduced not only by majority societies but also, at times, within Sámi communities themselves. They are formed within Sámi ethnopolitical movement and identity formation, which establish symbols or

markers of Sáminess and seek to emphasise distinction (otherness) from colonisers.

Another contribution of this dissertation is to complicate the relationship between coloniality and essentialisation. While essentialised images of Sámi identity originate within colonial systems of classification, they have also become important resources in Indigenous political mobilisation, cultural revitalisation, and struggles for collective rights. Rather than interpreting essentialisation solely as a nationalist or ideological project, this dissertation argues that it has often functioned as a strategy of survival within settler-colonial conditions. At the same time, this strategy creates tensions for individuals who do not fully correspond to dominant representations of Sáminess, thereby producing experiences of ethnostress.

Although ethnostress is rooted in unequal power relations, the ethnographic material demonstrates that people are not passive recipients of these pressures. Individuals actively negotiate, reinterpret, and challenge expectations of authenticity through everyday practices, including cultural learning, language revitalisation, community participation, humour, storytelling, the re-evaluation of personal identities, managing expectations, and addressing ethnostress publicly in media, social media, and academic debates. Ethnostress therefore appears not only as a condition of vulnerability but also as an ongoing process through which Sámi people exercise agency in shaping their own identities and relationships to community and tradition.

Finally, the dissertation argues that many of these everyday negotiations contribute to broader processes of decolonisation. Rather than abandoning Sámi identity, research participants expand and renegotiate what it means to be Sámi under contemporary conditions. By questioning rigid criteria of authenticity and acknowledging multiple pathways to belonging, they participate in the gradual de-essentialisation of Sáminess without undermining Indigenous political distinctiveness. Decolonisation therefore emerges not only through institutional or legal change but also through everyday practices that transform the meanings of identity, belonging, and authenticity from within Sámi communities.

Ethnostress as an Analytical Tool

The central analytical contribution of this dissertation lies in the conceptualization and empirical development of ethnostress as a tool for understanding how settler-colonial logics operate at the level of everyday identity. In this dissertation, ethnostress is defined as a form of ethnicity-

related stress that emerges from the need to negotiate, perform, and justify one's ethnic belonging within contexts shaped by settler-colonial histories and ongoing power relations, and expectations of authenticity. It names the tension experienced when individuals must position themselves in relation to both dominant societal expectations and internal community norms – particularly around authenticity, cultural competence, and belonging – in ways that members of the dominant group are never required to do. Crucially, ethnostress is not only a result of external discrimination or stigma, but also of the relational and discursive processes through which ethnic identities are constructed, contested, and maintained.

What the empirical analysis of this dissertation makes unmistakably clear is that ethnostress can seemingly be many things: language, handicrafts, traditional clothing, reindeer herding, place of residence, activist engagement, family background, and livelihoods. Yet this expansiveness is not a conceptual weakness, it is precisely the analytical point. The aspects of life that produce ethnostress for Sámi individuals are not inherently stressful. They would not be experienced as identity burdens at all if the person were not a member of a colonized minority group. A Finn who dislikes handicrafts, or lives far from their ancestral region does not face a crisis of ethnic legitimacy. For a Sámi person, the same situations can become sources of deep anxiety about adequacy, authenticity, and cultural survival. Ethnostress thus reveals how settler-colonial logics pervade everyday life, requiring those marked as culturally “other” to continuously perform and demonstrate their otherness as a condition for recognition, while the dominant group's identity remains unmarked, naturalized, and beyond scrutiny.

The analytical value of ethnostress lies not simply in describing another form of stress, but in identifying a distinct mechanism through which settler colonialism continues to operate in everyday life. It bridges structural, discursive, and experiential levels of analysis, connecting macro-level processes of coloniality and nation-state formation with micro-level experiences of identity, emotion, and belonging. While related to frameworks such as minority stress, ethnostress offers a more context-specific lens that foregrounds the role of ethnicity, authenticity, and colonial histories in shaping pressure, and that locates these pressures not only in external discrimination but in the internalization of colonial expectations by communities themselves. Importantly, the concept also illuminates agency: individuals do not passively experience ethnostress but actively negotiate, resist, and rework these pressures in their everyday lives. In this sense, ethnostress provides a nuanced lens for understanding both the constraints and

the creative possibilities involved in contemporary Indigenous identity formation.

A key contribution of this dissertation is to distinguish ethnostress from broader concepts such as minority stress. While minority stress primarily refers to the psychological consequences of stigma, prejudice, discrimination, and social exclusion experienced by members of marginalized groups, ethnostress identifies a different mechanism. It arises not primarily from discrimination itself, but from the need to continuously negotiate, perform, and legitimate an essentialized ethnic identity produced through settler-colonial histories. In the Indigenous context, individuals experience pressure not only from the majority society but also through tourism, state recognition frameworks, media representations, and internal community expectations regarding language, cultural competence, traditional livelihoods, or other markers of authenticity. Ethnostress is therefore multidirectional and relational, operating across multiple social arenas rather than through majority-minority relations alone. Most importantly, it is rooted in the epistemological and political logics of settler colonialism, which continue to regulate what counts as a legitimate Indigenous identity. Consequently, reducing discrimination alone cannot eliminate ethnostress, because its underlying causes lie in the enduring colonial structures that organize recognition, authenticity, and belonging.

Ethnostress as Internalized Anxiety: Between Structure and the Self

One of the most theoretically significant findings of this dissertation concerns what might be called the paranoid or anxiety-driven dimension of ethnostress, a form that does not correspond to any concrete external accusation or exclusion, yet is no less real in its effects. Karoliinná's account is a good example. She described a persistent worry that other Sámi might perceive her public engagement with Sámi culture and identity politics as performing or "trying too hard", even though no one had ever said this to her. She recognized the feeling as internally generated: "It's more like anxious paranoia than actual truth behind it". Similarly, her insecurity about speaking Sámi in community settings persists even as her language skills improve and even as her Sámi friends reassure her, suggesting that the psychological weight of ethnostress is not dissolved simply by acquiring cultural markers. This dimension of ethnostress – internalized, self-directed, and disconnected from any single external provocation – reveals the depth to which colonial logics have been sedimented in self-perception. The settler-colonial framework has done its work so thoroughly that its demands are reproduced

from within, shaping how people assess themselves even in the absence of overt policing.

This connects to the dissertation's broader theoretical argument about coloniality as a "matrix of power" (Quijano 1992; Mignolo and Walsh 2018) that operates not only through external institutions but through the internalization of colonial worldviews by colonized individuals and communities. Ethnostress, in this sense, is not merely a response to what others say or do, it is a manifestation of how colonial categories of authenticity, adequacy, and legitimacy have been taken up as internal standards for self-evaluation. This insight advances existing literature on settler colonialism, which has tended to focus on structural and historical dimensions, by foregrounding the affective and experiential consequences of coloniality in everyday life.

Ethnostress as a Site of Agency and Resistance

The dissertation insists that ethnostress must not only be understood as a burden but also as a site of possibility. Chapter 5 demonstrated that Sámi individuals and communities are not passive recipients of settler-colonial pressures but active agents who navigate, negotiate, and often transform them. Drawing on Scott's work *Weapons of the Weak* (1985) and theories of everyday practice, the chapter identified a range of strategies through which people cope with, resist, and rearticulate the expectations that produce ethnostress. These include *birget*, the Sámi cultural ethic of managing and enduring, as well as humour and satire, de-essentialization of Sámi identity markers, embracing hybrid or multiple identities, reconnection through language and family, and the cultivation of collective joy and pride around Sáminess. The growing use of the term "ethnostress" itself within Sámi communities represents an important step. Naming the experience makes it discussable, and recognizing it as structurally produced rather than a personal failure opens space for collective reflection and decolonial response.

These strategies are not merely individual coping mechanisms. They are forms of everyday decolonization that challenge the rigid binaries – authentic/inauthentic, traditional/modern, Sámi/Finnish – imposed by colonial frameworks. When participants reject the idea that one must speak perfect Sámi, own reindeer, or make all of one's own clothing in order to be "proper" Sámi, they are delinking from colonial epistemologies in precisely the sense Mignolo describes. When Sámi writers, artists, and public figures reclaim the right to be simply a musician or a person, instead of always being, first and foremost, a "Sámi" musician or a "Sámi" person, they challenge the reduction

of Indigenous identity to its most visible and exoticized markers. And when communities debate, satirize, and negotiate among themselves the meanings and limits of Sáminess, they demonstrate that Indigenous identity is not static but dynamically produced and continuously rearticulated. Ethnostress, in this sense, is not only a symptom of colonial oppression, but also a catalyst for cultural creativity and identity renewal.

Yet the dissertation also cautions against romanticizing resilience or placing the entire burden of transformation on individuals and communities. The strategies examined in Chapter 5 arise precisely because structural conditions have produced the need for them. The ability to cope with, resist, and creatively navigate ethnostress does not eliminate its structural causes. For this reason, the dissertation insists that while agency is visible at the individual and community level, institutional and state-level action is equally essential.

The Necessity of Reconciliation and Institutional Change

Ethnostress will not disappear through community resilience alone. So long as the structural conditions that produce it remain in place – colonial epistemologies embedded in education systems, the absence of comprehensive reconciliation processes, and the persistence of authenticity-based frameworks for Indigenous recognition – individuals will continue to be caught in loops of self-doubt, inadequacy, and the relentless need to perform their own belonging. The Finnish education system, as this dissertation documents, remains a significant site of settler ignorance. Sámi history, culture, and colonial experience are marginal or absent from national curricula, producing a knowledge vacuum that burdens Sámi individuals with the exhausting task of explaining themselves to a majority population that has never been taught their history. Ruotsala’s refusal to be “a walking Sámi dictionary” and Helga West’s observation that “shouldn’t it be someone else’s job to fill that knowledge gap” point to a structural problem that cannot be resolved at the individual level.

The ongoing Truth and Reconciliation Commissions in the Sámi context represent an important step toward addressing these structural roots. However, reconciliation cannot be limited to formal processes of acknowledgment. It must extend to concrete changes in curricula, media representation, language revitalization support, land and resource rights, and the reform of recognition frameworks that currently reproduce essentialist demands. Without the majority-side’s effort by the states, educational institutions, and dominant societies, the burden will continue to fall

disproportionately on minority individuals, who will remain trapped in the loop of having to demonstrate, prove, and justify a belonging that should need no justification.

The state produced settler colonial relationships through intensifying settlements up north and assimilation policies, hence, it has also a duty to reduce ethnostress it causes. Research participants identify a continuous need for institutional support for Sámi communities. The findings also have practical implications for the design of public services. Participants consistently emphasized that culturally safe education, healthcare, and mental health services require more than cultural awareness or competence. They require professionals and institutions to understand the historical effects of assimilation, recognize power imbalances, and create environments in which Sámi people do not have to justify or explain their identity before receiving appropriate support. This includes integrating Sámi histories and contemporary realities into educational curricula, strengthening Sámi-language services, incorporating cultural safety into professional training, and ensuring that institutional responses are developed in collaboration with Sámi communities.

Contributions to Anthropology and Broader Relevance

This dissertation makes three main contributions. First, it advances the anthropological understanding of power in the discursive formation of ethnicity by showing, through granular ethnographic evidence, how expectations of authenticity are constructed, internalized, and contested in settler-colonial contexts. It demonstrates that expectations of authenticity are an everyday mechanism of settler colonialism. Following that, essentialization is not simply a nationalist project but a survival strategy within settler-colonial conditions, one that nevertheless generates its own pressures, including ethnostress. In doing so, it bridges personal experiences and broader colonial power structures, contributing both to theoretical debates on settler colonialism and coloniality and to a more nuanced understanding of Indigenous identity struggles.

Second, it expands Sámi scholarship by providing the first in-depth ethnographic analysis of ethnostress among the Sámi in Finland. While the concept has been mentioned in Sámi academic and public discourse since at least the 1990s (Kuokkanen 1998; Valkonen 2009; Lehtola 2015a), it has never been systematically documented at the level of lived, everyday experience. This dissertation rectifies that gap, offering richly textured accounts of how ethnostress is experienced across different backgrounds,

generations, and life trajectories, from reindeer herders navigating climate change to urban-raised Sámi navigating reconnection. It also demonstrates how sources such as media, literature, and fieldwork observation together illuminate dimensions of ethnostress that no single method could capture alone.

Third, this dissertation demonstrates why ethnostress is needed as a distinct analytical concept for Indigenous contexts shaped by settler colonialism. Existing concepts such as minority stress explain the effects of discrimination and marginalization but do not fully capture the pressures produced by authenticity expectations, the performance of Indigenous identity, and the internalization of colonial standards of legitimacy. Ethnostress therefore provides a concept that is specifically attuned to the historical and contemporary conditions of settler colonialism and to the multidirectional pressures experienced by Indigenous peoples. Although ethnostress is developed here as a concept specific to Sámi experiences of settler colonialism, the analytical questions it raises may inform comparative research beyond Indigenous contexts. Rather than transferring the concept wholesale, future studies might explore whether comparable forms of internalized inadequacy emerge in other colonial or normative contexts, and whether these require distinct conceptual vocabularies of their own. In this sense, ethnostress should be understood less as a universal category than as a point of departure for comparative inquiry into how different regimes of power shape identity, recognition, and belonging. The analytical questions raised by ethnostress concerning authenticity, recognition, and internalized inadequacy may also prove fruitful for comparative studies of other forms of power, coloniality, and identity, although such contexts require concepts grounded in their own historical and political conditions.

Beyond its analytical contribution, the concept of ethnostress may also provide practitioners and institutions with a vocabulary for recognizing forms of identity-related stress that emerge from colonial histories, authenticity expectations, and unequal power relations. In this sense, the concept has potential relevance not only for anthropological research but also for education, healthcare, mental health services, and Indigenous policy development.

Final Reflections

To conclude: ethnostress is not simply a burden. It is a diagnostic concept that makes visible the ongoing logics of settler colonialism in everyday lives of Indigenous people. Where ethnostress appears, so does the

evidence of colonial power operating through identity expectations, recognition politics, and internalized inadequacy. Where it is negotiated, resisted, and rearticulated, so does the evidence of Indigenous agency, resilience, and the ongoing refusal to be erased.

The rigid boundary between Sáminess and Finnishness, and the essentialized image of “proper” Sáminess that circulates in both majority discourse and Sámi community life, does real harm by making people doubt their identity, identify more strongly with the dominant culture as a consequence, and experience even the most mundane aspects of life as tests of their belonging. At the same time, the stories, poetry, humour, and everyday negotiations examined in this dissertation reveal a community that is not passive in the face of these pressures. Sámi people continue to rework, challenge, and expand what it means to be Sámi on their own terms, in their own ways, and with a creativity and resilience that no colonial framework has been able to extinguish.

Ultimately, what this dissertation argues is that ethnostress illuminates the entanglement of identity, coloniality, and resistance. For the individuals who experience it, the hope is that understanding ethnostress as a structurally produced condition, rather than a personal failure, can itself be a form of relief. The feeling of not being “proper” Sámi is not a reflection of individual inadequacy. It is a reflection of historical and contemporary injustice. Recognizing this does not resolve the injustice, but it is an indispensable step toward doing so.

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SANTRAUKA LIETUVIŲ KALBA

Samiai yra autochtonų tauta, gyvenanti teritorijoje, vadinamoje Sapmiu (Sápmi), Šiaurės Europoje – Norvegijoje, Švedijoje, Suomijoje – ir Rusijos Kolos pusiasalyje. Samių populiaciją sudaro apie 80 000–100 000 žmonių: daugiausia jų gyvena Šiaurės Norvegijoje (50 000–65 000), apie 20 000–40 000 Švedijoje, 8 000–10 000 Suomijoje ir apie 2 000 Rusijoje. Samių kalbos priklauso finougrų kalbų grupei. Yra dešimt samių kalbų (nors ne visos išliko iki šių dienų) ir panašus skaičius regioninių grupių, atpažįstamų, pavyzdžiui, pagal tradicinius drabužius. Greta šiuolaikinio gyvenimo būdo ir profesijų samiai taip pat puoselėja tradicinius verslus, tokius kaip elnininkystė, žvejyba, gamtos gėrybių rinkimas ir amatai. Samių tėvynės teritorija Sapmis Norvegijoje apima Finmarką (Finnmárku, norv. Finnmark), Trumsą (Romsa, norv. Troms), Nordlandą (Nordlándda, norv. Nordland) ir dalį Triondelago (Trööndelage, norv. Trøndelag). Švedijoje ši teritorija driekiasi per Norboteną (Norrbottna, šved. Norrbotten), Vesterboteną (Västerbottena, šved. Västerbotten) ir siekia Jemtlandą (Jiemhten, šved. Jämtland). Suomijoje ji apima šiaurines Laplandijos dalis, visų pirma Enontekiję (Eanodat, suom. Enontekiö), Inari (Aanaar, Inari), Utsjokį (Ohcejohka, suom. Utsjoki) ir dalį Sondankiulės (Soađegilli, suom. Sodankylä), Rusijoje – Куэ́лнэгк нё́аппк (Kildino samių kalba), arba Kolos pusiasalį Murmansko srityje. Samių žemės po truputį buvo kolonizuojamos, vykdoma asimiliacinė politika, kartos prarado kalbą ir kultūrinės žinias. XX amžiaus antroje pusėje prasidėjo samių etnopolitinis judėjimas ir kultūrinis atgimimas. Visgi kolonijiniai santykiai išliko ir daro įtaką įvairioms gyvenimo sritims – viena iš jų yra savo tapatybės nepakankamumo patyrimas kaip etnostreso reiškiny.

1. Tyrimo kontekstas ir aktualumas

Šioje daktaro disertacijoje nagrinėjama etnostreso samprata – ir kaip empiriškai patiriamas reiškiny, ir kaip analitinė prieiga, leidžianti suprasti ilgalaikę kolonijinės naujakurių santvarkos dinamiką Sapmyje, samių tautos tėvynėje Šiaurės Europoje, apimančioje šiaurinę Norvegijos, Švedijos ir Suomijos dalis ir Rusijos Kolos pusiasalį. Samių tauta oficialiai pripažįstama vienintele Europos Sąjungos autochtonų tauta. Jų padėtis ypatinga tuo, kad kolonializmo padariniai šiame regione iki šiol menkai pripažįstami, palyginti su kitų pasaulio regionų autochtonų tautų kontekstais.

Etnostreso sąvoka atsirado Šiaurės Amerikos pirmųjų tautų akademineje tradicijoje, apibūdinant psichologines ir kultūrines kolonizacijos pasekmes. Mohaukų edukatorė Diane Hill kartu su kolegomis Antone ir Myers 1986 m. pristatė šį terminą, įvardydamą įtampą, kylančią dėl kultūrinės asimiliacijos, tapatybės praradimo ir kolonijinių struktūrų poveikio pirmųjų tautų nariams. Vėliau ši sąvoka buvo perimta samių mokslininkų, aktyvistų ir jaunimo, siekiant apibūdinti su autentiškumu, tapatybe ir priklausymu susijusį spaudimą, atsirandantį samių visuomenėje.

Sapmyje etnostresas reiškia su etniškumu susijusią įtampą, kylančią tada, kai žmogus nesijaučia esąs „pakankamai tikras“ samis. Tai gali būti susiję su samių kalbos nemokėjimu, tradicinių amatų (*duodji*) nepraktikavimu, tradicinių drabužių (*gákti*) nenešiojimu, gyvenimu už Sapmio ribų ir jo pasekmėmis tapatybei, tradicinių pragyvenimo būdų – elnininkystės ar žvejybos – nepraktikavimu arba samių visuomenės reprezentavimo našta. Etnostresas išryškina, kad autentiškumo lūkesčiai ne tik primetami dominuojančios visuomenės iš išorės, bet ir internalizuojami pačiose samių bendruomenėse.

Šiaurės Europoje kolonializmas ir kolonialumas ilgai liko nepakankamai ištirti iš dalies todėl, kad dominuojančiuose naratyvuose Šiaurės Europos šalys vaizduojamos kaip periferinės, kalbant apie Europos imperializmą, ir iš esmės egalitarinės ar humanitarinės. Tokie naratyvai užtemdė tiek šio regiono dalyvavimą užjūrio kolonijiniuose projektuose, tiek vidinę samių žemių kolonizaciją, vykdytą Danijos su Norvegija, Švedijos, Suomijos ir Rusijos. Ši disertacija prisideda prie augančio mokslinio susidomėjimo kolonializmu Šiaurės Europoje, atskleisdama, kaip kolonijinė dinamika afektiškai ir socialiai veikia per etnostreso reiškinių.

2. Tyrimo tikslas ir klausimai

Šios disertacijos tikslas – išanalizuoti, kaip etnostreso patirtys susijusios su platesne kolonijinės naujakurių sistemos logika, kuri esencializuoja tapatybę lūkesčiu atliepti kultūrinį kitoniškumą, taip pat su tuo, kokias strategijas individai ir bendruomenės taiko siekdami susitvarkyti su autentiškumo lūkesčiais.

Disertacijoje keliama keturi pagrindiniai analitiniai klausimai:

1. Kaip etnostreso reiškinių galima suprasti atsižvelgiant į istorinį naujakurių kolonializmo kontekstą Sapmyje?

2. Kaip autentiškumo lūkesčiai veikia kaip pagrindinis mechanizmas, per kurį naujakurių kolonijinė galia ir toliau formuoja autochtonų tapatybę?
3. Kaip ši patirtis artikuluojama samių kontekste per etnostreso sampratą ir kaip ji pasireiškia kasdieniame gyvenime?
4. Kaip į etnostresą reaguoja individai ir bendruomenės ir kaip šios reakcijos prisideda prie samių tapatybės deesencializavimo?

3. Teorinis pagrindas

Disertacijos teorinis pagrindas grindžiamas tarpdalykine prieiga, jungiančia naujakurių kolonializmo teoriją, kolonialumo sampratą ir kasdienės politikos bei agentiško antropologines perspektyvas. Teorinis karkasas yra naujakurių kolonializmo teorija, kuri prasideda nuo Patrick Wolfe (2006) ir Lorenzo Veracini (2011) darbų ir vėliau sujungiama su Anibal Quijan (1992), Walter D. Mignolo ir Catherine Walsh (2018) kolonialumo samprata.

Remiantis Wolfe (2006), naujakurių kolonijos autochtonus laiko kliūtimi, nes šio kolonializmo pagrindinis tikslas yra žemių ir išteklių užėmimas, kitaip nei užjūrių kolonializmo, kuriuo siekiama išteklių ir darbo jėgos (ja tampa vietinė populiacija). Veracini (2011) teigimu, naujakurių kolonizatorių pagrindinis tikslas – kad žmonės „išnyktų“ dėl asimiliacijos ar fizinio naikinimo (pavyzdžiui, genocido), jų kultūrinių praktikų ištrynimo ir pan.

Disertacijoje taip pat remiamasi dekolonialumo teorija, visų pirma Anibal Quijan (1992), Walter Mignolo ir Catherine Walsh (2018) publikacijomis. Kolonialumas nėra lengvai pastebimas – tai veikiau pasaulėžiūrų ir ideologijų matrica, veikianti mechanizmus, kurie valdo ne tik kolonizatoriaus, bet ir kolonizuotojo protą. Autentiškumo lūkesčiai tampa priespaudiniais tiek, kiek jie yra struktūruoti kolonijinėmis dichotomijomis – pvz., „tradicinis“ ir „modernus“, „praeitis“ ir „dabartis“, „tikras“ ir „mišrus“, „grynas“ ir „suterštas“. Tokios dichotomijos tampa epistemologiniais mechanizmais, kontroliuojančiais autochtonų egzistencijos legitimizavimą ir reprezentaciją.

Šios teorinės perspektyvos leidžia parodyti, kad samių autentiškumo klausimas nėra tik kultūrinis ar simbolinis reiškinys. Jis tiesiogiai susijęs su politine teise egzistuoti kaip atskirai tautai. Kadangi vietinių tautų teisės dažnai grindžiamos jų „skirtumu“ nuo dominuojančios visuomenės, atsiranda spaudimas atitikti tam tikrą įsivaizduojamą „tikro“ samio modelį. Šie autentiškumo lūkesčiai internalizuojami pačios bendruomenės, individų ir pasireiškia kaip etnostresas.

Be to, disertacijoje etnostresas traktuojamas ne tik kaip internalizuotas kolonialumo poveikis, bet ir kaip reiškinys, dėl kurio aktyviai deramasi kasdieniame gyvenime. Remiantis kasdienės politikos ir praktikos teorijomis (Scott 1985; de Certeau 1984; Bayat 2010), tiriama, kaip samių individai dalyvauja autentiškumo lūkesčių sistemoje, juos perinterpretuoja ir kartais ginčija įprastomis socialinėmis ir diskursyviomis praktikomis. Disertacijoje taip pat remiamasi naratyvinės vaizduotės samprata (Meretoja 2018), tiriant, kaip alternatyvūs samių tapatybės suvokimai artikuliuojami greta dominuojančių normatyvinių struktūrų ir yra perkuriami.

4. Metodologija ir lauko tyrimas

Disertacija grindžiama ilgalaikiu etnografiniu lauko tyrimu, vykdytu Inario (Aanaaro) regione Suomijoje 2016–2024 m. Tyrėjos ryšys su regionu prasidėjo 2016 m., kai ji daugiau nei keturis mėnesius praleido Sapmyje, dirbdama Samių archyve ir susipažindama su bendruomenėmis bei archyvine medžiaga. Nuo 2018 m. birželio iki rugsėjo ji vykdė magistro baigiamojo darbo lauko tyrimą, o nuo 2023 m. rugsėjo iki 2024 m. birželio – daktaro disertacijos lauko tyrimą.

Tyrimo duomenis sudaro dalyvaujantieji stebėjimai ir šimtai puslapių lauko tyrimo užrašų; aštuoni gyvenimo istorijų interviu, aštuoni pusiau struktūruoti interviu ir gausi neformali komunikacija; įvairi medžiaga, įskaitant žiniasklaidą, tinklaraščius, socialinę žiniasklaidą ir meną (filmus ir literatūrą); 35 Suomijos vidurinių mokyklų geografijos, visuomenės mokslų ir istorijos vadovėlių analizė, skirta samių reprezentacijoms tirti. Lauko tyrimo metu tyrėja dalyvavo kalbų (suomių, Inario samių ir šiaurės samių) ir rankdarbių (siuvimo, sidabro juvelyrikos, keramikos) kursuose, bendruomenės renginiuose (festivaliuose, mugėse, viešose diskusijose) ir kasdieniame gyvenime.

Pagal tyrimo koncepciją nebuvo numatyta duomenis rinkti tik viename miestelyje, kaimelyje ar konkrečioje geografinėje vietovėje – siekta įtraukti įvairius tyrimo dalyvius, taip pat geografiniu aspektu, kad būtų atspindimos įvairios etnostreso patirtys. Kai kurie dalyviai augo kaimuose, kurių dauguma gyventojų yra samiai ir kalba samių kalbomis, kai kurie – miestuose, kur samių kalbos neišmoko, kai kurie – Inario savivaldybėje, kur dominuojanti kasdienė kalba yra suomių. Tyrimo dalyviai buvo samiai, gyvenantys tiek pietų Suomijos miestų centruose, tiek Sapmyje, taip pat elnių ganytojai, aktyvistai, politikai ir psichikos sveikatos specialistai. Tyrime dalyvavo ir suomių, gyvenančių šiaurėje. Dvi interviu tyrimo dalyvės buvo

suomės, auginančios samius vaikus. Toks pasirinkimas padarytas siekiant įvairiapusiškai aprėpti įvairias patirtis ir jų interpretacijas.

Tyrimė reflektuojama autorės, kaip neautochtonės tyrėjos iš Lietuvos, pozicija ir jos įtaka tyrimo procesui. Disertacijoje atvirai aptariamos etinės dilemos: ar nevietinis žmogus gali tyrinėti vietinių tautų patirtis, kaip išvengti kolonijinio žvilgsnio, kaip kurti pasitikėjimą su bendruomene. Susidomėjimą etnostreso tema skatino ne tik ilgalaikis darbas Sapmio regione, bet ir asmeninės refleksijos apie postsovietinėse visuomenėse patiriamą nepakankamumo jausmą ir kolonialumo palikimą. Autorė argumentuoja, kad įvairios visuomenės – vietinės tautos, postsovietinės šalys, globalių Pietų visuomenės – patiria panašių formų nepakankamumą, save vertindami pagal dominuojančius Vakarų standartus. Tyrimas grindžiamas nuostata, kad antropologinis pažinimas kuriamas dialoge tarp tyrėjo ir pašnekovų, todėl ypatingas dėmesys jame skirtas etiniam jautrumui, vietinių balsų svarbai ir nuolatinei savo pozicijos refleksijai. Svarbi tyrimo dalis yra autorės refleksijos apie savo pačios patirtis Lietuvoje po Sovietų Sąjungos žlugimo. Ji lygina samių etnostresą su platesniu postkolonijiniu nepilnavertiškumo jausmu Rytų Europoje. Kartu tai paskatino atlikti palyginimus su kitomis mažumomis bei pokolonijinėmis erdvėmis ir atverti kelius naujiems tyrimams.

5. Naujakurių kolonializmas ir dekolonizacija Sapmyje

Norint suprasti etnostresą, būtina aptarti jo istorinį ir struktūrinį kontekstą. Antrajame disertacijos skyriuje apžvelgiama naujakurių kolonializmo istorija ir dinamika Sapmyje. Susidomėjimas samių žemėmis ir intervencija į jas prasidėjo maždaug nuo XV amžiaus, per kelis šimtmečius samiai iš daugumos daugelyje vietovių tapo mažuma. XX amžiuje buvo vykdoma itin intensyvi asimiliacijos politika.

Suomijoje, kaip ir kitose Šiaurės Europos šalyse, vaikai buvo baudžiami už samių kalbų vartojimą arba tradicinį joikavimą. Dėl suominimo politikos buvo prarasta visa samių kalbėtojų karta. Ypač tai paveikė mažesnes samių kalbas, tokias kaip Inario samių ir Skoltų samių kalbos. Imta slėpti samiškąją tapatybę ir jos gėdytis. Vis dėlto XX amžiaus 7-ajame dešimtmetyje Šiaurės Europos samių kraštuose prasidėjo stiprus samių kultūros atgimimas.

Šiame kontekste disertacija atskleidžia esminius kolonializmo ramsčius: žemių ir išteklių nusavinimą, kultūrinį nusavinimą (religinius persekiojimus, ritualų draudimus, kultūrinių objektų naikinimą ir pasisavinimą), socialinių struktūrų ardymą ir suominimą (per švietimo, kalbos ir gyvenamosios vietos politiką), taip pat diskursyvų ir politinį samių tapatybės kontroliavimą, išlikusį iki šių dienų. Šie procesai sukūrė struktūrines

etnostreso sąlygas: žmonės vienu metu susiduria ir su reikalavimu asimiliuotis, ir su spaudimu įkūnyti „autentišką“ kultūrinį kitoniškumą, suformuotą pačios naujakurių vaizduotės.

Šiandien samių kultūra yra didžiuojamasi, samiai organizuojasi politiškai. Kiekvienoje samių istorinės tėvynės šalyje yra samių parlamentas. Taip pat veikia Samių taryba – tarptautinė samių organizacija, atstovaujanti skirtingoms šalims. Vyksta daugybė kasmetinių samių tautinių ir kultūrinių renginių, pavyzdžiui, švenčiama Samių tautinė diena (vasario 6 d.), organizuojami muzikos, kino ir kitokie festivaliai. Daug nuveikta gaivinant kultūrą, ypač kalbas. Nors dabar samių kalbos turi oficialų statusą samių tėvynėje, kalbėtojų karta dėl asimiliacijos politikos yra prarasta: daugelis žmonių nemoka savo kalbos, o tai yra tapę viena svarbiausių etnostreso priežasčių.

6. Autentiškumo lūkesčiai naujakurių kolonialumo kontekste

Vienas svarbiausių disertacijos argumentų – tai, kad autentiškumo lūkesčiai yra kolonijinės galios mechanizmas. Trečiajame disertacijos skyriuje autentiškumo lūkesčiai analizuojami kaip pagrindinis mechanizmas, per kurį naujakurių kolonijinė galia veikia ir toliau. Nagrinėjama, kaip tiek daugumos visuomenė, tiek pačios samių bendruomenės kuria „tikro samio“ vaizdinį. Šis vaizdinys dažnai siejamas su romantizuotu, sustingusiu vietinių tautų įsivaizdavimu: tikras samis turi gyventi gamtoje, būti susijęs su elnininkyste, kalbėti samiškai ir tęsti „tradicinį“ gyvenimo būdą. Tokie lūkesčiai kyla ne tik iš turistinių ar valstybinių reprezentacijų, bet ir iš politinių kovų dėl vietinių tautų teisių.

Simbolius, kurie asimiliacijos laikotarpiu samiams kėlė gėdą – kalbą, tradicinius drabužius ir *duodji* (rankdarbius), ryšį su gamta kaip pragyvenimo būdus, kaip antai elnių ganyką, žvejybą ir kitas praktikas (Valkonen 2009), jie vėliau perėmė kaip politinės tapatybės ženklus. Visgi dėl kultūrinės asimiliacijos pasekmių, t. y. kalbos įgūdžių ir kitų tradiciniais laikomų požymių (pavyzdžiui, gebėjimo kurti rankdarbius, mokėjimo savo rankomis siūti tradicinius drabužius, tradicinio pragyvenimo iš elnių ganyklos, žvejybos ar apskritai gyvenimo iš gamtos) netekimo, arba gyvenimo miestuose toli nuo Sapmio žmonės ima jaustis nesantys „tikri“ samiai. Taip susiformuoja paradoksas: etnopolitinė mobilizacija buvo būtina politinio išlikimo strategija, tačiau ji sukūrė esencialistinius lūkesčius, kurie dabar slegia asmenis, negalinčius jų išpildyti.

Disertacijoje autentikos lūkesčiai atskleidžiami kaip plačiai pasireiškiantis reiškinyss įvairiuose pasaulio autochtonų kontekstuose. Apžvelgiama įvairių kraštų literatūra. Elizabeth Povinelli (1998a, 1998b) aprašo Australijoje aborigenams keliamus reikalavimus parodyti tradicijas, susijusias su ikikolonijiniais laikais, kad jie būtų oficialiai pripažinti autochtonais. Šį reiškinį ji vadina „pripažinimo gudrybe“ (angl. *cunning for recognition*). Luisa Steur (2010, 2011) kritikuoja liberalų kultūrinį autochtoniškumo suvokimą Indijoje, kur pamirštami ekonominiai iššūkiai ir grupės verčiamos atitikti autentiškumo lūkesčius. Megan Moodie (2015) taip pat tyrinėja Indiją ir pažymi, kad Dhanka genties adivasių (Indijoje autochtonų grupės vadinamos adivasiais) frazė „mes buvome adivasiai“ atspindi įtampą tarp socialinio mobilumo ir autentiško indigeniškumo lūkesčių. Laura Graham (2002) parodo, kad Pietų Amerikos Amazonijos vietinių tautų atstovai tarptautinėje erdvėje susiduria su Vakarų auditorijos autentiškumo lūkesčiais, kurie lemia jų kalbos pasirinkimus ir skatina įvairias savireprezentacijos strategijas. Alcida Rita Ramos (1994) pažymi, kad nevyriausybės organizacijos dažnai kuria „hiperrealų indėną“ – idealizuotą vietinio gyventojų įvaizdį, pagal kurį vertinami realūs žmonės. Camilla Morelli (2021) atskleidžia, kaip į miestus persikėlę vietiniai jaunuoliai atsiduria tarp prieštarinių stereotipų: laikomi pernelyg „vietiniais“ miestui, tačiau kartu ir nepakankamai „autentiškais“. Laurens Bakker (2007) ir Marijn Kraak (2010) parodo, kaip turizmas ir žiniasklaida Indonezijoje kuria ir palaiko egzotiško, „primityvaus“ vietinio gyventojų įvaizdį, versdami bendruomenes derėtis tarp modernumo ir išorinių autentiškumo lūkesčių. Yri Slezkine (1994) aprašo, kaip Sibiro ir Arkties vietinės tautos Rusijoje skirtingais laikotarpiais buvo reprezentuojamos per kintančius stereotipus – nuo laukinių ir necivilizuotų, iki „gamtos vaikų“ ar atsilikusių grupių, kurias reikia modernizuoti, o sovietinėje ideologijoje net buvo vaizduojamos kaip „autentiški proletarai“.

Disertacijoje pabrėžiama, kad šie lūkesčiai yra internalizuojami. Tai reiškia, kad kolonijinis mąstymas tampa pačių žmonių savęs vertinimo dalimi: jie ima vertinti save pagal kolonijinius kriterijus. Kaip pažymi Harald Gaski (2008), samių viešajame diskurse apie tapatybę ir tautiškumą kai kuriais atvejais susiformavo esencializuojančios tendencijos – iš dalies todėl, kad samių reikalavimai turi būti išreikšti dichotominiame interpretaciniame rėme, priešpriešinančiame autochtonų kultūrą dominuojančiai nacionalinei visuomenei. Tokia esencializacija yra išgyvenimo strategija naujakurių kolonijinėmis sąlygomis, o ne vien tautinio judėjimo sukurtas projektas, kaip linkę teigti kai kurie mokslininkai.

7. Etnostresas: apibrėžimas ir pasireiškimo formos

Ketvirtajame skyriuje, kuris yra disertacijos empirinis ir analitinis branduolys, etnostresas pristatomas kaip analitinė priemonė ir dokumentuojama jo raiška įvairiose samių gyvenimo srityse. Šioje disertacijoje etnostresas conceptualizuojamas kaip su etnine tapatybe susijusi streso forma, atsirandanti dėl poreikio nuolat įtvirtinti, reprezentuoti ir pagrįsti savo etninę priklausomybę kolonijinės istorijos ir tebesitęsiančių galios santykių formuojamuose kontekstuose.

Etnostreso apibrėžimas

Sąvoka „etnostresas“ atsirado tyrinėjant Šiaurės Amerikos vietines tautas. Diane Hill, Robert Antone ir Brian Myers (1986) darbuose ji apibrėžiama kaip kolonializmo sukeltas kultūrinės tapatybės, pasaulėžiūros ir priklausymo jausmo sutrikdymas. Vėliau šią sąvoką plėtojo Gregory Cajete (1994), Anthony F. C. Wallace (2012), Winona LaDuke (2005), Debra Merskin (2010), Merylene Pilon (2020) ir kiti autoriai. Jie etnostresą siejo su tarpgeneracine trauma, marginalizacija, stereotipizacija ir kolonijinės priespaudos pasekmėmis. Samių tyrimuose Rauna Kuokkanen (1999) perkėlė šią sąvoką į vietinį kontekstą, apibrėždama ją kaip stresą, kylantį dėl kvestionuojamos etninės tapatybės ir gyvenimo „tarp dviejų pasaulių“. Vėliau Sanna Valkonen (2009) ir Veli-Pekka Lehtola (2015) etnostresą susiejo su autentiškumo lūkesčiais, spaudimu atitikti tam tikrą samiškumo modelį ir nuolatinį poreikį aiškinti ir pagrįsti savo tapatybę.

Kalbant apie samius, etnostresas pirmiausia siejamas su autentiškumo lūkesčiais ir jausmu, kad žmogus nėra „pakankamai tikras“ samis. Tyrimo dalyviai dažnai kalbėjo apie abejones savo samiškumu dėl samių kalbos nemokėjimo, jaučiamo kultūrinių žinių trūkumo, dėl to, kad nėra kilę iš elnininkystės besiverčiančių šeimų, gyvena už Sapmio ribų ar nepakankamai įsitraukia į bendruomeninę veiklą. Šios patirtys glaudžiai susijusios su asimiliacijos politikos palikimu – būtent dėl jos dalis samių neteko kalbos, kultūrinių praktikų ir ryšių su bendruomene. Etnostresą stiprina ir išoriniai autentiškumo lūkesčiai, kai samiai vertinami pagal stereotipinius įsivaizdavimus, kaip turėtų atrodyti, kalbėti ar gyventi „tikras“ vietinis gyventojas. Tyrimas atskleidžia, kad samiams dažnai tenka aiškinti ir įrodinėti savo tapatybę tiek daugumos visuomenei, tiek pačioje bendruomenėje. Vis dėlto pašnekovai ir samių intelektualai pabrėžia, kad samiškumas nėra statiška ar praeityje sustingusi tapatybė – tai nuolat

besikeičianti kultūra, kurios autentiškumą liudija ne tariamas „grynumas“, o gebėjimas prisitaikyti ir išlikti šiuolaikiniame pasaulyje.

„Tarp dviejų kultūrų“: mišrios tapatybės

Etnostresą ypač dažnai jaučia žmonės, kilę iš mišrių samių ir suomių šeimų, kurių gausu Inario vietovėje. Tyrimo dalyvė Máret pasakojo, kad vaikystėje bendraamžių nebuvo laikoma same, nes jos motina yra suomė. Vėliau ji sužinojo, kad kai kurie žmonės manė, jog nesąžininga, kad ji lankė samių kalba kalbančių vaikų darželį. Šis tapatybės klausimų daugiasluoksniškumas – kas yra „pusiau samis“, kas „pusiau suomis“ – atspindi kolonijinių kraujo ir kilmės idėjų raišką šiuolaikiniame kasdieniame gyvenime. Gyvenimas tarp dviejų kultūrų atskleidžiamas ir samių literatūroje, kur kolonijiniai santykiai pabrėžiami per tai, kad lūkesčius ir būdus būti samiais autochtononei grupei suteikia ir reprezentacijas kuria dominuojanti kultūra, o ne jie patys. Žodis „tarp“ nurodo navigavimą tarp dviejų visuomenės grupių – dominuojančios ir mažumos.

Etnostresas ir kultūrinių ryšių atkūrimas

Etnostresas dažnai siejamas su kultūrinio ryšio atkūrimo (angl. *reconnection*) procesais, ypač tarp samių, augusių už Sapmio ribų. Daugeliui jų samiškumas buvo perduotas per šeimos ryšius, prisiminimus ar pavienės kultūrinės praktikos, tačiau asimiliacijos pasekmės, kalbos praradimas ir atskirtis nuo bendruomenės skatino abejones dėl savo tapatybės. Kalbos mokymasis, ryšių su giminaičiais stiprinimas, tradicinių amatų praktika ir dažnesnis lankymasis Sapmyje tapo svarbiomis priemonėmis atkuriant priklausymo jausmą. Vis dėlto šie procesai dažnai lydimi etnostreso, nes kartu su kultūriniu sugrįžimu atsiranda spaudimas tapti „pakankamai samišku“, atitikti tam tikrus kalbos, žinių ar kultūrinės kompetencijos lūkesčius. Todėl kultūrinis ryšio atkūrimas tampa ne tik savęs atradimo ir įgalėjimo procesu, bet ir svarbia erdve, kurioje patiriamas ir bandomas įveikti etnostresas.

Etnostresas kaip kultūrinės kompetencijos ir žymės

Kalbos nemokėjimas yra svarbiausias etnostreso šaltinis. Dėl asimiliacijos politikos ir draudimo mokyklose kalbėti samių kalbomis buvo prarasta visa kalbančiųjų karta. Daugelis samių nebemoka samiškai arba moka menkai, o tai tampa nuolatiniu streso šaltiniu. Nemažai samių šiais laikais savo kalbos mokosi jau suaugę. Samių kilmės žmogui samių kalbos mokymasis yra visiškai kitoks nei bet kurios kitos kalbos mokymasis – jis

susijęs su traumos įveika, kupinas emocijų ir klausimų, susijusių su šeimos istorija ir savo tapatybe. Šie žmonės dažnai jaučia gėdą dėl to, kad nekalba samiškai pakankamai gerai arba visai nemoka šios kalbos. Jie bijo būti vertinami kitų samių kaip „nepakankamai tikri“. Kalba tampa ne tik komunikacijos priemone, bet ir moraliniu bei politiniu tapatybės kriterijumi.

Tradicioniai drabužiai (*gákti*) ir rankdarbiai (*duodji*) per etnopolitinį judėjimą, kaip ir kalba, tapo politizuotais samių tapatybės simboliais, todėl tie, kurie nemoka siūti savo drabužių ar nepraktikuoja rankdarbių, gali jausti nepilnavertiškumą. Šalia kitų pragyvenimo iš gamtos šaltinių elnių ganymas, kuris kadaise buvo tik nedidelės dalies samių pragyvenimo būdas, per kolonijines reprezentacijas ir muziejų naratyvus iškilo kaip „autentiško samiškumo“ simbolis, kuriantis lūkesčius tiek iš išorės, tiek pačiose samių bendruomenėse. Papildomo sudėtingumo tam suteikia klimato kaita: elnių ganytojai patiria etnostresą ir dėl noro išlaikyti kultūrinį tęstinumą, ir dėl augančių iššūkių, susijusių su netikrumu bei ekonomine rizika.

Reprezentavimo našta

Kadangi Suomijos visuomenėje žinios apie samių istoriją labai menkos, samiai dažnai jaučia pareigą aiškinti savo kultūrą, istoriją ir politines problemas. Su tuo ypač dažnai susiduria samiai, gyvenantys Suomijos pietų miestuose. Tyrimo dalyviai kalbėjo apie nuovargį nuo nuolatinio „atstovavimo“ savo tautai. Jie teigė jaučiantys spaudimą būti „gerais“ samių kultūros reprezentantais ir bijantys suklysti ar pasirodyti nepakankamai kompetentingi.

Etnostresas ir socialinė padėtis

Etnostreso patirtys priklauso ne tik nuo asmeninės tapatybės, bet ir nuo žmogaus socialinės padėties, gyvenamosios vietos ir gyvenimo būdo. Tyrimas atskleidė, kad etnostresas pasireiškia per lyčių vaidmenų lūkesčius – moterys dažnai patiria papildomą spaudimą derinti šiuolaikinius profesinius lūkesčius su tradiciniais kultūriniais vaidmenimis. Už Sapmio ribų gyvenantys samiai dažniau susiduria su baime prarasti kultūrą, asimiliuotis ir atsakomybe išsaugoti kalbą ir tradicijas. Tarp elnių ganytojų etnostresas taip pat siejamas su įsipareigojimu tęsti tradicinį gyvenimo būdą nepaisant klimato kaitos ir ekonominių iššūkių, todėl tampa ne tik tapatybės, bet ir kultūrinio tęstinumo klausimu. Taigi etnostresas pasireiškia ne tik kaip tapatybės klausimas, bet ir kaip kasdienė atsakomybė išlaikyti kultūrą, kalbą, ryšį su žeme ir tradicinį gyvenimo būdą.

Išorinis ir bendruomeninis spaudimas

Tyrimas parodė, kad etnostresas kyla ne tik iš išorinių visuomenės lūkesčių, bet ir iš pačios samių bendruomenės. Išorinėje aplinkoje samiai dažnai susiduria su stereotipiniais autentiškumo reikalavimais, samiškumą siejančiais su elnininkyste, tradiciniu gyvenimo būdu ar kitais kultūriniais ženklais. O bendruomenėje etnostresas pasireiškia per kalbos, kultūrinių žinių ir kitų samiškumo kriterijų vertinimą, kuris gali skatinti abejones savo tapatybe ir priklausymu bendruomenei. Pašnekovai pabrėžė, kad būtent artimiausios aplinkos abejonės ir vertinimai dažnai yra skaudžiausi, nes kuria nuolatinį spaudimą įrodyti savo samiškumą. Dėl to etnostresas tampa ne tik reakcija į kolonijines galios struktūras, bet ir kasdiene priklausymo, legitimumo ir autentiškumo derybų patirtimi.

Etnostresas kaip nerimas

Vienas iš teoriškai reikšmingiausių disertacijos atradimų – etnostreso dimensija, kurią galima pavadinti paranojiškumu ar nerimastingumu. Ji neatitinka jokio konkretaus išorinio kaltinimo ar atstūmimo, tačiau savo poveikiu yra ne mažiau reali. Tyrimo dalyvė Karoliinná nurodo nuolatinį rūpestį, kad kiti samiai gali suvokti jos viešą dalyvavimą samių kultūroje ir tapatybės politikoje kaip „per didelį stengimąsi“, nors niekas jai niekada to nesakė. Ji pripažįsta: tai labiau nerimas ir paranoja nei tiesa. Ši dimensija atskleidžia, kaip giliai kolonijinė logika įsišaknijusi savivokoje.

8. Etnostreso įveikos strategijos

Penktajame skyriuje tiriama, kaip patys samiai ir jų visuomenė reaguoja į etnostreso patirtis kasdieniame gyvenime. Šis skyrius parodo, kad etnostresas turi būti suprantamas ne tik kaip suvaržymas, bet ir kaip galimybių erdvė. Remiantis James Scott darbais apie „silpnųjų ginklus“ (1985) ir kasdienės praktikos teorijomis (de Certeau 1984; Bayat 2010), skyriuje identifikuojamas strategijų spektras.

Kultūrinio ryšio atkūrimas ir mokymasis

Kultūrinio ryšio atkūrimo ir mokymosi procesai etnografijoje išryškėja kaip praktikos, kai žmonės naviguoja tarp lūkesčių ir spaudimo, susijusių su etnostresu. Tyrimo dalyviai nebando iš karto atitikti visų samiškumo lūkesčių, o savo santykį su kultūra traktuoja kaip laipsnišką ir

nenutrūkstamą procesą. Tai apima ryšio su giminaičiais Sapmyje atkūrimą, samių kalbos mokymąsi, kultūrinių praktikų įgijimą arba ilgesnį buvimą samių aplinkoje. Mieste augę Karoliinná ir Matti pasakoja apie atsijungimo ir vėlesnį ryšio atkūrimo procesą, kuriame svarbų vaidmenį atlieka ryšiai su giminaičiais Sapmyje ir ilgesni apsilankymai šiame regione.

Lūkesčių valdymas

Su etnostreso įveika glaudžiai sietinas šiaurės samių kalbos žodis *birget*, reiškiantis „susitvarkyti“, „išverti“, „išgyventi“. Kaip aiškina tyrimo dalyvė Biret, samių kultūroje visada buvo kokia nors grėsmė ar kliūtis, sunkinusi gyvenimą. Anuomet žmonės neturėjo kito pasirinkimo, jie privalėjo susitvarkyti. Nors dabar, atrodo, turėtų būti lengviau ir yra paprasčiau prašyti pagalbos, ta susitvarkymo kultūra vis dar egzistuoja. Vis dėlto tyrimo dalyviai taip pat pabrėžia, kad *birget* kultūra gali tapti toksiška, kai į sunkumus ne reaguojama, o jie tik pakeliami. Tyrimo dalyvis Matti teigia, kad svarbiausia yra nustatyti asmenines ribas, nes dalis šių lūkesčių sukurti jo paties galvoje.

Kita svarbi strategija – savito būdo prisidėti prie samių bendruomenės paieška. Pašnekovai pabrėžė, kad nėra vieno tinkamo būdo būti samiškam – vieni prisideda per kalbą, kiti per profesinę veiklą, politiką, meną ar rūpinimąsi šeima. Tokia perspektyva padeda sumažinti spaudimą atitikti visus autentiškumo lūkesčius ir leidžia samiškumą suvokti kaip ilgalaikį santykį su kultūra, o ne kaip nuolatinį savo tapatybės įrodinėjimą.

Lūkesčiai ir stereotipai taip pat valdomi humoru. Humoras yra gerai žinoma įveikos strategija. Juokai apie turistus ir tyrėjus gali būti suprantami kaip svarbus būdas susigrąžinti galią ir atmesti autentizuoto samio vaizdinį. Samių radijas ir televizija „Yle Sápmi“ (Suomijos nacionalinio transliuotojo dalis) rengia radijo programą „Sohkaršohkka“. Ją sudaro „Instagram“ platformoje kuriami trumpi komediniai eskizai apie samių jaunimo gyvenimą, įskaitant turistų, besitikinčių sutikti „autentišką senovinį“ samį, pašiepimą. Tokios produkcijos svarba yra dvejopa: juokas suteikia palengvėjimą, galimybę bendruomeniškai apmąstyti kolonijines struktūras ir paverčia stereotipus juokelių objektu.

Kolektyvinis pripažinimas ir socialinis priklausymas

Svarbi etnostreso įveikos strategija yra priklausymas kolektyvui ir kolektyvinis pripažinimas. Tyrimas parodė, kad samiai savo tapatybę dažnai grindžia ne tik asmeninėmis žiniomis ar kultūriniais gebėjimais, bet ir šeimos ryšiais, giminyste ir bendruomenės pripažinimu. Giminaičių palaikymas,

šeimos istorijos, kultūrinės tradicijas puoselėjantys artimieji, samių kalbos perdavimas vaikams padeda mažinti abejones savo tapatybe ir stiprina priklausymo bendruomenei jausmą. Toks palaikymas ypač svarbus žmonėms, išgyvenantiems ryšio su samiškąja tapatybe atkūrimo procesą.

Ne mažiau reikšmingas yra emocinis palaikymas ir galimybė dalytis patirtimis su kitais samiais. Pokalbiai su draugais, šeimos nariais, bendraminčiais ar kalbos mokymosi grupėmis padeda suprasti, kad abejonės, kaltės jausmas ar tapatybės klausimai nėra individuali problema. Tokia palaikanti socialinė aplinka legitimizuoja šias patirtis, stiprina pasitikėjimą savimi ir mažina autentiškumo lūkesčių keliamą spaudimą.

Daugiasluoksnių ir hibridinių tapatybių pripažinimas

Kita strategija – tapatybės rekonceptualizavimas, pripažįstant asmeninės kilmės daugialypumą ir hibridiškumą. Kai kurie individai ne mėgina atitikti siaurai apibrėžtą samiškumą, o mažina autentiškumo spaudimą pripažindami, kad tuo pat metu yra ir samiai, ir suomiai. Tai leidžia ginčyti griežtas ar esencializuotas priklausymo sampratas. Tyrimo dalyvei Karoliinai lūžio tašku tapo dokumentinio filmo epizodas, kuriame asmuo pristatė save ir kaip samį, ir kaip suomį. Jos teigimu, tai labai sumažino spaudimą rinktis tik vieną tapatybę. Individualų etnostresą taip pat gali mažinti atviros diskusijos apie tapatybės daugiasluoksniškumą viešojoje erdvėje ir meno darbuose – žmonės pamato, kad jų patirtys yra atpažįstamos. Tokiu būdu taip pat kvestionuojami siauri autentiškumo standartai, o samiškumas pradedamas suvokti kaip daugialypė, dinamiška, nuolat formuojama tapatybė.

Kolektyvinis ir institucinis atsakas į etnostresą

Tyrimas parodė, kad etnostresas nėra vien individuali patirtis – jo mažinimui svarbios ir kolektyvinės bei institucinės priemonės. Viena pagrindinių problemų, kurią įvardijo pašnekovai, yra nepakankamas samių istorijos, kultūros ir šiuolaikinės padėties pristatymas Suomijos švietimo sistemoje. Dėl žinių stokos visuomenėje vis dar egzistuoja stereotipai, diskriminacija, o patys samiai dažnai jaučia spaudimą nuolat aiškinti savo kultūrą ir kompensuoti tai, ko neišmoko mokykloje. Todėl švietimas laikomas svarbia priemone mažinant etnostresą ir didinant visuomenės supratimą apie samių bendruomenę.

Kitas svarbus aspektas yra kultūriškai jautrių paslaugų plėtra. Tyrimo dalyviai pabrėžė samių kalbomis teikiamos psichologinės pagalbos, kultūrinį kontekstą išmanančių specialistų ir institucijų pasirengimo svarbą. Ypač reikšmingas vaidmuo tenka švietimo, sveikatos priežiūros ir socialinės pagalbos sistemoms, kurios gali padėti atpažinti etnostresą skirtingais gyvenimo etapais – nuo vaikystės ir tapatybės paieškų iki tėvystės, senatvės ar netekties. Tokios iniciatyvos prisideda prie etnostreso pripažinimo kolektyvine ir struktūrine problema, o ne vien asmenine patirtimi.

Didžiavimasis samiškumu

Tyrimas parodė, kad etnostresas mažinamas ne tik per institucinę paramą, bet ir per pozityvias kolektyvines samiškumo patirtis. Festivaliai, kultūriniai renginiai, humoras, meninė kūryba ir bendruomeniniai susibūrimai suteikia galimybę patirti samiškumą kaip džiaugsmo, pasididžiavimo ir priklausymo šaltinį, o ne vien per kolonializmo ar traumų prizmę. Kaip pabrėžia Astri Dankertsen (2022), tokios kasdienės kultūrinės praktikos gali veikti kaip savita aktyvizmo forma, stiprinanti bendruomeniškumą ir matomumą. Kalbėjimas apie kultūros gyvybingumą, kūrybiškumą ir džiaugsmą yra itin svarbus, nes būtent šios patirtys stiprina kolektyvinę tapatybę ir padeda atsverti etnostreso keliamą įtampą.

9. Pagrindiniai tyrimo rezultatai

Pagrindinis disertacijos analitinis indėlis į mokslą yra etnostreso konceptualizavimas ir empirinis plėtojimas kaip priemonės, leidžiančios suprasti, kaip naujakurių kolonijinė logika veikia kasdienės tapatybės lygmeniu. Etnostresas apibūrinamas kaip su etniškumu susijusio streso forma, kylanti iš poreikio derėtis dėl savo etninės priklausomybės, ją atitikti ir pateisinti kontekstuose, suformuotuose naujakurių kolonijinės istorijos ir nuolatinių galios santykių.

Esminis empirinis atradimas yra tai, kad etnostresą gali kelti įvairūs dalykai: kalba, rankdarbiai, tradiciniai drabužiai, elnių ganymas, gyvenamoji vieta, aktyvizmas, šeimos kilmė, pragyvenimo būdas. Visgi šis spektro platumas nėra konceptualus trūkumas – tai esminis analitinis taškas. Veiksniai, sukeliantys etnostresą samių individams, savaime nėra stresiniai. Jie nebūtų tapatybės našta, jei asmuo nebūtų kolonizuotos mažumos narys. Suomis, nemėgstantis rankdarbių arba gyvenantis toli nuo protėvių regiono, nesusiduria su etninio legitimumo krize. Samiui ta pati situacija gali tapti gilaus nerimo šaltiniu dėl tinkamumo, autentiškumo ir kultūrinio išlikimo.

Tyrimas atskleidžia, kad etnostresas nėra vien išoriškai primetamas – jis taip pat internalizuojamas pačiose samių bendruomenėse. Kaip rodoma visoje disertacijoje, spaudimas kyla iš kelių krypčių: dominuojančios visuomenės autentiškumo lūkesčių, atsakomybės dėl kultūrinio tęstinumo ir aktyvizmo, taip pat bendruomenės viduje vykstančių kito asmens samiškumo vertinimo ir kvestionavimo procesų.

Disertacijoje pažymima, kad etnopolitinė mobilizacija buvo išgyvenimo strategija, o ne tik tautinio judėjimo projektas. Tokia esencijalizacija yra dvigubas saitas: ji veikia kaip išgyvenimo mechanizmas, tačiau kartu sukelia etnostresą. Šią dinamiką tiksliai apibūdina sarkastiškas tyrimo dalyvio Mihkkal apibendrinimas: „etnostresas reiškia, kad turi būti senoviškesnis samis.“

10. Mokslinė reikšmė ir indėlis

Disertacijos indėlis į mokslą iš esmės yra trejopas. Pirmą, ji išplečia antropologinį supratimą apie galios veikimą etniškumo diskursinėje formacijoje, detalio etnografinė medžiaga parodant, kaip autentiškumo lūkesčiai yra konstruojami, internalizuojami ir ginčijami naujakurių kolonijinės santvarkos kontekstuose. Disertacija atskleidžia, kad esencijalizacija nėra vien tautinis projektas, tai išgyvenimo strategija naujakurių kolonijinėmis sąlygomis – strategija, kuri vis dėlto kuria savą spaudimą, įskaitant etnostresą.

Antra, disertacija praplečia samių studijų mokslinę literatūrą, nes joje pateikiama pirmoji nuodugni etnografinė etnostreso tarp samių Suomijoje analizė. Nors sąvoka „etnostresas“ samių akademiniame ir viešajame diskurse minima bent nuo XX a. 10-ojo dešimtmečio (Kuokkanen 1998; Valkonen 2009; Lehtola 2015), ji niekada nebuvo sistemingai dokumentuota kasdienių patirčių lygmeniu. Disertacija užpildo šią spragą, nes joje pateikiami turtingi ir tekstūriški pasakojimai apie tai, kaip etnostresas patiriamas skirtinguose kontekstuose, kartose ir gyvenimo trajektorijose.

Panaši dinamika pastebima tarp tautinių mažumų, internete ieškančių informacijos apie konkuruojančius valstybinius naratyvus – pavyzdžiui, lyginant samius Suomijoje ir lenkų mažumą Lietuvoje (Starkutė ir Pilarczyk-Palaitis 2026), taip pat posovietiniuose ir pokomunistiniuose regionuose bei postkolonijinėse visuomenėse. Už etninių kontekstų ribų panašūs internalizuotų išorinių normų procesai pasireiškia lyties ir negalios teisių srityse.

Nors sąvoka etnostresas pateikia sąvoką, kuri yra specialiai pritaikyta istorinėms ir šiuolaikinėms naujakurių kolonializmo sąlygoms bei

daugiakryptėms įtampoms, kurias patiria autochtonai, ir čia plėtojamas samių kontekste, su ja susiję analitiniai klausimai gali būti naudingi ir lyginamiesiems tyrimams už autochtonų konteksto ribų. Užuoť tiesiogiai perkėlus šią sąvoką tiesiogiai į kitus kontekstus, ateities tyrimuose galima nagrinėti, ar panašios internalizuoto nepakankamumo formos atsiranda kituose tautinių mažumų kontekstuose, pokolonijinėse visuomenėse, posovietiniuose ir posocialistiniuose regionuose arba normatyvizuojančiuose lyties ar galumo diskursuose.

11. Išvados

Šioje disertacijoje atskleidžiama, kad etnostresas atspindi tapatybės, kolonialumo ir pasipriešinimo sampyną. Joje parodomas naujakurių kolonijinės sistemos tęstinumas Šiaurės Europoje, o kartu išryškinamas samių veiklumas kuriant ateities scenarijus, peržengiančius kolonijines autentiškumo ir neautentiškumo, tradiciškumo ir modernumo dichotomijas.

1. Samių patiriamas etnostresas yra naujakurių kolonializmo pasekmė, kylanti iš kolonijinių galios santykių, kurie iki šiol formuoja priklausymo autochtoninei grupei ir tapatybės sampratą. Šalia kitų naujakurių kolonializmo istorinių ir šiuolaikinių procesų, kaip antai kultūrinių praktikų ir tikėjimų išstūmimo per christianizaciją, žemių eksploatacijos ankstyvosios kolonizacijos laikotarpiu ir šiuolaikinio žaliojo kolonializmo sąlygomis, samių socialinių sistemų ardymo ir suominimo per švietimo sistemą, taip pat politinės kontrolės ir kuriamų diskursų apie samiškumą, etnostresas yra vienas iš naujakurių kolonializmo ramsčių, parodantis, kad kolonijiniai santykiai ir toliau egzistuoja.
2. Vienas pagrindinių kolonijinės galios mechanizmų yra autentiškumo lūkesčiai: samiai nuolat vertinami pagal iš anksto nustatytus „tikro samio“ kriterijus. Naujakurių kolonializmo kontekste dominuojanti visuomenė kelia autochtonų grupei autentikos lūkesčius, o jų atitikimas lemia autochtonų grupės egzistavimo kaip atskiros kultūros legitimumą. Taip autentiškumo lūkesčiai įsitvirtina ir etnopolitinio judėjimo kuriamoje grupės tapatybėje ir yra internalizuojami individų.
3. Samių kasdienybėje etnostresas pasireiškia nepakankamumo jausmu, abejonėmis savo tapatybe, priklausymo klausimais ir nuolatinio poreikiu legitimuoti savo samiškumą. Jis susijęs su samiškumo žymų, kaip antai kalbos, tradicinių rankdarbių ir pragyvenimo būdų, atitikimu ir aktyvumu, kultūrinėmis žiniomis, šeimos istorija, lytimi,

gyvenamąją vietą, atsakomybę reprezentuoti samių kultūrą, kultūrinių ryšių atgaivinimu ir išlaikymu, gyvenimu tarp dviejų kultūrų dažnai daugiakultūroje ir kelių kalbėse šeimose, neatitinkančiose homogeniškos dominuojančios visuomenės etniškumo sampratų.

4. Individai ir samių visuomenė į etnostresą reaguoja įvairiomis strategijomis, tarp jų – kultūrinio ryšio atkūrimu, bendruomeniniu palaikymu, daugialypių tapatybių pripažinimu, lūkesčių kontroliavimu pasitelkiant humorą, asmeninio indėlio į samių kultūrą atradimu, nesiekiant atitikti ir mokėti visko, ir asmeninių ribų nustatymu. Svarbi etnostreso įveikos strategija yra kolektyvinis pripažinimas ir socialinis priklausymas – šeimos ryšiai, giminystė, bendruomenės palaikymas ir galimybė dalytis patirtimis su kitais samiais stiprina priklausymo jausmą, mažina abejones savo tapatybe, legitimizuoja patiriamus sunkumus ir padeda atsverti autentiškumo lūkesčių keliamą spaudimą, ypač ryšio su samiška tapatybe atkūrimo procesuose. Didžiavimasis samiškumu – vis dažnesnis samių rodymas per pozityvią prizmę, o ne vien per aukos naratyvą, itin svarbus formuojant pozityvų santykį ir bendruomeninius ryšius. Tyrimas taip pat parodė, kad etnostresas negali būti įveiktas vien individualiu ar bendruomeniniu atsparumu. Jam mažinti būtini instituciniai pokyčiai – didesnis samių istorijos ir kultūros matomumas švietimo sistemoje, kultūriškai jautrios paslaugos, kalbų revitalizacijos priemonės ir platesnės susitaikymo ir dekolonizacijos iniciatyvos. Kadangi etnostresas kyla iš istorinių ir šiuolaikinių naujakurių kolonializmo struktūrų, atsakomybė jį mažinti tenka ne tik samių bendruomenei, bet ir valstybei bei jos institucijoms.

Galiausiai disertacijoje daroma išvada, kad etnostresas tai diagnostinis reiškinys, padedantis suprasti, kaip naujakurių kolonializmo logika veikia kasdienį autochtonų gyvenimą. Etnostresas išryškina kolonijinės galios poveikį, pasireiškiantį per autentiškumo lūkesčius, pripažinimo politiką ir internalizuotą nepakankamumo jausmą. Vis dėlto ten, kur dėl jo deramasi, kur jam priešinamasi ir kur jo reikšmė permąstoma, atsiskleidžia autochtonų veiklumas, atsparumas ir nuolatinis atsakymas būti ištrintiems iš istorijos.

Individams, patiriantiems etnostresą, svarbu suvokti, kad tai yra struktūriškai sukurta būseną, o ne asmeninė nesėkmė. Jausmas, kad esi „nepakankamai samis“, nėra individualaus nepakankamumo įrodymas – jis atspindi istorines ir šiuolaikines kolonijinio neteisingumo formas. Nors šio fakto pripažinimas savaime neišsprendžia problemos, jis yra būtina sąlyga siekiant ją suprasti ir įveikti.

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Ugnė Barbora Starkutė is an anthropologist and PhD student in ethnology at the Institute of Asian and Transcultural Studies at Vilnius University. Her research focuses on Indigenous studies, Sámi society, settler colonialism, coloniality, identity politics, and decolonisation. During the past decade she has been involved with research in the Sápmi region, conducted long-term ethnographic fieldwork in Finnish Sápmi and has been a visiting researcher at the Arctic Centre of the University of Lapland, and the University of Amsterdam. She is the author and co-author of scholarly publications on the coloniality effects on Indigenous and minority identity, and co-author of publications on food waste and young people. She has presented her research at numerous national and international conferences. Alongside her academic work, she is a co-founder and researcher in the applied anthropology organisation, *Anthropos*, where she conducts research, develops educational resources, and implements interdisciplinary projects. She also works at the National Museum of Lithuania, in the Department of Ethnography and Anthropology where she consults on exhibitions and works on ethnographic exhibitions and the inclusion of ethnic minorities. Ugnė also serves as a board member of the Lithuanian Anthropological Association.

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LIST OF PUBLICATIONS

Articles:

1. .Pilarczyk-Palaitis, E. Anna and Ugnė B.Starkutė, B. 2026. 'Authentic' ethnic? Coloniality as Expectations of 'Authenticity' Towards Ethnic Minorities". *Journal of Baltic Studies*, 1-23.
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NOTES

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