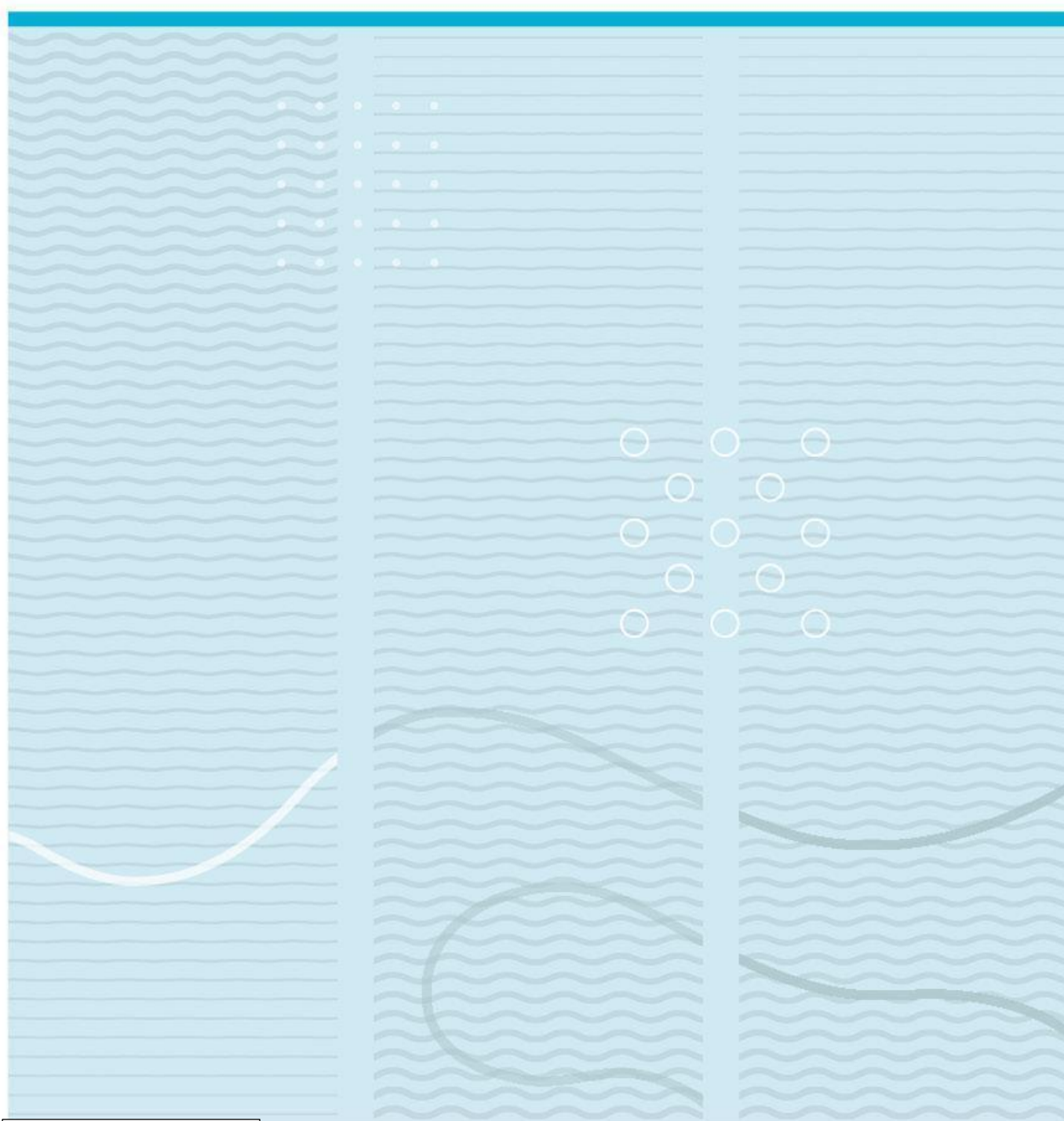


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‘Art Puts Questions in All Directions’: Sámi Creative Expressions and Self-Determined Futures



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Abstract

Inspired by Nils-Aslak Valkeapää's (in Sámi: Áillohaš, 1943-2001) ecocritical perspective and strong critique of Western colonialism and capitalism, this study seeks to address the multidimensionality of Sámi contemporary creative expressions and identities, challenging the one-dimensionality that often comes out when associating a strong political/activist dimension to Sámi artistic practices, while aiming at filling the existing gap between theoretical and academic understandings of decoloniality/indigenization – the *what*- and the way different Sámi artists relate to them in their practices - the *how*.

Through conversations with six Sámi artists residing on the Norwegian side of Sápmi, this study reflects on the statement “Indigenous art is inherently political” (Martineau & Ritskes, 2014, p.1) seeking to investigate the role of Sámi creative expressions in decolonizing and/or indigenizing Sápmi and imagining possible *pluriversal* futures. In doing so, it questions whether Sámi creative practices should be inherently considered political, further inquiring if and how the Sámi artists who participated in the conversations relate their artistic expressions to the activism/*artivism* framework, and what is the role of Nils-Aslak Valkeapää/ Áillohaš in imagining self-determined futures.

The role of Sámi creative expressions is hereby analyzed within a decolonial framework in relation to cultural self-determination and Sámi sovereignty as the right to pursue Sámi self-determined futures. Throughout the process, a crucial role was given to positionality and ethical principles connected to conducting research with Indigenous peoples. The epistemological and methodological stances are attuned, in this regard, to decolonizing methodologies, critical arts-based research, and inspired by the values of Indigenous methodologies. The conversations were analyzed and coded using reflexive thematic analysis. Three themes, divided in ten subthemes - were designed, after coding the in-depth conversations, especially in relation to the role Valkeapää had in shaping Sámi artistic identities, together with the expectations and stereotypes of being a Sámi artist; the role that Sámi creative practices play for the participants artists, in questioning Western development, and in posing radical questions while creating spaces *as* futures. The thesis focuses on the concept of *epistemicide* (Santos, 2016) - also evident in the essentialization of Sámi creative practices and identities- and the importance of *epistemic reconstitution* (Quijano, 2007). This is done by foregrounding Sámi creative

practices in their multidimensionality, beyond the reductive framing of creativity as “instrumental to an explicitly stated politics or political project” (Martineau & Ritskes, 2014, p.3) and exploring the “liberating potentialities” (p.3) of Sámi creative practices.

Acknowledging the crucial role of Sámi creative practices in imagining, and shaping tself-determined futures, is crucial to fill the gaps left by legal definitions of sovereignty and self-determination. Hence, Sámi creative expressions can be political in a transformative way, and not “in a restrictive and hegemonic sense” (J.Nango, conversation, December 17, 2021) without being overtly activist.

“The moment of danger we traverse demands that we deepen communication and complicity.

We must do it not in the name of an abstract communitas but spurred, rather, by the destabilizing image of multiform suffering, caused by human initiative, which is as overwhelming as it is unnecessary. At this moment of danger, the theories of separation must be reformulated keeping in mind what unites us; conversely, the theories of union must be reformulated keeping in mind what separates us. Borders must be constructed with lots of entrances and exits. At the same time, we must bear in mind that what unites us only does so a posteriori. It is not human nature but human initiative that unites us.”

(Santos, 2016, p.90-91)

“...The important fact is not to reduce realism to what exists” (Santos, 2008, p.35)

The capitalist system, and globalization theory which speak of ethics, hide the fact that their ethics are those of the marketplace and not the universal ethics of the human person. It is for these matters that we ought to struggle courageously if we have, in truth, made a choice for a humanized world.

—Freire (1998, p. 114, paraphrased by Denzin, Lincoln & Smith, 2008)

“Esiste navigando un desiderio che sta al di là della necessità di capire: la meta non è più arrivare: è navigare; contro il tempo, malgrado il tempo, a favore del tempo, nonostante il tempo, in mezzo al tempo.”

[There is, in sailing, a desire that lies beyond the need to understand: the goal is no longer to arrive: it is to sail; against time, in favour of time, in spite of time, in the midst of time

(My translation from Italian).]

(De Andrè, 2018)

This thesis is dedicated to the memory of Nils-Aslak Valkeapää (1943-2001), and to the interrupted futures of all Indigenous Peoples who are struggling for imagining and creating new ones.

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List of Abbreviations

ILO C107: Indigenous and Tribal Populations Convention, 1957 (No.107)

ILO C169: Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention, 1989 (No.169)

UN: United Nations

UNDRIP: United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples

UNWGIP: United Nations Working Group on Indigenous Populations

TA: Thematic Analysis

OCA: Office for Contemporary Art Norway

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Foreword

Before and *after* are two concepts that can hardly be separated from one another. Intriguingly enough, these terms are both concerned with the future. What came before us determines what we live now and influences what will come after. I firstly visualized it as an image. I have been in the Arctic during winter, especially in particular places where the horizon line only separates the whiteness of the landscape. This absolute landscape seems infinite, both in space and time terms. The image I had in mind when trying to think about the circularity of time and the continuity of generations is about footprints in the snow and other people following them. The people who walked before risked their lives in that very snow, then learned how to survive and transmitted the knowledge to the next generations, the ones that now can walk on that path, the path ahead. I liked this image that came to my mind because it puts things in a different, straightforward perspective, but something we Westerners tend to forget. The people who walked before were ahead. This means the past is not behind. What came before still determines the direction for the future today. I believe this image helps understand how circular time can be. How many paths were there, and how many were erased by the West. Some footprints are still there, but most of them are now holes.

On a more pragmatic way – as this journey taught me a lot about the value of pragmatism – I consider this thesis, and particularly the analysis, as a space, co-constructed with Sigbjørn Skåden, Joar Nango, Johan Sara Jr, Elina Waage Mikalsen, Hilde Skancke Pedersen, and Sara Inga Utsi Bongo.

↔

‘The pure products go crazy’, wrote Clifford (1988), building on the incipit of William Carlos Williams’ poem, ‘*To Elsie*.’ Elsie is the name Williams gave to a woman who was helping his wife at home and who became an inconvenient portrait of truth and promiscuity, which stands “for groups marginalized or silenced in the bourgeois West: “natives, women, the poor.” (Clifford, 1988, p.5). A female, colored body serving “as a site of attraction, repulsion, symbolic appropriation” (p.5); “her great ungainly hips and flopping breasts” representing the uncertainties and ambivalences of Western modernity, the compromised authenticity of traditions- ‘succumbing without emotion,’ and the non-charming nostalgia connected to it (Williams, 1923). According to Whisnant (1983), “such authenticities would be at best

artificial aesthetic purifications” (Clifford, 1988, p.4). Elsie, for Clifford, represents the construction of other histories resulting from the *deconstruction* of the hegemonic one. Her presence is plural, silent and disturbing, incarnating the plurality of *modernities* challenging the Western monocultural vision. She *is* “her possible futures” (1988, p.7). Unmasking Western history as just *one-history-among-others* also has the effect of debunking the diffusionist myth (Blaut, 1993), dissolving the binary tradition/modernity, and displacing “the coherent subject of a singular modernity” (Clifford, 2016). Elsie stands for plural subjects, multiple histories, and identities; her yell is a call to look beyond, to deconstruct linear futures and uniform histories, to imagine and to reconstruct pluriversal futures, as the “human future is something to be creatively imagined, not simply endured” (Clifford, 1988, p.6). Her *plural* existence unleashes hope for creating alternative futures.

This project draws on personal and academic reflections about human rights and responsibilities concerning the environment, the role of different epistemologies in how humans are facing this global crisis, which is not just environmental but ecological in a broader sense, encompassing every being in relation to the system we live in. Also, being a poet, I am susceptible to the poetic and creative dimension, which has the power of a wormhole, bridging different dimensions and people beyond time and space. I decided to open my thesis with these concepts to set the flow of my research methodologies and lens: everything is interconnected and nonlinear beyond the capitalistic logic of time and space. Space and time as we live them are indeed a product of the monoculture of the West, colonized products of modernity. There are, in fact, multiple spaces and multiple times, and reasserting this multiplicity is the first step of decolonizing our minds while creating those spaces – creating worlds- together with the performativity of those times, would be the first step for recovering Indigenous epistemologies and re-indigenizing. The temporality of the West imposes us to think of colonialism as an event that happened in the past. However, thinking with the MTL Collective, “we understand that settler colonialism is a structure, not an event,” a *matrix of domination* which entails that “capitalism is part and parcel of Western hegemony and coloniality,” and that, therefore, “the solutions and responses cannot come from the same epistemology and way of doing things that has got us to this brink” (Center for Creative Ecologies, 2017). The second of the three Zapatista’s sayings, ‘preguntando caminamos’, asking we walk, connects to the image I presented, in the sense that the way is lost, so as the Zapatistas say, we must ask while we walk, “because asking-discussing is a process of collective determination, and collective

determination is the way” (Nitasha, S. Husain, A., & Mckee, 2012). For Holloway, it is time to reverse the “traditional temporalities of revolution” (ibid.). The rupture must happen now, and not in the future, for the future to happen, I would add. It is an “arduous and often slow process of creating a different world, always pushing against-and-beyond that which exists” (ibid.), ‘un Mundo donde quepan muchos mundos’ (a world where many worlds fit), as the one claimed by the Zapatistas.

Rømskog, October 2022

Alessia Marzano

Keywords: Sámi creativity, Sámi epistemologies, Nils-Aslak Valkeapää, epistemicide, Indigenous futures, pluriversality of human rights

Glossary

Ecocide: Officially defined in 2021 as the “unlawful or wanton acts committed with knowledge that there is a substantial likelihood of severe and widespread or long-term damage to the environment being caused by those acts” (Stop Ecocide International, n.d.).

Anthropocene: A term proposed by atmospheric chemist Paul J. Crutzen and limnologist Eugene F. Stoermer (2000) to designate the geological time starting with the industrial revolution (or, for others, with the atomic bomb), within the era currently referred to as the Holocene. The debate around the starting of the Anthropocene as an epoch includes determining whether it follows the Holocene or directly the Pleistocene (Lewis & Maslin, 2015). In addition, the new name was suggested to stress the impact humans had on the Earth system (Reddy, 2014) as “dominant drivers of geologic change on the globe” (Todd, 2015, p.244).

Radical Change: With this term I refer to the radical change that would occur from a radical shift of ontological and epistemological perspectives.

Sci-fi / CLI-fi: while the former refers to the literary/artistic genre of science-fiction, the latter, climate sci-fi, is more specifically connected to the future of climate change.

Green Capitalism: also known as Eco-capitalism, or environmental capitalism, is described as a “new economic system that values natural resources on which human survival depends”, (Chichilnisky, 2020, p.161). I will address this “ecological rift of capitalism” (Holleman, 2018, p.14) in a critical way, linking the ecological decline, or ecocide, with social inequalities as another face of colonialism. As Foster, Clark & York (2010) contend green capitalism is “the product of a social rift: the domination of human being by human being. The driving force is a society based on class, inequality, and acquisition without end. At the global level it is represented by... the imperialist division between center and periphery, North and South, rich, and poor countries” (p.47).

Acoustemology: Joining the words ‘acoustic’ and ‘epistemology,’ the term refers to a “sonic way of knowing and being in the world” (Rice, 2018). Anthropologist and ethnomusicologist Steven Feld coined the portmanteau word in his fieldwork in Papua New Guinea to describe Kaluli’s complex interaction with the rainforest’s sonic environment. The term later became part of the anthropological vocabulary to explain the engagement of humans with sound (Rice, 2018).

Recurrent Sámi Terms

Sápmi: the land inhabited and used by the Sámi since time immemorial, which comprises the Northern parts of Norway, Sweden, Finland, and the Kola peninsula in Russia.

Joik/yoik: (also spelled *jojk*) is described by Ramnarine (2009) as a distinctive vocal style implying complex techniques and using the whole body for resonance. It is based on a system of syllables ('lo,' 'la,' 'yo', for example), which function as "units of meaning" (Jones-Bamman, 2000), and may be combined with words. As described by Hætta (2020), joik's origin can be found in religious practices, while "it is primarily a musical form used in everyday life and social contexts" (p. 41). The purpose of joik is to represent, or "encompass and express" (DuBois, 2006, p.71) an experience, a place, a person, an animal, a feeling, a spirit, or a natural phenomenon. The essential characteristics of joik are its flexibility and adaptability, which contributed to preserving it despite colonization, and the fact that one does not joik *about* something, but rather one *joiks* something. For this reason, it is said to bring the object of joik to life by capturing its essence (Ramnarine, 2009; DuBois, 2006). In Northern Sámi, the term for joik is *luohti*, while the person who performs it is called *juoigi* (Hætta, 2020).

Duodji: This fundamental concept is hard to define and is not just translatable as Sámi "craft" as it is often translated. It is associated with practical skills, creativity (Finbog, 2020, p. 29), and social and spiritual activities.

Dáidda: a term introduced to describe and distinguish 'visual art' in Sámi terms.

Váibmoášši: Described as a "heart case" by a Sámi mediator, identifies something close to the heart, which can differ from person to person, but for which one is willing to fight. Therefore, it is not uncommon to hear the question, "What is your *Váibmoášši*?"

Ofelaccat: A Northern Sámi word that means "pathfinder". Sámi pathfinders "pave the way and innovate, to sustain Sámi ways of being, doing, seeing and thinking in the world today, that have been and are being eroded, devalued, suppressed, erased by past and current colonial systems" (García-Antón, 2022, p.59).

Árbediehtu: Sámi traditional, or ancestral knowledge, which is holistic, being pragmatical, ecological, and spiritual at the same time.

1 Introduction

*I converse with the earth
and hear the creeks answer
their voices the sounds of silver
I converse with the earth
beyond time*
(Valkeapää, 1997, poem 7.)

*“It is perhaps the most important question ever to confront culture
in the broadest sense- for let us make no mistake:
the climate crisis is also a crisis of culture,
and thus, of the imagination”* (Ghosh, 2016, p.9)

Sámi multi-artist Nils-Aslak Valkeapää (in Sámi: Áillohaš or Áilu, for who personally knew him; 1943-2001) was a lucid traveler of worlds, a critical thinker ahead of his time. In his first book, the *Terveisia Lapista pamfleetti/Greetings from Lapland* (1971 [1983]), Áillohaš deeply reflected about the Sámi people and the state of the world, providing a powerful critique of capitalism and colonialism. Throughout his existence, he explored and expressed his way of being Sámi and fostered the feeling of a Sámi community on a global dimension. Twenty-one years after his death, his artistic, political, and spiritual heritage still influences new generations of Sámi artists and their identities. As Sigbjørn Skåden stated, “if you are a Sámi and you are an artist, you have to relate to him, somehow” (conversation, December 6, 2021).

Arguing that Sámi artistic representation is reduced in scope and complexity by coloniality, threatening “to reappropriate, assimilate, subsume/consume and repress Indigenous voicings and visuality, their forms and aesthetics, within its hegemonic logic of domination” (Martineau & Ritskes, (2014, p.1), this study addresses the multidimensionality of Sámi contemporary creative expressions and identities while taking Áillohaš’s production as a reference.

Colonialism in Sápmi “is not a temporality that has passed; it is a far-reaching structure that persists” write García-Antón and Brissach (2022); the logic of colonialism alters how life itself is conceived, impeding

“how Sámi people know and form kinship with lands, waters, and other more-than-human-beings, and how they can fulfill their obligations to those kinships within a colonial economy in which nature is capitalised and Sámi relations to land are penalised by colonial law. These are all-encompassing forms of dispossession. As the

dispossessor of futures, colonialism today prevents Sámi people from imagining the future within their own ways of knowing, being, doing and thinking.” (p.85).

Through in-depth conversations with six contemporary Sámi artists, this study seeks to close the gap between theoretical understandings of decolonizing/indigenizing and Sámi creative practices imagining Sámi self-determined futures.

If, as multi-artist John Akomfrah contends, artists act as “custodians of a possible future”, making alternative futurities visible, they also have the duty of “holding historical failings within the realm of visibility- so that they will not ever be forgotten in the creation of future alternatives” (Demos, 2020. p.83-84).

Who has the right to imagine different futures? “Who is dominating the conversations about how to change the state of things?” (Todd, 2015, p.244). As far as climate is a “common cosmopolitical concern” (Latour, 2004) “we have every reason to blame ‘advanced culture’ for being the greatest danger in world history for ‘underdevelopment’ (Valkeapää, 1984, p.125). As not all humans are responsible for ecological disasters, “not all humans are equally invited into the conceptual spaces where these disasters are theorized or responses to disaster formulated” (Todd, 2015, p.244). Moreover, Métis scholar Zoe Todd claims how “complex and paradoxical experiences of diverse people as humans-in-the-world... can be lost when the narrative is collapsed to a universalizing species paradigm” (2015, p.244). Hence, this project draws upon a critique of capitalism and Western modernity, considering the role of creative expressions and artists in decolonization, as “creators of spaces where other worlds, other orders can become thinkable” (Haapoja, 2011).

I relate the statement “our art forms are never separate from our political forms,” (Nanibush, 2014), to the Sámi context, where Sámi creativity is considered “part of the Sámi way of life”; it is a duty for many Sámi artists “to be socially critical” (Hætta, 2020, p.106-109). To counteract *epistemicide*, I seek to re-center Sámi cultural and creative expressions “as the force that energizes decolonization and provides fugitive possibilities for movement and creative expression” (p.2). Re-centering implies foregrounding Sámi creative practices in their multidimensionality, beyond the reductive framing of creativity as “instrumental to an explicitly stated politics or political project” (p.3) and exploring the “liberating potentialities” (p.3) of Sámi creative practices.

1.1 Purpose of the Research and Research Questions

“Really highly advanced states carry out genocide without blood, without physical violence. That’s how it is.” (Valkeapää, 1983, p.2).

Denying “multiple ontologies of human diversity”, colonialism destroyed Indigenous epistemologies (Mendoza, 2020, p.56), including Sámi ways of being in the world. In this study I analyze the role of Sámi creative expressions through a decolonial and post-development lens concerning self-determination¹ and freedom to pursue Sámi sovereignty. Closing the gap between theoretical understandings of what it means to decolonize/indigenize, and the way Sámi artists relate to these processes through the world-making potential of creative expressions, is vital to read the contemporary struggles for Indigenous self-determination and sovereignty as first and foremost ontological struggles, towards the *pluriverse*, a world where many worlds fit. Significantly, while decolonization is hereby considered “in epistemic terms” (Mignolo, 2011; Walsh & Mignolo, 2018; Mendoza, 2020, p.56), self-determination and sovereignty are addressed in relation to the right of the Sámi to determine their own futures according to Sámi epistemologies, ontologies, and relationality (Kuokkanen, 2000). Referring to the Sámi artistic context I will illustrate, and to the series of conversations held with six Sámi contemporary artists, I ask:

What is the role of Sámi creative expressions in decolonizing/indigenizing Sápmi and imagining possible futures?

Furthermore, considering the statement by Martineau & Ritskes, (2014, p.1): “Indigenous art is inherently political”, where *politics* is defined as the “collaboration among dissenting voices over the kinds of alternative worlds we want to create” (Kothari et al., 2019, p.23), and in

¹ As articulated in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP, 2007): “All peoples have the right of self-determination. By virtue of that right they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social, and cultural development”. This study further addresses: “the right not to be subjected to forced assimilation or destruction of their culture” (Article 8.1); “the right to practice and revitalize their cultural traditions and customs. This includes the right to maintain, protect and develop the past, present and future manifestations of their cultures” (Article 11.1); “the right to revitalize, use, develop and transmit to future generations their histories, languages, oral traditions, philosophies, writing systems and literatures, and to designate and retain their own names for communities, places and persons” (Article 13.1); “ the right to the dignity and diversity of their cultures, traditions, histories and aspirations which shall be appropriately reflected in education and public information” (Article 15.1)(UN, 2007).

relation to Nils-Aslak Valkeapää/Áillohaš critical heritage, I included the following sub-questions to support my analysis,

- Do the participant Sámi artists regard their artistic practices as political and/or activist?
- What is the role Nils-Aslak Valkeapää/Áillohaš and his legacy in light of Sámi self-determined futures?

Considering their *poietic*, transformative, and healing potential, Sámi creative practices can be understood as sites of articulations - and disarticulations - of traditions, hybridity, Indigenous sovereignty, and self-determination. By helping creating bridges over cultural divides, and “opening new avenues for learning about our shared histories, responsibilities and visions of the future” (Bailey, 2017), creative practices are inextricably connected with the radical need for social justice, informing both the theories and the practice(s) of human rights.

While critical of the Eurocentrism of the Human Rights framework, this project builds on the critique outlined by Santos (2021), exploring if, and how, the hegemonic and conventional human rights can be radically transformed in a counter-hegemonic sense. Santos (2021) argues that the acritical celebration of human rights contributes to the undervaluation of other forms of knowledge while holding the emancipatory potentiality of human rights hostage to the Western understanding of the world (p.2). The study, aligned with Fregoso (2014), navigates the permeability between the human rights discourse and “other zones of symbolic production like art practices, performance, education, cultural and social justice activism, and so forth” (p.586).

1.2 Methodology and Ethical Considerations

Inspired by critical Indigenous research (CIRM)², my methodology is based on the moral obligation, especially valid for non-Indigenous researchers, for accountability, reciprocity, and responsibility, implying ‘giving back’ to Indigenous communities (Kuokkanen, 2007). Addressing my research question - what is the role of Sámi creative expressions in decolonizing/indigenizing Sápmi and imagining possible futures - I have held in-depth, semi-structured conversations with six Sámi artists residing in the Norwegian side of Sápmi; Sigbjørn Skåden, Joar Nango, Johan Sara Jr, Elina Waage Mikalsen, Hilde Skancke

² The Methodology will be further discussed in Chapter 5. *Methodology*.

Pedersen, and Sara Inga Utsi Bongo. Notably, I use the term ‘conversation’ rather than ‘interview’, consistently with my decolonial framework and methodologies.

Under consent, the conversations took place and were recorded on Zoom, then manually transcribed verbatim. Following the reflexive thematic analysis method Braun & Clarke (2021)³, they were coded and analyzed for themes. The role of reflexivity was essential, especially in relation to my positionality as non-Indigenous researcher; as social sciences researchers, we are engaged with issues related to social justice. Thus, researching with Indigenous people implies the acknowledgment of colonialism and coloniality, and the risk of misusing Indigenous voices in academia (Kuokkanen, 2007).

The Norwegian Centre for Research Data (NSD) approved the project. The ‘contributors’ of my research are well-known artists, addressed with their names since the nature of the research did not focus on personal views that could endanger them politically or personally. Moreover, they willingly shared details about their works, and we found it more attuned and consistent with decolonial methodologies to address their names and their voices freely. The six participant Sámi artists are here briefly presented in the order in which the conversations were held, spanning from December 2021 to August 2022. A more detailed description can be found in *Annex 1*. The information regarding the artists is public.

Sigbjørn Skåden (b.1976) is a Sámi writer and poet from Skánit/Skånland, living in Romsa/Tromsø. His novel *Fugl* (2019) is relevant for my thesis.

Joar Nango (b. 1979) is a Sámi architect and artist living in Romsa/Tromsø. Relevant projects for this thesis are *Girjegumpi* (Sámi architecture library, 2018–), *Post-Capitalist Architecture TV*, a TV-series started in 2020 with Ken Are Bongo, and a *House for All Cosmologies* (2022).

Johan Sara Jr. (b.1963) is a Sámi musician, composer, producer, teacher, and performer of contemporary music currently residing in Máze/Masi, Finnmark. Relevant to this thesis is the music album *Almmiravddas* (2021).

Elina Waage Mikalsen (b.1992) is a Sámi/Norwegian multidisciplinary artist, singer, and performer, experimenting in art, film, drawing, textile, text/sound installations, and music. She lives in Oslo. Relevant to this thesis is the performance *Mii golggahit joga, bálgá, njuvccaid, váriid/ We Pour the River, the Path, the Swans, the Mountains* (2022).

³ Although there is not a single method; there are multiple ways to do reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2021).

Hilde Skancke Pedersen (b. 1953) is a Sámi and Norwegian multidisciplinary artist, residing in Guovdageaidnu/ Kautokeino, Finnmark working with visual art, poetry, performance, installations, photography, scenography, stage text, and costume design for theater. I particularly refer to the performance/installation of *Klimaterra* (written with Anitta Suikkari, 2021-22) and .

Sara Inga Utsi Bongo (b.1984) is a Sámi duodji practitioner and lecturer, residing in Guovdageaidnu/Kautokeino, Finnmark. I am referring to her work ‘Just a pair of winter shoes’ (2019).

1.3. Thesis Structure

This thesis is divided into seven main chapters. *Chapter One* presented the purpose of the research and the research questions while aiming at preparing the reader for the following chapters, providing an introductory context, methodological choices and ethical considerations, definitions of concepts.

Chapter Two outlining conversations relevant to the thesis, engages in a discussion of the literature thematically divided into the interconnected themes of indigeneity and the Indigenous rights framework; Indigenous knowledge, *ecocriticism*, and Indigenous Futurism; *artivism*, art strategies, and human rights, concluding with recent decolonial and Sámi perspectives on Sámi artistic expressions, and perspectives about Nils-Aslak Valkeapää/Áillohaš.

Chapter Three thoroughly maps out the theoretical framework, formed by interconnected theoretical concepts that are consistent and aligned with decoloniality, which guides my research. The methodology is reviewed in greater detail in *Chapter Four*, presenting the participant recruitment, data collection, data analysis, ethical principles, positionality, and limitations connected to my research.

Chapter Five provides the context for the analysis, addressing some recent perspectives by Sámi artists and scholars on Sámi aesthetics, duodji and art, literature, and music.

In *Chapter Six*, I present my analysis, consisting of three themes, ‘what a Sámi person was and could be, and what Sámi art was and should be’, divided in four sub-themes, ‘art puts questions in all directions’, broken down into three sub-themes, and ‘can you see into the future?’ also sorted into three sub-themes, whose nuances are discussed in the final summary.

Lastly, *Chapter Seven* consists of conclusive remarks while providing recommendations for future research.

1.4. Introductory Context

The following sections provide a non-exhaustive account of Sámi colonization and Christianization, assimilation, and eventual revitalization on the verge of the Indigenous movements of the 1970s. I emphasize the role of Sámi artists in the struggles against colonialism, given its impact on the definition of Sámi rights in Norway.

1.4.1 Sámi Struggles, between Colonization and Revitalization

hey hey mister president hello mister king
emperor and dictator
hey hey sir general
here is the wild child of the tundra
the red flower of the prairie grass
the sheep herder of the hot world
the naked being of the rainforest

hey hey robber of lands
(Valkeapää, 1994)

The Sámi people (also known as Sámit or Sápmelaččat) are the northernmost recognized Indigenous People in Europe⁴. As reported by Hætta (2020), the name Sámi “has replaced the colonial terms ‘Lapp,’ ‘Lap,’ ‘Laplander,’ or ‘Finn,’ which are seen as derogatory” (p.12). Their ancestral land, whose borders were never formalized, is situated in the Fennoscandian region, and is known as *Sápmi* in Northern Sámi⁵. Its territory was divided by the state borders of the emergent nations of Norway, Sweden, Finland, and Russia, in the eighteenth century, although ideologically and geographically is still considered one. Valkeapää (1984) powerfully described the feeling of living in a land suddenly divided by unnatural boundaries:

⁴ Although it is difficult to estimate the Sámi population, numbers range between 50.000 and 100.000, with half of the Sámi living on the Norwegian side, and not infrequently, in the cities outside of Sápmi (Hætta, 2020, p.13). Today, Northern Sámi is the most widely spoken language by Sámi speakers, although there are ten Sámi languages, all belonging to the Finno-Ugric tree. The Kemi Sámi language is extinct and the other nine languages are critically endangered as reported by UNESCO (Hætta 2020, p.13).

⁵ While the name differs in other Sámi languages, I will hereby refer to the name Sápmi.

“If I were to define what ... I'll call my fatherland, my definition would to a very large extent follow lines on the landscape...The mechanically drawn-up boundaries which are marked on the map are unnatural dividing lines for me” (Valkeapää, 1984, p.81-83).

Throughout the centuries, the Sámi have adopted nomadic or semi-nomadic lifestyles, making a living out of fishing, hunting, and gathering. According to Hætta (2020), after the wild reindeer stock was decimated, reindeer husbandry became a livelihood for many Sámi, who, organized in *siidas* (family groups), would follow the reindeer's seasonal migrations. Thus, the animal became the basis for livelihood, symbolically and nutritionally, in many areas of Sápmi (p.12). However, it is crucial to note that not all Sámi have a reindeer husbandry background, and today reindeer husbandry accounts for less than 10% in Norway (Hætta, 2020, p.13).

There is archeological evidence of settlements in Sápmi at least from the end of the last ice age (Greaves, 2018, p.107). Until the 16th century, the Sámi had long been interacting with non-Sámi, proto-Norse, and Norse cultures, being engaged in non-hostile commercial and social exchanges for centuries. However, from the 16th century onward, Norse, and Germanic peoples gradually “enforced a social hierarchy in which they enjoyed cultural superiority and political dominance over Sámi” (Greaves, 2018, p. 107). The acquisition of Sámi territories constituted a crucial factor in building the Scandinavian kingdoms, becoming a matter of sovereignty with the consolidation of boundaries (Greaves, 2018, p.110). Sámi transnationality was considered a threat potentially affecting “the territorial control of different states” (Greaves, 2018, p.111).

Although Christian missionaries had already approached the Sámi centuries earlier, Christianization intensified when the religious conversion aligned with the national interests, becoming a tool of colonization. In addition to taxation, Sámi were to be converted to Christianity, as religious unity was considered crucial to ensure social order (Greaves, 2018, p.111). Consequently, from the 17th century, the Sámi shamans (*noaidis*), were condemned for witchcraft and executed; their ceremonial drums and other items associated with the devil were destroyed, while offerings at sacred places, joik, and the Sámi language became forbidden.

As many Sámi converted, due also to the role of boarding schools⁶, built from 1900 to the post-war period in Finnmark and Sweden, Christianization eventually divided the Sámi

⁶ In less populated areas, Sámi, Kven (a Finnish minority), Finnish and Roma children were being forced away from their families into boarding schools, with the excuse of providing better schooling for them. This is considered the “darkest chapter in the history of Norwegianisation and Swedishisation” (Hætta, 2020, p. 50-51).

communities⁷. Centuries of Christianization almost wiped-out Sámi pre-Christian religion, which, according to Hætta has “animistic and shamanistic traits” (2020, p.13). However, the intangible knowledge was not completely erased, and some ancient Sámi rituals are still alive, contributing to the revitalization of Sámi spirituality today (Hætta, 2020, p.13).

The consequences of the Second World War were particularly disastrous in the counties of Romssa and Finnmarku, where over 90 percent of the populated areas were destroyed, forcing the inhabitants to flee, hiding in the mountains, or evacuating to the South (Hætta, 2020, p.17). The process of reconstruction and “modernization”, based on the principle of ‘equality’, led to cultural assimilation, referred to as ‘Norwegianization’⁸. The colonial assimilation policies had severe consequences for Sámi culture, as “few traces of their material culture were left, and the national states made no effort to safeguard or include them in the reconstruction and nation-building that followed” (Hætta, 2020, p.18). The role of the boarding schools was devastating. Many Sámi did not learn the Sámi language, especially in the coastal areas that were evacuated after the war ended.

As Hilde Skancke Pedersen argues, it is a nice thought that “everybody should have the same education, the same opportunities” (conversation, June 23, 2022). Nevertheless, “stalling children together in boarding schools, trying to force them to learn a language they never heard, means a lot of bad things coming out of a good idea” (H. S. Pedersen, conversation, June 23, 2022).

1.4.2 Imagining a Sámi Nation: Sáminess, the Sámi Movement, and the Marginal Sámi Identities

Expressing the Sámi identity and organizing Sámi collective interests was the aim of the Sámi Movement, concerned with the relationship with the majority culture and the creation of a Sámi self-image as a “distinct people who had lived in the area before the present states” (Gaski, 2008, p.220). Gaski (2008) claims that the construction of a Sámi identity came at the expenses of the marginal Sámi population - namely the ones who do not connect directly with this “Sámi national narrative” (p.219). While political in its essence, the Sámi revitalization

⁷ Around 1850, Laestadianism took hold among Sámi and Kven, opposing Christian priests, “whose conduct was deeply damaging to Sámi culture and lifestyle” (Hætta, 2020, p.55).

⁸ The Sámiráđđi (the Sámi Council), founded in 1956, by promoting a shared identity, Sámi rights, and interests (Hætta, 2020, p.53) influenced the end of Norwegianization as a policy in 1963.

promoted by the Sámi movement was expressed through “music, art, education, research and popular culture” (Gaski, 2008, p.220).

Particularly around and after the Alta protest⁹, the Sámi movement began adopting Sámi symbols to represent a nation- “a Sámi map and flag”- transforming “the negative stigma associated with Sáminess to more positive markers of Sámi identity” (Gaski, 2008, p.220; Stordahl, 1996, 2000). The “new” Sámi image was prompted by many groups as emancipatory, although “it did not produce a coherent system of cognitive identification for the Sámi people as a whole” (p.222). Many Sámi were, and still are, not comfortable with the “clear ethnic dichotomization implicit in the metaphoric kinship the new emblems symbolized” (Gaski, 2008, p.222). The division between "us"(Sámi) and "them" (Norwegians/Westerners) that comes out of this framework, increases the risk of “misrepresenting peoples’ complex identities” (Gaski, 2008, p.234). Many Sámi live

“outside the so-called Sámi core areas where the ethnic border between Sámi and Norwegian is blurred; many of them can not [sic] speak the Sámi language and they do not bare visible cultural traits or possess knowledge that is traditionally connected to “Sáminess.” For this group, imagining the Sámi nation is not very obvious, which represents a challenge for developing and expressing Sámi nationhood.” (Gaski, 2008, p.219)

Self-determination is thus tied with the self-definition as Sámi and the place given to the identities which differ from a ‘Sámi national narrative’ (Gaski, 2008), becoming intrinsically problematic in a context where not all the Sámi consider themselves as such. “Creating identities”, politics is responsible for generating meaning while “answering the question of ‘who’ we are as a people” (Gaski, 2008, p.221).

1.4.3 Indigenous Global Framework and Sámi rights

The Sámi cultural revitalization flourished in the 1970s, also due to the broader international movement of Indigenous Peoples, demanding an end to discrimination, access to their ancestral lands and resources, and self-determination. The essence of Sámi revitalization

⁹ According to Hætta (2020), due to the demand for energy in Finnemárku, already in the 60s official reports had suggested to build a power plant close to Áltá, by damming the river Áltá- Guovdageaidnu. Máze, situated in the river valley, would, in this sense, be flooded to function as ‘water reservoir’ (p.20).

and fighting spirit was symbolized by the acronym ČSV¹⁰, which usually stands for *Čájjet Sámi Vuoiŋŋa!* or *Čájjet Sámi vuodá* (Show Sámi spirit!) (Hætta, 2020). Bridging with other Indigenous Peoples across the globe, in those years, some Sámi activists had also taken a role in the World Council of Indigenous Peoples, including Nils-Aslak Valkeapää. Since then, the trans-national Indigenous rights discourse has been referred to as an interpretive legal framework in national and local disputes¹¹, concurring to shape the debates and struggles surrounding Sámi rights to lands and water as an “indigenous people’s matter” (Gaski, 2008, p.227). The Áltá conflict not concerning the right to own, “but the right to be heard as a people” (Bjørklund, 2020, p.46), “revealed the unresolved problems of governance concerning the relationship between the State and the Sámi” (Gaski, 2008, p.220; Minde, 2003). However, the case prompted favorable results for the Sámi in the rights field: the establishment of the Sámi Rights Committee in 1980, intending to examine the need for “constitutional protection of the Sámi culture”, resulting in amendments to the Constitution¹² and the constitution of the Sámi Parliament in 1989¹³.

Norway became the first country to ratify the ILO Convention No.169 (1989), continuing its progress in matters of legal obligations towards the Sámi. The Finnmark Act in 2005 facilitates “the management of land and natural resources in the county of Finnmark in a balanced and ecologically sustainable manner” (Ravna, 2014, p.300), while the Reindeer Husbandry Act (2007) acknowledges the ecological, economical, and cultural aspects embedded in reindeer husbandry and Sámi way of life (Ravna, 2011-12, p. 275).

According to Østhagen (2011), Sàpmi increasingly represents an intersection between the regional and international levels, being at the center of the Arctic geopolitical debate. Evidence of this is the Sàpmi- EU strategy (2019-2022), which aimed to increase and strengthen “the strategic relationship between the EU framework and Sámi society” (Sámiráđđi, 2022, p.4), founded on “a holistic worldview in which Sámi culture is understood to be the essential foundation of any actions taken to meet the needs of Sámi society today.” (*ibid.*).

¹⁰ČSV is also a movement that enhanced Sáminess and the formation of a common identity (Hætta Kalstad, 2013)

¹¹ Especially in relation to the ILO Convention No.169, as Norway was the first country to ratify it (Gaski, 2008).

¹² Constitutional Article 110a recites, “It is responsibility of the authorities of the State to create conditions enabling the Sámi people to preserve and develop its language, culture and way of life” (Ministry of Justice and Public Security, 1988). Another amendment in 1990 instituted the equality of Sámi languages and Norwegian.

¹³ The Sámi Parliaments, present in Norway, Sweden, and Finland, and called Sámediggi, are consulted by the nation-states on matters of Sámi concern, but have no sovereignty over lands, waters, and natural resources (Hætta, 2020, p.13). The Parliament is a directly elected assembly with advisory powers, aiming to achieve self-determination as political autonomy (Gaski, 2008, p.222).

Despite the Indigenous rights framework, “a young generation of Sámi artists, thinkers, politicians and nature guardians living across all sides of the borders dividing Sápmi are contesting the depth of this narrative”, arguing that “there is no postcolonial condition for the Sámi people” (García-Antón, Gaski & Guttorm, 2020, p.9). A more subtle form of colonialism, masked as part of the ‘green shift’, is noticeable in the construction of the windmills across Sámi reindeer-herding land and sacred areas, and in the concessions given to multinational extractive industries which dump toxic waste in the fjords¹⁴, disrupting “ancestral livelihoods, spiritual values and Sámi bodies of knowledge (epistemologies)” (*ibid.*).

1.5 Definitions

It is crucial to examine some complex terms that are relevant to this study clarifying how I use them. Some concepts, in particular Indigenous self-determination, and sovereignty are interconnected.

Sámi Creative Expressions

Most approaches to Sámi artistic expressions tend to divide them according to the different corresponding Western disciplines, following the Western binary way of thinking. For instance, “traditional knowledge, handicraft and duodji are placed in one group, and *dáidda*, pictorial art, which signifies artistic freedom or autonomy, are placed in another” (Snarby, 2017, p.122). In my research, I discuss this division, considering creativity in its broader and holistic sense, encompassing literature, poetry, visual art, architecture, *duodji*, music, and performances, under the terms “artistic/creative expressions” or “artistic/creative practices”, as many Sámi artists use different means of expression. When employed, the separation between the various practices and disciplines is to be considered descriptive.

“Tradition/traditional” and “Modern/modernity”

I use the term tradition emphasizing its “generative and propelling “characteristics (Hunter, 2014, p.2). Thinking of cultural products as “living traditions,” also problematize the

¹⁴ I refer, for example, to what happened in Repparfjorden.

discourse on preservation addressed in official documents connected to cultural heritage (UNESCO, 2009-2014). The concept of traditional knowledge becomes problematic if associated with the idea of authenticity, which “is produced by removing objects and customs from their current historical situation – a present-becoming-future” (Clifford, 1988, p.265). When possible, I use the term ‘ancestral knowledge’ which is more appropriate, relating to “knowledge inherited over time rather than bound by the frame of a tradition” (García-Antón, 2022, p.66) or contextually, to Sámi knowledge (*Árbediehtu*). While modernity is also used as a theoretical concept as the other side of coloniality (Mignolo, 1992; Quijano, 2008), in some cases I use it in a descriptive and non-dichotomic sense.

Indigenous

The term ‘indigenous’ has been extensively associated with the *allochronistic* practice of placing the non-European others in a “different colonized space” and time, a static, ‘primitive’, and ‘underdeveloped’ past (Fabian, 1983). Contrasting this perspective, I use the term Indigenous in a decolonized way, avoiding oversimplifications of the experience of different Indigenous Peoples but rather relating to their common struggles. I chose to use the words Indigenous, Native, and Western, with capital letters, highlighting the differences between them. I chose to use the spelling *Sámi*; there are multiple languages in Sápmi, but I mostly refer to Northern Sámi.

Indigenous Sovereignty and Indigenous Self-Determination

Indigenous sovereignty is not just a political definition, but “a social and cultural way of defining community” (Bauder & Mauller, 2021, p.10) recognizing relationships, interdependencies, and responsibilities between different actors is an “extension of the relationship that Indigenous People have to their land” (p.11). Notably, the idea of sovereignty is deeply contextualized, contradicting “the definition of Westphalian sovereignty as a uniform conception of state authority” (Bauder & Mauller, 2021, p. 12). This “state-centred, territorial idea of sovereignty” served as a political justification and “instrument of political control” for the creation of modern nation-states, being “deeply implicated in the colonisation of

Indigenous Peoples” (Bauder & Mueller, 2021, p.2-3¹⁵). I refer to Sámi sovereignty as re-establishing and reconnecting with Sámi concepts and values. While the Westphalian conception of sovereignty shaped the international political debate for centuries, Indigenous sovereignty, since the UN Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (2007), has “been mobilised in relation to efforts of decolonialization” (Bauder & Mueller, 2021, p.1). The liberal and democratic principles underlying Westphalian sovereignty, continuing to uphold settler colonialism¹⁶, “threaten Indigenous self-determination” (Bauder & Mauller, 2021, p. 6).

Self-determination is too often misinterpreted as “a desire for recognition by the state and society” (Bauder & Mueller, 2021, p.7). Rather, Indigenous self-determination deals also with the right “to maintain and develop manifestations of cultural practices including the restitution of their spiritual and intellectual properties” (Kuokkanen, 2000, p. 412).

Culture

This study considers culture as flexible, adaptable, and dynamic, emphasizing the political aspect of culture, insofar as social life comes to be seen as “potentially political where politics is the contestation of relations of power” (Nash, 2001, p.77). The interconnected view between nature and culture is emphasized in most Indigenous philosophies. As the vice president of the Sámi Council, Aslak Holmberg contends “the Sámi lands are not wilderness. There is no word for ‘wilderness in the Sámi languages. A wilderness is uninhabited, deserted, wild...our so-called wildernesses are in fairly intensive use. Our natural landscape is our cultural landscape” (Holmberg, 2021, p.136).

Activism and *Artivism*

Activism has been conceptualized in different ways, often emphasizing contestation as a “core aspect of activist communication” (Ganesh & Zoller, 2012, p.69), besides “advocacy, conflict, and transgression” and solidarity (*ibid.*). Most of the time, activists tend to be

¹⁵ See also Douglas (2005).

¹⁶ It suffices here to note some of the main characteristics that distinguish settler colonialism from colonialism *per se*, as described by Veracini (2007;2010). Starting from the capitalist need, described by Marx and Engels in 1848, for expanding “everywhere, settle everywhere, establish connections everywhere” (in Veracini, 2010, p.1). Settler colonialism is related to both colonialism and migration. However, settlers “are made by conquest, not just by immigration” being “founders of political orders and carry their sovereignty with them” (Veracini, 2010, p.3). In her article, Mendoza (2020), criticizes the dichotomy that settler colonialism theorists created between settler colonialism and ‘exploitation colonialism’ which disregards the history of racism in Iberian colonialism.

described in radical terms, emphasizing the “aggressive and violent” dimension, and ruling out the possibility of dialogue (Ganesh & Zoller, 2012, p.71). Social action cannot exclude dialogue, to be a truly transformative praxis; without dialogue and serious reflection, action is considered “mere activism” or sloganeering (Freire, 1970, p.65).

Artivism is a term coined by Ricardo Dominguez, blending art and activism. It is “a new educative language for transformative social action” (Aladro-Vico, Jivkova-Semova & Bailey, 2018), evolving from “urban and graffiti art, and situationism” (p.10).

In this study, activism is contextualized as “direct action” within the Indigenous Peoples' anti-systemic and decolonial struggles. Notably, activism is not homogeneous, intertwining with “local, national and global domains, to articulate a vision of a future” (Venkateswar & Hughes, 2011, p.5).

2 Literature Review

2.1 Outline

The following sections, offering a review of inspiring scholarly works, are meant to clarify my own direction. I curated the literature review thematically, from the global to the Sámi context.

The first section questions the validity of the criteria associated with indigeneity, framing the Sámi identities as Indigenous. The second section outlines different studies focusing on Indigenous views, environmental degradation, Indigenous knowledge as part of the *ecocriticism* debate, concerned with the relationship between humans and the environment, and in connection with Indigenous futurism. The third section connects artistic expressions with climate change, framing the Anthropocene as an “onto-epistemological” critical era. The fourth section presents *artivism* and the emancipatory vision of human rights as potentially liberating praxis from below. The sixth part brings together different perspectives on Valkeapää, emphasizing his role in shaping *Sáminess*, and his ecocritical perspective.

2.2. Indigeneity and the Indigenous Rights Framework

Indigeneity is a contested concept having no final definition under international law. Both the International Labour Organization’s Convention (ILO169, 1989), and the Indigenous Declaration (UNDRIP, 2007) leave to Indigenous individuals the determination of their own identity, “in accordance with the traditions and customs of the community or nation concerned” (United Nations, 2013, p.2). Nevertheless, some criteria define Indigenous Peoples in the frame of international law. The criterion of self-identification was proposed by special rapporteur Martínez-Cobo (1986)¹⁷, while considering other elements, including historical continuity, distinctiveness, non-dominance, and “determination to preserve, develop and transmit to future

¹⁷ “On an individual basis, an indigenous person is one who belongs to these indigenous populations through self-identification as indigenous (group consciousness) and is recognized and accepted by these populations as one of its members (acceptance by the group)” (Addendum 4, para. 381).”

generations their ancestral territories and identity as peoples in accordance with their own cultural patterns, social institutions and legal system” (p.2-3).

While the phrasing may vary in each document, the recurring elements are critically examined by Bello-Bravo (2019)¹⁸, seeking to close the gap between legal and socio-cultural definitions of indigeneity. The author argues how such legal definitions often “fail to compass some Indigenous people, thereby formally and legally excluding them from the very process of protections that such legal frameworks are intended to afford” (p.112). Undoubtedly, finding a definition represents a crucial part of Indigenous rights recognition (Bello-Bravo, 2019, p.112). I agree with Corn tassel (2003) and Bello-Bravo (2019) arguing that the “dynamic and evolving character of indigeneity” (p.115), lacking in legal documents, would ensure the continuity of indigeneity even in changing circumstances, for example when an Indigenous person moves to an urban area (Bello-Bravo, 2019, p.115). However, indigeneity represents more than a conceptualization, even for those who are not Indigenous but share the “collective desire to change the world” (Fregoso, 2014, p.593), keeping alive “non- Cartesian epistemologies [and] relational ontologies” (Delgado-P., 2012, p.178).

Fostering Indigenous self-representation (Smith, 2012) is crucial to avoid replicating the colonialist inclination to “essentialize or exoticize nativeness as a homogeneous entity” (Delgado-P. 2012, p.198). Particularly, referring to something as “an indigenous peoples’ matter and connecting it to legal claims often entails being trapped in an essentialist discourse” (Gaski, 2008, p.228). While Sámi identity is based on an ancestrally defined conception of ethnicity, as Bjørklund (2020) contends, this definition “is not always in line with people’s understanding of authentic ethnicity and identity” (p.44). These essentializing tendencies of Sámi political discourse are associated with the need to provide cultural and political arguments for distinctiveness conforming “to the Norwegian state’s identity expectations” to secure cultural rights (Gaski, 2008, p.234).

¹⁸ For the extended discussion, the reader should refer to Bello-Bravo (2019) and Corn tassel (2003).

2.3 The ‘End of the World’: Indigenous Knowledge, Ecocriticism, and Indigenous Futurism

“It is such a deep frustration that the youth around the world, confronted with the possibility of an imminent ecological collapse, visualize more easily the end of the world than the end of capitalism.”
(Santos, 2020a, p.591-592)

What if a world is ending, while others are being born from the struggles? Some authors situate the beginning of the post-Holocene era with the Industrial Revolution, or the evolution of nuclear science, while others collocate it in 1610, with the Orbis Spike¹⁹. As Demos (2020) argues, the latter coincided with “the geological implication of colonization in the Americas” (p.246). Since its popularization by Crutzen in the early 2000s, the Anthropocene has become a “sort of charismatic mega-category” (Reddy, 2014). The major critique to the concept contends that emphasizing the impact of humanity on the Earth, it ignores and flattens the differences between “who drive fossil-fuel economy and those who do not” (Malm & Hornborg, 2014; Todd, 2015).

Demos (2020), emphasizes how the Anthropocene is an era of “onto-epistemological and politico-military” wars, “within (still unfolding) histories of colonial and global states of violence and dispossession” (p.238). The fears for the end of the world are contextualized by Indigenous voices “as a mode of settler anxiety, haunted by those centuries-old histories of colonial violence” (Demos, 2020, p.26). In this sense, *hauntology*, a portmanteau concept describing the feeling of being hunted by the past constantly reminding of other possible futures (Coverley, 2020) has been associated in the West with cultural and political failures “of social imagination”, leading from the impossibility to imagine possible futures, to the hope for different ones (Coverley, 2020, p.4). For Fisher (2012), the “no longer” “haunts the present from the past”, and the “not yet” “haunts the present from the future”, disrupting Western linear conceptions of time (Coverley, 2020, p.5).

For many indigenous peoples, the Anthropocene represents “the worst of past potential futures” (White, 2017), when confronted with the destitution of transgenerational continuity of

¹⁹ Lewis and Maslin (2015) assert that only documented long-lasting changes to the Earth may be considered the beginning of a new era on the planet. The markers for these global changes are called “golden spike)

cultural traditions, land, and resources, and the unceasing “overturning of stable systems of sovereignty and self-determination” (Demos, 2020, p. 27).

Nonetheless, Todd (2016), contextualizing the end of the world through Indigenous eyes, asks crucial questions regarding the meaning of having “a reciprocal discourse on catastrophic end times and apocalyptic environmental change in a place where, over the last 500 years, Indigenous Peoples faced (and face) the end of worlds with the violent incursion of colonial ideologies and actions”. In this sense, the Anthropocene contains multiple stories, “temporalities and geographies, of sequential world-ending events”, informing “present anxieties and realities” in relation to the environmental breakdown (Demos, 2020, p.27).

Cajete (2018) recognizes this time of dramatic climate change, degradation, and social disruptions as a time of the “rise of Indigenous mind” (p.15), calling for the recognition and application of Indigenous ancient consciousness and knowledge to the global context. Indigenous knowledge is part of a paradigm called by Cajete (2018) *Native Science*, a *kincentric* (Martinez, 2003) “relational orientation, knowledge base, and process for sustaining people, community, culture, and place through time and generations” (Cajete, 2018, p.16) including “Indigenous relationship to land, plants, animals, community, self, cosmos, spirit, and the creative animating processes of life” (p.15). Science encompasses not only ecological practices but also philosophy, spirituality, astronomy, creativity, “art and architecture; practical sustainable technologies and agriculture; and ritual and ceremony practiced by Indigenous Peoples both past and present” (Cajete, 2018, p.16). The concern for the planet calls also for *intergenerational justice*, as expressed in the Iroquois Confederacy constitution, “human actions should account for families seven generations beyond” (Nelson & Shilling, 2018, p.13).

Linking academic theory to “pragmatic eco-activism conducted by multiethnic and Indigenous communities”, Monani and Adamson (2017) address the intersections between Ecocriticism as an interdisciplinary project within Indigenous and Native American Studies (p.2). Environmental criticism or *ecocriticism* (Glotfelty, 1996) is an emergent interdisciplinary field of literary studies which considers human beings’ relationship with the environment and examines literary responses to environmental concerns (Harvard University Center, n.d.).

Ghosh (2016) addresses climate change as a crisis of culture and imagination, particularly in relation to colonialism. However, as Streeby (2018) argues, considering sci-fi and cli-fi to be set in a future distant from our present (Ghosh, 2016, p.72), he fails to address science-fiction as a worthy contributor to climate change debates. Conversely, I argue with

Streeby (2018), that science fiction and other speculative genres are crucial for Indigenous people and people of color “to remember the past and imagine futures that help us think critically about the present and connect climate change to social movements” (p.5). As Octavia Butler has argued, science-fiction and *Indigenous futurism*²⁰ being about “how we in the present shape the future that is to come by thinking about it and foreseeing it” (Streeby, 2018, p.25) can help recovering hopes and dreams “by rethinking the past in a new framework” (Streeby, 2018, p.17).

2.4 Artivism, Art Strategies, and Human Rights

In his essay *How Does Music Free Us*, activist and musician Fred Ho (2011) discussed the connections between music, ecology, and revolution tackling the issue of what he called an “ecological and cultural desertification” strictly connected to the capitalist system of mass commodity production, calling for a de-Europeanization of the world and the need for a low impact upon nature (p.55), a human liberation through human creativity.

The works of politically committed artists are undoubtedly crucial for “the social memory and values of the oppressed ... to resonate across time and disturb the Imperial occupation of dignity” (Barson & Rodriguez, 2019). Clarifying what it means to be an activist, Barson & Rodriguez (2019) state that the transition from artist to activist occurs when recognizing common objectives and “offer[ing] our labor as a means to achieving those goals” (*ibid.*). The ability of artivism is in generating “audiences, congregated community, and transmit values and revolutionary hope through aesthetics and performance” (*ibid.*).

Blanes and Bertelsen (2021) propose the term ‘confluences’ to express “transformations and generative socialities” and to convey “utopian transformative wills to the extent of pushing us to rethink the space of politics, social movements and ideology” (p.6) towards “a praxis generative of mobilization” (2021, p.6). The emancipatory potential of art is enshrined at both local and global levels. In this sense, acknowledging interconnections and recognizing *confluences* can play a big role in forming what Fish (2020) calls “collaborative resistance” and Fregoso (2014) addresses as “collaborative arts practices”, understood as

²⁰ An expression coined by Anishinaabe writer Dillon (2003) that will be discussed in Chapter Three: *Theoretical Framework*.

“unconventional sites for the expression of human rights discourse” (p.586), living spaces in which human rights intersect with other areas of “symbolic production” and social justice.

2.5 Perspectives on Sámi Artistic Expressions and Activism

Focusing on contemporary music, performances, and festivals in Sàpmi, Hilder (2012) analyzes the role of musical creativity as part of the Sàmi cultural heritage debate. Particularly Hilder addresses the role of *Jojkarkivprojektet* (The joik Archive Project, 2005-2007), whose purpose was to “recollect, digitize and make accessible to a Sàmi public all known joik recordings” (p. 166), for inspiring “musical creativity for a Sàmi future” (p.166).

Hætta (2020), Sámi author, photographer, and artist tackles the interweaving of artistic expressions and activism vis-à-vis local and global political contingencies, by illustrating the formation of the artist group *Mázejoavku* in 1978, around the Áltá case. Some relevant questions addressed by Hætta (2020) also inform my inquiry, especially in terms of exploring the articulations of “‘Sáminess’ in modern society” (p.44). Similarly, García-Antón, Gaski & Guttorm (2020), discuss the People’s action against the damming of the Áltá- Guovdageaidnu Waterway (c.1978-1982) emphasizing the pivotal role of Sámi artists and the unexpected transnational movement of solidarity that surrounded the action (p.8). Although its consequences were considered positive at the time, invisible and systemic forms of colonialism are still in place, in “Norwegian and Nordic health educational, economic, cultural, media and judicial systems, and that the Sámi infrastructure that was created is tightly bound by the powers of these Nordic states.” (*ibid.*). Finbog (2022) criticizes the concept of land ownership informed, the author argues, by a view of the world seen as a hierarchical structure, which is utterly different from Sámi philosophy, based on the relationality of all beings, including “the land, the rivers, our ancestors long passed, animals and other creatures” (Finbog, 2022, p.7). As the author argues, Indigenous sovereignty, and the onto-epistemological conflict behind it, is not abstract or a matter of principle. How humanity interacts with the land is a matter of survival, “an issue of our future” (Finbog, 2022, p.11). As from a Sámi perspective “Indigenous sovereignty can only be attained when the inter-substantiation between the human and natural worlds that underpins Sámi worldviews is acknowledged” (García-Antón et al. 2020, p.10), the cultural rights framework is acting as “an effective tool to destroy Indigenous values of inter-substantiation” (*ibid.*). In my study I share their main standpoint, as “state-run violations across

the Nordic region” are based on an epistemological basis, “a clash of knowledge systems, and of forms of being and doing in the world” (*ibid.*).

I also build on Finbog, García-Antón & Niillas (2022), who consider the Sámi Pavilion experience in ‘La Biennale di Venezia, 2022’ an act of Indigenous sovereignty. For the first time, the Nordic Pavilion has been transformed, by artists Pauliina Feodoroff, Máret Ánne Sara, and Anders Sunna, into the Sámi Pavilion. The project, representing “a sovereign call for Sápmi”, was conceptualized around three key elements, namely “transgenerational relations, holistic Sámi knowledge, and Sámi spiritual perspectives” (Finbog et al., 2022). García-Antón (2018) poses crucial questions across critical perspectives on land rights, curatorial practices, global and local Indigenous art expressions, and theory and praxis of sovereignty. I share with García-Antón (2018) the attitude of posing questions, while inquiring the way Sámi artists relate *to* and express decolonization and indigenization in their own terms.

2.6 Áillohaš: A Kaleidoscope

Lars Mørk Finborud and Geir Tore Holm, the curators of the retrospective exhibition on Nils-Aslak Valkeapää/Áillohaš, (Henie Onstad Dáiddaguovddáš/ Henie Onstad Kunstsenter, 23.10.2020 — 02.05.2021) intended to give homage to the multidisciplinary artist through an exhibition that could reflect

“the richness, the cross artistic practice, and the intense spectrum of creativity and political commitment found in Áillohaš’s life and art- as a painter, poet, joiker, philosopher, composer, photographer, journalist, book artist, record producer, publisher, writer, festival organizer, sculptor, actor, architect, puppet maker, political activist, sound artist, and beyond” (Finborud & Holm, 2020, p.32)

After the exhibition, contributions from many artists and writers around Sápmi have been collected in the catalogue called *Nils-Aslak Valkeapää/Áillohaš* (2020). Each contributor presented a ‘piece’ of Áillohaš’s artist and persona, contributing to a full-fledged, complex, and kaleidoscopic picture. Especially, the contribution by Sigbjørn Skåden (2020) was crucial to understanding the influence Áillohaš had on the new generations of artists and to frame Valkeapää in a more complex panorama of identities, away from the ‘romanticized way’ he sometimes has been transposed from the outside. In his contribution, Skåden (2020) analyzes Áillohaš’ writing as having two dimensions, one more introverted and reflexive, addressing

nature, and Sámi relationship with the land, and another more extroverted, critical towards colonization and capitalism. The two dimensions are considered interconnected, like a pendulum going back and forth.

Art historian Hautala-Hirvioja (2017) discusses the importance of different Sámi backgrounds for three post-war Sámi (Finnish) artists, Nils-Aslak Valkeapää, Merja Aletta Rantila (b.1960), and Outi Pieski (b.1973), to analyze “how they construct their belonging to Sámi culture and deal with their (sometimes traumatic) Sámi backgrounds in light of their Western cultural and art educations through their art in different societal situations” (p.99). The author shows how different Sámi generations relate to Sámi identity and culture, as well as to decolonization, addressing the assimilation policy implemented in Finland²¹ from the late 19th century to the post-WWII period (Hautala- Hirvioja, 2017). My project resonates in part with Hautala- Hirvioja’s objectives, aiming at emphasizing the importance of individual stances alongside the collective ones. Nykänen (2018) navigates the political thought of Valkeapää, especially regarding Sámi distinctiveness, and affinities with other Indigenous Peoples, in the context of the international Indigenous Peoples’ movement (p.123). Nykänen especially focuses on Áillohaš’s early works (1971-1994), to locate the foundations of his political thought connected to Sáminess (Hautala- Hirvioja, 2017; Skåden, 2020).

²¹ The author refers to Finland as Valkeapaa was initially grew up in the Finnish side of Sapmi. Assimilation policies were in all Scandinavian countries, although with some differences.

3 Theoretical Framework

3.1 Outline

In this section, I outline the interpretive framework used to analyze the conversations held with the six Sámi artists. I look at Sámi contemporary artistic expressions through a *decolonial* lens, as Norway can be framed in the context of Nordic colonial complicity’ and ‘Nordic colonial exceptionalism’ (Loftsdottir & Jensen, 2016, p.1), despite “colonial processes were typically more insidious, gradual and less *physically* violent in Scandinavia” (Kuokkanen, 2019, p.8). The idea of traditional futures (Clifford, 2013) is intertwined with reclaiming and reassigning Indigenous Peoples, including the Sámi, to the present and the future. While epistemicide, and the on-going dispossession of the ancestral land “in the name of (settler) nation-building and industrial development” (Tlostanova et al., 2019, p.3) connect the Sámi and other Indigenous Peoples, to approach indigeneity as articulated entails acknowledging the diversity of Indigenous cultures and histories despite their common struggles against different imperialisms (Clifford, 2013, p.54).

Decolonization, intended as “epistemic reconstitution” (Mignolo, 2018), involves a delinking from the Western values of commodification and exploitation and the recentering of Indigenous epistemes and values such as relationality, reciprocity, and responsibility. This ‘cognitive shift’ needs to be imagined in a post-development framework, connected with a *pluriversal* perspective on human rights, which acknowledges the “infinite diversity of the world” on onto-epistemological levels (Escobar, 2016, p.13).

3.2 Decolonization, Decoloniality, Delinking

Colonialism, and the discrimination against people with Sámi backgrounds, which created popular stereotypes about Sámi, considered ‘underdeveloped’²², deeply influenced Sámi identities (Gaski, 2008). As Valkeapää wrote, “Western culture evaluates other cultures

²² Not to mention the role of physical anthropology in legitimating the European superiority through anthropometric measurements of other cultures (Hall et al., 2013).

through comparison with itself. Thus, foreign cultures are usually viewed as primitive vestiges from a pre-historic age... and their creative work is consequently called primitive art” (1983, p.9).

The assimilation policies resulted in “a radical decline in the number of people who identified themselves as Sámi” as it was considered “a hindrance, and many Sámi did not teach their children the Sámi language” (Gaski, 2008, p.220). This loss of knowledge and language, poverty, and the feeling of being politically powerless generated a sense of inferiority (*ibid.*).

For the Sámi, deprived of their futures, colonialism involves “devalu[ing] Sámi perspectives and push[ing] them towards the edge of extinction” (García-Antón, 2022, p.59-60). *Coloniality*, proposed by Quijano (1992) is an “indigenized world-system perspective” (Tlostanova et al, 2019, p.1), to unveil “the underlying logic of all Western modern/colonial imperialisms” (E-International Relations, 2017), and describe the dependence on the norms of interpreting the world made by Western modernity (Tlostanova et al, 2019, p.1)²³. *Decoloniality* stands as an emancipatory “epistemic, political and cultural movement” (*ibid.*), for which Western modernity is the dark side of coloniality, affiliated with “racism, hetero-patriarchy, economic exploitation, and discrimination of non-European knowledge systems” (*ibid.*)²⁴.

In Norway, coloniality shows one of its faces in the so-called ‘Green colonialism’, corresponding to “state-inflicted destruction of Sami knowledges, perspectives and territories (in other words, of epistemicide and ecocide)” following a “pattern of persistent state disregard” for Sami sovereignty, and “threatening the very survival of Sami people, including their Indigenous knowledge systems, livelihoods, spiritual values and worldviews.” (García-Antón, Gaski & Guttorm, 2020, p.9-10).

In fact, the term *epistemicide* refers to the deliberate process of destruction of the knowledge and epistemology of Indigenous populations, including “their memories and ancestral links and their manner of relating to others and to the land” (Finbog, 2022, p.5; Santos, 2016, p.18).

²³ In this regard, referring to ‘epistemic demarcations’ rather than to geographical and territorial delimitations, the concepts of Global North and Global South address the production of knowledge of colonized societies and “enhances the recognition of reality from a perspective that deconstructs the coloniality/modernity of the Global North, which has been internalized as absolute truth” (Passada, 2019, p.1).

²⁴ Decolonial thinking implies also taking the distances from the coloniality of gender and economic exploitation, which are part of the colonial matrix of power. While being aware of it, hetero patriarchy will not be the focus of this study.

Aligning Mignolo (1992) and Quijano's (2008) approach with Indigenous critiques of Western modernity, Suárez-Krabbe (2012) argues for considering Eurocentric modernity a "death project"²⁵, describing the "systemic ways in which coloniality works against life and the heterogeneity that life depends upon" (Tom et al., 2019, p.8).

Inasmuch as "settler colonialism and coloniality continue to frame relations of power today" (p.11), the "chronological, material and Spatio-temporal invasiveness of modern European capitalist colonialism demands persistent material, cultural and ideological scrutiny... in the interests of decolonization and inversions of the inequities of colonialism" (Kapoor, 2009, p.5).

Quijano (2007) and Mignolo (E-International Relations, 2017), proposed the *decolonial task* as an *epistemic reconstitution*: of "ways of thinking, languages, ways of life and being in the world that the rhetoric of modernity disavowed and the logic of coloniality implement" (E-International Relations, 2017). To engage in this epistemic reconstitution, it is crucial to de-link from the Western structure of knowledge, and the "normative political categories of modernity" (Mignolo, 2007).

The decolonial framework aims at building "a different conceptual apparatus to explain the world and launch an agency to change it" (Tlostanova, 2019, p.290).

3.3 Indigenous Paradigm: Making the *Pluriverse*

Each local history may have different decolonial options (Mignolo, 2009). Kuokkanen (2000) arguing for adopting an 'Indigenous paradigm', emphasizes how de-linking from the naturalized Western categories corresponds to a 'cognitive shift' implying to "think and act from the spaces of Indigenous epistemes" (Kuokkanen, 2007, p.6). Opposing the 'values' of "domination, exploitation, commodification, individualism, and separation", fostered by European coloniality (Tlostanova et al., 2019, p.3), Kuokkanen (2007) contends that Indigenous worldviews are generally characterized by interrelatedness and reciprocity between

²⁵ The project of *modernity* as dominant worldview emerging in Europe with the Renaissance (Kothari, et al. 2019), under the auspices of which universalism, anthropocentrism, patriarchy, and coloniality were carried out and justified, is behind both the notions of development and progress. As Quijano (2007) shows, the dichotomy between subjects/bearers of reason and objects of knowledge/domination functioned as the justification for the colonization of Indigenous Peoples and the exploitation of natural resources.

“land, nature, and people, resulting in specific social, cultural, and ecological responsibilities”²⁶ (p.32). The Indigenous paradigm is rooted in a holistic approach which does not separate “intellectual, social, political, economic, psychological and spiritual forms of human life from each other” (Kuokkanen, 2000, p.417). Concurrently, ancestral knowledge encompasses the material, spiritual, cosmological, and empirical relationships of a people with their environment (Kuokkanen, 2000, p.418).

The pluriverse consists in moving beyond Western universalizing tendency and seeing “the world as pluriversally constituted”, as an “interconnected diversity” (Mignolo, 2018, p.x), Western cosmology becoming just one of many cosmologies, “no longer the one that subsumes and regulates all the others” (p.xi). Moreover, the experience of being human is not universal; the concept of ‘human being’ embedded in the human rights discourse, was conceived within “European hegemonic knowledge and modern and post-modern ideas that molded the universal concept of humanity” (Mignolo, 2009, p.175).

Using double standards to justify wars of resources, the imperialist agendas around the world have narrowed the scope of human rights to the lowest common denominator, weakening “the credibility of human rights in the international arena” (Santos, 2021, p.xi). As Kvalvaag & Mezzanotti (2021), have argued, human rights are North-Centered, and they have little interest in fighting against the oppression imposed by capitalism and colonialism, and its abstract universality “is hostile to any counter-hegemonic concepts emerging from insurgent, revolutionary or simply non-Eurocentric perspectives” (Santos et al., 2021. p.1).

3.4 Traditional Futures, Indigenous Futurism, and Indigenous Articulations

*“I am not one to believe
in traditions simply because they are traditions. I believe in the legacies
that multiply human freedom, not in those that cage it”
Galeano (2007)*

One year before the first Convention concerning the Protection of the World Cultural Heritage (1972), Valkeapää already wondered if preserving a culture was worth the trouble

²⁶ In this regard, the framework of *relational ontology* (Datta, 2013, p.1), suggesting the material and spiritual interconnections between things (Datta, 2013, p.1), is particularly useful. Escobar (2016) explicitly connects relational ontologies with the Epistemologies of the South framework and pluriversality.

(1983, p.103). For him, “in a living society it’s not wise to conserve a cultural form” (Valkeapää, 1983, p.104). A living culture has the capacity to adapt to new situations, absorbing new elements finding “its own forms of expression”, according to the times (*ibid.*).

Especially in the Arctic, humans and their cultures must be adaptable and flexible, like the birch bending to the wind and the weight of the snow, rendered by the sculpture *Bajás guvlui viggamin Sápmái dudjomat/ Sámi Culture Against the Grain* (Jåks, 1979; *Annex 3*). In this regard, tradition should be conceived as a complex “means of raising essential questions about the ways in which we pass on the life of cultures”, a transformational site “for social negotiations, political claims, and fraught conversations” (p.153), inherent to any issue of cultural transmission (Phillips, 2016). Looking to the past to find present solutions and the way ahead for the future, is, not coincidentally, the core of intergenerational time and Indigenous knowledge transmission, according to which “time has no single, violent direction” (Clifford, 2016, p.157). In fact, looking back does not imply an acritical return to the past; tradition is a flexible, “practical selection and critical reweaving of roots” (*ibid.*) capable of accommodating changes.

Dillon (2003), inspired by the Afrofuturism movement, coined the term *Indigenous futurism* to describe creative expressions that articulate Indigenous traditions into self-imagined and self-determined futures, in which Indigenous Peoples have “a place on their own terms - an imagination cut free of the constructs of colonialism” (artandculturemaven.com, 2019).

The ‘language of articulation’ is used by Clifford (2001; 2013), to identify the sites of pragmatic deconstruction and reconstruction of Indigenous traditions, in their multidimensional complexity. The articulations’ approach is also connected with indigeneity, questioning its identification with essentialist traits about “primordial, transhistorical attachments” (Clifford, 2013, p.54). The approach rejects the simplistic explanations for which indigeneity equals to “appeals to ethnicity and ‘heritage’ by fragmented groups functioning as ‘invented traditions’ within a late-capitalist, commodified multiculturalism” (p.54). An articulated tradition can be imagined as a contingent “collective voice” and/or an ensemble of concrete connections, in a nonessentialist and nonreductive way (Clifford, 2013, p.60).

3.5 Indigenization and Critiques of Decoloniality

Tuck and Yang (2012) have noted that the terminology related to *decolonization*²⁷ “has taken on an inflated status in the arts and humanities, providing a radical shell to familiar ideas and practices of multiculturalism that operate well within the comfort zone of established institutions” (MTL Collective, 2018, p. 194). Mendoza (2020) argues that patriarchy is not taken enough into consideration in decolonial thinking, while in fact “there can be no decolonization without depatriarchalization” (p.56). Moving away from the deconstructing general critique which does not consider the “epistemic, existential or aesthetic delinking” embedded in the original meaning of decolonial thinking (Tlostanova, et al., 2019, p.1), I argue for a re-politicization of decoloniality as foremost concerned with the struggles of Indigenous Peoples.

Since decolonization is referred to as epistemic decolonization, it implies the “recovery of epistemic rights, the destruction of Eurocentrism, de-westernization, and to a certain extent” the re-*Indigenization*²⁸ of society (Mendoza, 2020, p.56-57). According to Smith (2012), indigenizing entails two dimensions pertaining to re-centering “landscapes, images, languages, themes, metaphors and stories of the indigenous world”, and disconnecting from the colonial ties (p.147) through an “Indigenous cultural action”, grounded in “alternative conceptions of world view and value systems” (*ibid.*). Generally, the indigenization project relates to considering Indigenous perspectives equal to the Western one, particularly within the institutions traditionally connected with knowledge (e.g., Universities, museums, schools).

²⁷ Decolonization can be referred to as the political struggle made during the Cold War to decolonize Africa and Asia, a struggle that eventually failed by the 90s, after “the realization that the state cannot be democratized or decolonized” (Walsh & Mignolo, 2018, p. 106). Decolonial thinking shares some objectives with postcolonialism when it “seeks to preserve heterogeneity and to critique its aspersion or transcendence by any master discourse” (Kapoor, 2008). However, this ‘delocalized universalism’ becomes meaningless or even problematic if uncritical toward modernity and its epistemic tools (Tlostanova et al, 2019).

²⁸ I have replaced the re-indianization of the original text with re-Indigenization, as it seemed more appropriate to the context of this paper.

4 Methodology

4.1 Outline

My research question and sub-questions have driven my methodological and analytical approach, informed by decolonial, critical, and Indigenous perspectives. In this chapter, for the sake of transparency, I outline how I selected the participants, collected, and analyzed the data, illustrating my epistemological foundation and methodological choices. Indigenous research by a non-indigenous person, implies an attentive reflection on ethical principles, positionality, and on the limitations of my study.

4.2 Participant Recruitment and Data Collection

In my research I initially employed purposive sampling, a non-probability form of sampling suitable to find participants that are “relevant to the research questions” in accordance with the research goals (Bryman, 2012, p.418). I used a sequential and contingent approach (Teddlie and Yu, 2007; Hood, 2007) implying “an evolving process”, during which the participants are added and the criteria shift, changing the research questions (Bryman, 2012, p.418). I contacted the artists in different ways. For example, I came to know Joar Nango, through a webinar and then on social media, becoming interested in his projects. Likewise, I used social media through arts-based festivals in Norway to find other artists. The criteria guiding the selection of possible participants were at first connected with their self-identification as Sámi artists living in the Norwegian side of Sápmi and feeling comfortable speaking English. However, some of the artists were not interested in participating, while others dropped interest on a later stage, due to their lack of time, involvement in other projects, and/or covid-19. My aim was not to have a representational sample; as initially my goal was to find three artists, I became more aware of the importance of diversity, in terms of age/generation, gender representation, Sámi area of provenience and identity, and artistic background.

I met Joar Nango at the inauguration of *Girjegumpi*, the Sámi Architectural Library, his installation/performative space at the National Museum Architecture in Oslo, on October 14,

2021. Two weeks later, I joined him and other Sámi artists participating at Nuuk Nordic Culture Festival (Greenland, 28-31 October 2021), as the festival was thematically relevant, addressing colonialism and Indigenous art expressions, especially in relation to the Arctic context. Digitally and face-to-face, I met many inspiring artists and contacted one of them, Hilde Skancke Pedersen, in June, when my project and research questions were evolving.

Tromsø-based literature festival *Ordskalotten* (November 11- 13 2021), was also relevant to my project, commemorating the 20th anniversary of Valkeapää's death and emphasizing the role of literature as socio-political critique. I met Sigbjørn Skåden, one of the hosts, whose contribution to the Nils-Aslak Valkeapää/Áillohaš retrospective catalogue (2020) I had already read. I invited him to partake in my project, having a Zoom-conversation on December 6, 2021. On December 14, 2021, I had a Zoom meeting with Joar Nango.

As the process evolved, I relied on snow-balling sampling. Skåden proposed to contact Johan Sara Jr., and Elina Waage Mikalsen with whom we Zoom-met on February 8-10, 2022, respectively. On Zoom, I met Hilde Skancke Pedersen (June 23, 2022), previously e-met at Nuuk Nordic Culture Festival 2021, and Sara Inga Utsi Bongo on August 22, 2022. Before the conversations - one hour each - took place, I had sent the participants the information in the consent form along with the Zoom link. All the conversations were held via Zoom due to contingent reasons, particularly regarding Covid-19 pandemics, the artists' numerous commitments, and the long distances between me and the participants.

Choosing 'conversations' over 'interviews', denotes a more horizontal relation, minimizing the hierarchical feeling that the term 'interview' communicates, while creating a relaxed and positive atmosphere of dialogue. Referring to bell hooks (1989), "dialogue implies a talk between two subjects, not the speech of subject and object. It is a humanizing speech, one that challenges and resists domination" (p.131).

The conversations were in English, as I am neither fluent in Norwegian nor Northern-Sámi. Talking in a third language, nor my first language or theirs - avoided other power implications. Having several topics, I employed a semi-structured guide, giving more space to the participants' views, experiences, and suggestions. This also provided an opportunity for them to expand on these topics, allowing me to ask important follow-up questions not initially reflected in my interview guide (Bryman, 2012, p.471). In this way, the conversations enabled the richness and multi-dimensionality in the following development of themes and in the analysis, which I came to consider as a co-constructed space, in which my role was to connect and act as a bridge. I integrated the data collected through the conversations with other

information on the artists and their creative work collected from online public sources (e.g. other interviews, articles, installations, publications, and other artistic material), or personally attending arts festivals and live performances (e.g. Nuuk Nordic Culture Festival 2021, *Ordkalotten* Tromsø internasjonale litteraturfestival 2021, Sámi Pavilion at Venice Biennale 2022).

4.3 Data Analysis: Reflexive Thematic Analysis

Despite the suitability of other analytical frameworks, such as narrative analysis, which would have had the benefit of keeping intact the narrative content, I employed reflexive thematic analysis, better suited for emphasizing the interconnectedness of themes among conversations, and applicable across different theoretical and epistemological perspectives (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.78). As all research is interpretive, my personal identity and values are part of the analysis. The reflexive approach to thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2021) gives significance to the practice of critical reflexivity as part of the researcher's role. Consequently, the researchers should take responsibility for "one's own situatedness within the research and the effect that it may have on the setting and people being studied, questions being asked, data being collected and its interpretation" (Berger, 2015, p.220). In my research, continuously reflecting on my assumptions, choices, and expectations was particularly relevant, as in Indigenous research, the role of reflection upon power relations is endorsed (Smith, 2012).

My analysis was both inductive, being located and driven by data, and deductive, as the interpretation was influenced by theoretical assumptions providing a 'lens.' I was interested in thematic patterns across the conversations consistently with Indigenous values and epistemologies, emphasizing connections rather than 'borders' (Kuokkanen, 2000). I used the six-phase process outlined by Braun and Clarke (2021), starting with (1) 'Familiarizing yourself with the dataset;' (2) 'Coding'; (3) 'Generating initial themes'; (4) 'Developing and reviewing themes'; (5) 'Refining, defining and naming themes'; and ending with (6) 'Writing up.' (p.86-87). These phases are considered part of a guideline and not rules, as the process is not linear but recursive (p.88).

Phase one implied a critical immersion in the data and taking notes throughout the process. While transcribing and comparing the transcripts with the original recording, I aimed

to find patterns and interesting elements (Braun & Clarke, 2021, p.102). Then, considering the topics of the interview guide, I labeled the most relevant segments of each data item using different colors. Interconnected with Phase one, I heralded Phase two, coding for sixteen items relating them to my initial research questions, which considered the role of Sámi creative expressions in relation to activism/artivism, the relationship of the artists with the political/environmental nexus, and with Nils-Aslak Valkeapää. I coded in a way to keep the research questions open for change.

Phase three consisted of generating initial themes. I have been exercising reflexivity, questioning my way of interpreting, and creating themes. Erroneously, the six themes I created - and related subthemes - coincided with *topic summaries* (also called ‘bucket themes’), capturing “everything that was said about X” (Braun & Clarke, 2021, p.389). Focusing on the conceptualization of themes by Braun & Clarke (2021) as “patterns of ... underpinned and unified by a central idea” (p.388), I organized patterns of the data providing an initial interpretation in relation to previous literature and based on the central motifs of Valkeapää’s work: the connection with the landscape, climate change and the political role of creative expressions.

Figure 1 shows this stage of the analysis, in which I was identifying existing patterns of meaning rather than developing a deeper understanding of them.

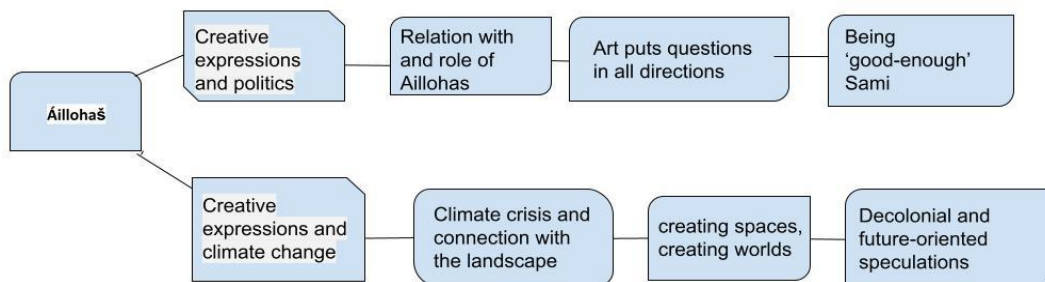


Figure 1 illustrates an initial thematic map with six main themes

At this point, the role of Sámi creative practices in relation to decolonization, indigenization, and imagining alternative futures beyond capitalism, colonialism, and climate change became clearer. During Phase Four, I discovered that the same item could be coded in more than one way, and this could lead to look at the data in different ways. This phase was

the longest; while reviewing the themes, I recombined them, merging some and dropping others. **Figure 2** shows the three themes resulting from the recombination of the previous ones.

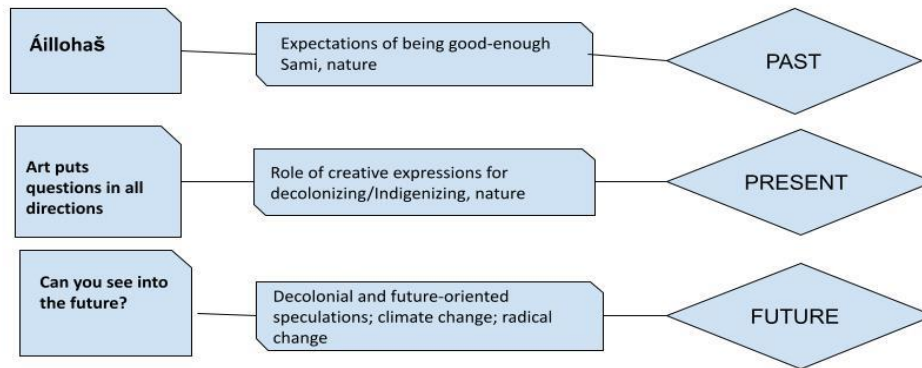


Figure 2 shows the change after Phase 4, while associating the three themes to three temporalities of past-present-future

I realized that the topic encompassing nature and climate change was cross-cutting throughout the data, and therefore I decided to let it be present in every theme, connected with different aspects (e.g., expectations, related to the past; how it is addressed now in Sámi creative practices; speculations about the future of climate change). Phase Five consisted of refining, defining, and naming themes. The final themes and sub-themes are shown in **Figure 3**.

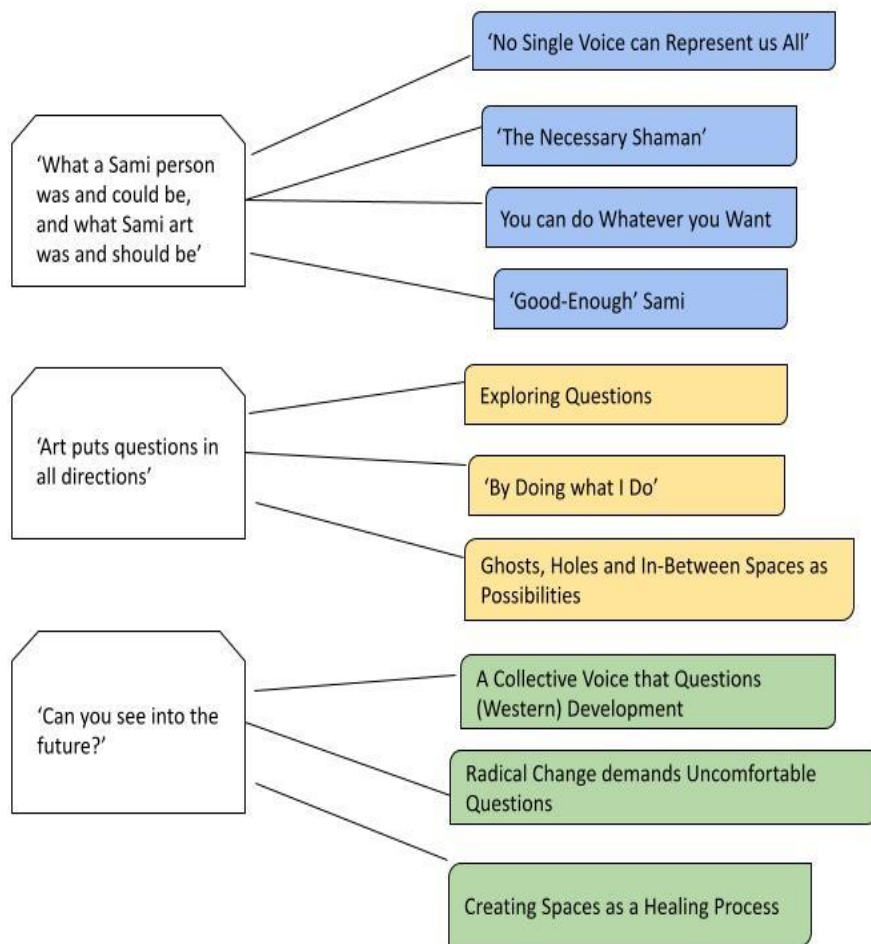


Figure 3 illustrates the final thematic map consisting of three main themes, and ten sub-themes

4.4 Positionality

Despite the risks of essentialization connected with the binary distinction Western/Indigenous, these differences need to be acknowledged to avoid “ethnocentric universalization” (Lawrence & Raitio, 2016, p.121). As an Italian, European and non-Indigenous woman, I grew up within one of the six modern European and imperial languages²⁹, based on Greek and Latin, which “provided the tool to create a given conception of knowledge

²⁹ Namely Italian, Spanish, and Portuguese, German, French and English, see Mignolo (2009).

that was then extended to the increasing, through time, European colonies from the Americas to Asia and Africa (Mignolo, 2009, p.164). However, if I go deeper, I am also a migrant. I came to Norway two years and a half ago, and I still do not master the Norwegian language. I am a poet, writing in Italian and English, and expressing different emotions depending on the language I use. For all these reasons, I share the same concerns as Lawrence & Raitio (2016) and the same strive of being an allied other, “by bringing a critical gaze from within to Western academia and Western institutions, such as corporations, governments and public authorities” (p. 121). As part of my positionality, the following section displays the epistemological foundation connected with my methodological choices.

4.4.1 Epistemological Foundation: Indigenous Research, Critical, and Decolonizing Methodologies

Agreeing with Denzin, Lincoln & Smith (2008) about the need for dialogue between Indigenous methodology, and critical methodology, my epistemological foundation is grounded in critical methodologies and inspired by Indigenous ones, befitting social justice research. As decolonizing research engages with Indigenous epistemologies and critical interpretive practices “shaped by Indigenous research agendas” (Smith, 1999, p. 20), my methodological approach is also informed by critical Indigenous research methodology (CIRM), based on the moral obligation, especially valid for non-Indigenous researchers, for accountability, reciprocity, responsibility, and respect (Kuokkanen, 2007).

Particularly, critical arts-based research is attuned with decolonizing methodologies, challenging “colonizing habits of mind and ways of being” (Finley, 2018, p.972). This approach “makes intentional use of imagination”, being a “performative research methodology that is structured on the notion of possibility, what *might be*, of a research tradition that is... pluralistic, ethical, and transformative in positive ways” (Finley, 2018, 971-972). Critical arts-based research is fluid, “within the liminal spaces between heterogeneous projects and social transformation” and relational, moving past dualisms “from the margins of “otherness”” (Finley, p.972). Similarly, Indigenous knowledge frameworks, which describe diverse theoretical and methodological approaches to knowledge based on Indigenous contextual worldviews, tend to disrupt the dichotomy ontology/epistemology, while aligning in part with critical theories.

While the role of the academic in some contexts is still considered to be neutral and disengaged in the attempt to avoid biases, the point of research being intrinsically political has

been made by several scholars and activists (Lawrence & Raitio, 2016). This is particularly true in Human Rights and Social Sciences research in general, as researchers come to be engaged with social and political injustices. Researching in and *with* Indigenous communities and individuals especially implies the acknowledgement of coloniality and the stance of academia in the marginalization and exploitation of Indigenous voices (Kuokkanen, 2007). Smith (2012) outlines an “Agenda for Indigenous Research” (p.119) connecting local, regional, and global efforts towards Indigenous self-determination. The research agenda, implying processes of “transformation, decolonization, healing and of mobilization as peoples” is conceptualized as a set of approaches situated within the “decolonization politics” (p.120). Self-determination, in this sense, is more than a political goal, being a goal of social justice expressed on “psychological, social, cultural, and economic” grounds (*ibid.*).

The Indigenous paradigm, as outlined by Kuokkanen (2000), is based on Sámi epistemologies pointing at Sámi sovereignty, and self-determination, which is understood from the Indigenous standpoint also as intellectual self-determination (p.415). Through this project, I thus hope to convey my support towards Sámi self-determination and sovereignty, for, as Kuokkanen (2000) argued, “relevant research regarding Indigenous Peoples’ communities is research that in one way or another supports Indigenous Peoples’ endeavors towards self-determination” (p.428). The metaphor of holes “as portals” employed by Mikalsen (conversation, February 10, 2022) to render how the loss can be transformed in possibility of reconnection between past, present, and future, served as a guide for my analysis and I consider it part of the methodology inspired by Sámi epistemologies (See Chapter 6: *Data Findings and Analysis*)

4.5 Ethical Principles

It was important for me to be aware of my positionality and of the challenges that this kind of research inevitably brings, as, to maintain legitimacy “we need to navigate and negotiate between the emerging norms and codes of ethics for research with Saami communities on the one hand, and dominant Nordic discourses concerning ‘neutral’ researchers on the other” (Lawrence & Raitio, 2016, p. 119). Working with Indigenous methodologies can be problematic for non-Indigenous scholars researching Indigenous issues (Olsen, 2016, p.30), putting the non-Indigenous scholar “in a location where ethical guidelines

are (potentially) transgressed already at the beginning” (Olsen, 2016, p.29). Despite the word “research” being “inextricably linked to European imperialism and colonialism (Smith, 2012, p.1), in Indigenous research “there are multiple ways of being either an insider or an outsider in Indigenous contexts” (Smith, 2012, p.138). To achieve transformation and “dismantling oppressive structures a great deal of reflexivity and sensitivity is warranted” (Löf & Stinnerbom, 2016, p.140; Smith, 2012). Denzin and Lincoln (2018) acknowledge the need of the qualitative inquiry community to have “an empowerment code of ethics that cross-cuts disciplines [and] honors Indigenous voices” (p.1536).

For Wilson (2008), this means that the methodology should incorporate Indigenous “cosmology, worldview, epistemology and ethical beliefs” (p.15). Ethical guidelines of Indigenous research refer to the moral obligation, especially valid for non-Indigenous researchers, for accountability, reciprocity, responsibility, and respect (Kuokkanen, 2007). Indigenous participants should be considered as co-authors and co-subjects of the research, which allows for better ethical practices and grounds relationships in mutual respect (Lawrence & Raitio, 2016, p.123).

Being the participants well-known artists at a national, regional, and international level, I address the names of the artists. Additionally, during the conversations the artists repeatedly related to their works, being them installations, exhibitions, books and publications, performances, or music albums. Thirdly, I found this decision to be consistent and attuned with my decolonial framework, which aims at being emancipatory, fostering Sámi artists’ right to self-represent, choosing who they want to be.

Informed consent was sent via email to the participants, using clear language to inform them of the purpose of the inquiry; risks for the participants; about the right to withdraw consent, and about privacy and confidentiality, asking them for the permission to register the conversations for the scope of transcription. For my project, I have applied for the permission of the Norwegian Center for Research Data (NSD) and followed the guidelines set by the National Committee for Research Ethics in the Social Sciences and Humanities (NESH, 2016), which help researchers to develop “ethical discretion and reflection, to clarify ethical dilemmas, and to promote good scientific practice”. The artists’ perspectives were addressed with integrity and respect, being aware of the issues related to Indigenous research from my positionality as non-Indigenous, European woman.

4.6 Limitations

I chose to refer to Nils-Aslak Valkeapää/Áillohaš and not to other Sámi *ofelaččeat* (pathfinders) because I resonated with his words and was able to connect with other artists through his work. Furthermore, he is one of the few Sámi artists who has been translated into English, and his role in championing Sámi rights and fostering Sámi culture cannot be denied. I nevertheless acknowledge this choice as a possible limitation of my study, as there are many other interesting and inspiring Sámi authors and artists who should be acknowledged and honored.

As one of my first aims was to investigate the relationship of different generations of artists with Áillohaš and his themes, it became clear that despite the existence of a collective Sámi voice, the differences in background, approach, themes, and identities within the same generation were also essential to acknowledge. For this reason, I found it “important to handle artists and their artworks individually rather than treat entire generations as a single group” (Hautala- Hirvioja, 2017, p.100). Referring exclusively to Sámi artists living and/or working in the Norwegian side of Sápmi may also represent a limit of my research. The political situation of the Sámi people in the different Scandinavian states makes it impossible to address all the backgrounds and differences in the space of a master’s thesis. Another evident limit of my research was connected to the language, as I could only work with English sources and/or rely on English translations. Finally, all the conversations were held via Zoom for contingent reasons; this may also have represented a limitation.

5 Context Baseline – Sámi Artistic and Creative Expressions

5.1 Outline

By outlining contemporary Sámi perspectives on Sámi creative expressions, politics, and activism, this chapter aims to prepare the reader for the following analysis. Due to lack of space, I will focus on Sámi aesthetics and duodji; the Sámi cultural revitalization from which the artist collective Mázejoavku emerged in 1978; Nils-Aslak Valkeapää/Áillohaš³⁰; the Sámi Pavilion at La Biennale di Venezia (2022), an experience reflecting on Indigenous sovereignty and the interconnections between “land, art and knowledge” (Finbog et al. 2022); Sámi literature and music. These examples are relevant to show the ongoing interconnectedness of Sámi creative practices with the struggles for Sámi self-determination and sovereignty and to convey the continuity, adaptability, and creativity of Sámi practices through time.

5.2 On Sámi Aesthetics and Duodji

As Áillohaš significantly wrote in his book *Greetings from Lappland*,

“Art as an isolated phenomenon is unknown to the Sámis. In this way, artists as a professional group are also a product of modern society, a result of the mad rush of our time. Through the Sámi life-style, each moment of life becomes an artistic experience.”
(Valkeapää, 1983, p.60-61)

Sámi aesthetic practices have always been rooted in Sámi epistemologies, livelihoods, and cosmology as duodji. Snarby (2017) categorizes Sámi thinking into four main features: duodji, mythology, ecology, and the cyclical understanding of history. Hætta (2020) specifies that no parallel word in the Western perspective can reliably translate or communicate what duodji entails in terms of values and worldview (p.34), as the concept of duodji is not just translatable as “handicraft,” being associated with practical skills, creativity, social and spiritual activities (Finbog, 2020, p. 29). The creative activity described by duodji is connected to Sámi “aesthetic

³⁰ A biography of Nils-Aslak Valkeapää/Áillohaš is found in *Annex 2*.

expression³¹, reflecting deeply rooted collective values, meanings, and norms, as well as the immaterial knowledge of processes and experiences of materiality” (Finbog, 2020, p.29). Consequently, gathering materials is not separated from Sámi epistemologies (Snarby, 2017, p. 121). The materials used come from the reindeer, such as leather and horn; others depend on the availability in nature, like wood or mica, or are bought or exchanged, like silver and fabrics (Hætta, 2020, p.34). Traditionally, dipmaduodji is associated with apparel, clothing, and accessories made by women using leather, fur, and textiles, while garraduodji is with tools made by men out of wood, metal, and horn (ibid.). Duodji is “a cultural practice embedded in the relational quality of people, objects, land, nature, other beings, seasonal knowledge, and spiritual beliefs” (Finbog, 2020, p.30). Rooted in a “collective life experience and incorporating a holistic understanding of the world, of landscape and seasons” (ibid.), duodji is also related to Sámi intergenerational time and the exchange of “wisdom and skills” connecting ancestors and descendants and the past with the present³² (ibid.). However, Finbog (2020) emphasizes how the contextual prominence of duodji is not just cultural but also political. Duodji was an essential part of the resistance, from the early stages of colonization to the assimilation policies, throughout the Sámi political movements of the 1970s and 80s (Finbog, 2020, p.30). Thus, duodji represents an integral part of Sámi cultural heritage, reclaimed as part of Sámi self-determination and sovereignty struggle (Finbog, 2020, p. 30). In this regard, Hætta (2020) illustrates how, until the political movements in the 1970s, Sámi artistic expressions were categorized following the Western linear and progressive development for which Sámi art had not reached the development of Western art and was considered as mere handicraft (Hætta, 2020, p.36)³³.

³¹ Sámi aesthetics and conception of beauty differ from the Western one, as the beauty of an object, for example, is not based only on appearance but on the form concerning the purpose (Hætta, 2020, p.34).

³² While duodji was usually learned by children in the familiar context, centuries of colonialism and assimilation “created a rupture in the knowledge” which led to the need of teaching duodji at school today (Finbog, 2020, p.30)

³³ For Sámi scholar and duodjar Liisa- Rávná Finbog, art per se is a colonial concept, as “aesthetics has historically been understood as something that is linked with the progress of the West” (Liisa-Rávná Finbog @liisaravna 2021, October 7).

5.3 *Dáidda*, Art in Sámi terms: The *Mázejoavku* Collective

These opinions started to change with the Indigenous Peoples' cultural and political revival during the 1960s and 70s. Hætta (2020) particularly stresses artists' and academics' role in building (or rebuilding) a Sámi nation under a shared identity and values. Sámi symbols and practices were thus created and revitalized (Hætta, 2020, p.10). The opening in 1972 of the *Sámiid- Vuorká Dávvirat/ The Sámi Museum* in Karasjok was in line with the Sámi cultural uprising, coming to be a Sámi cultural center and strengthening the political and cultural awakening of the Sámi while furthering Sámi rights. Ole Henrik Magga, the former president of the Sámi Assembly, considered the museum “the first location where the Sámi people did not need to ‘bow and scrape’” (Snarby, 2017, p.122). In 1978, Trygve Lund Guttormsen, Aage Gaup, Hans Ragnar, Berit Marit Hætta, Synnøve Persen, Josef Halse, Britta Marakatt-Labba, and Rannveig Persen formed the artist group *Mázejoavku*³⁴, based in Máze/Masi³⁵ (Hætta, 2020).

Despite coming from different artistic backgrounds, the eight artists, coming from Northern Norway and educated in non-Sámi artistic expressions and aesthetics, “drew strength from their common identity: they were artists, they were Sámi, and they shared the experience of belonging to an Indigenous people discriminated against in the Nordic countries and Russia” (Hætta, 2020, p.10). Willing to “renew Sámi art as well as the colonial, Nordic and the Sámi’s own view of art” (Hætta, 2020, p.38), they self-identified as Sámi artists, questioning the meaning of *art* as defined in Western terms. In the post-assimilation scenario, when Sámi were not seen on good terms, this act corresponded to a political statement. Moreover, the encounter with other like-minded artists in Sápmi, especially with Iver Jåks³⁶ from the Norwegian side and especially Nils-Aslak Valkeapää from the Finnish side, led to the definition of the new term *dáidda*³⁷, which connected the Finnish word ‘taide’ (art), with the Northern Sámi word ‘*dáidu*’ (knowledge, ability) (Hætta, 2020, p.40-41). Defining themselves and their practice in terms of *dáidda*, they emphasized “individual adaptation and creativity, separate from the

³⁴ In the early days, known as Sáme Dáidujoavku, or Sámi Dáidojoavku/The Sámi ‘group’, it changed in *Mázejoavku* (the *Máze* group) after the group took residence in Máze/Masi. In other sources it can be found as Masigruppa (Norwegianized), or *Sámisk kunstnergruppe* (Sámi Artist Group). See Hætta (2020)

³⁵ Máze/Masi is situated in a valley north of Guovdageaidnu/Kautokeino and south of Áltá/Alta, in the Guovdageaidnu/Kautokeino municipality (Romssa- Finnmark county), on the Norwegian side of Sápmi. The percentage of Sámi inhabitants in the settlement is one of the highest in Sápmi (Hætta, 2020).

³⁶ Jåks worked with drawing and painting, sculpture, installations, and graphics (p.40-41).

³⁷ A Sámi artist is named *dáiddár*.

collective values and life experience of duodji” (Finbog, 2020, p.30)³⁸. Some practitioners perceived the distinction as a “division in Sámi aesthetic practices between dáidda and duodji, where the latter was placed in the past, like a rigid, undynamic category” (Hætta, 2020, p.41). Yet, drawing upon duodji flexibility and dynamism, they intended to reframe the knowledge connected to duodji with the purpose of renewal (ibid.) while embodying “the struggle for Sámi sovereign rights, Sámi self-respect, and Sámi cultural resurgence” (Hætta, 2020, p.10). Taking inspiration from Sámi mythology and cosmology, the Mázejoavku artists initiated a process of exploration of what Sáminess could be in Sámi modern society and the global context. In this sense, they were aware of “waging a cultural war for the Sámi people, and that the ‘weapons’ of the broader art world could be used in their favour” (Hætta, 2020, p.44). Despite being inextricably connected with the Sámi cultural revitalization, the artist group Mázejoavku was also associated with the cultural and political resistance movement against the damming of the Alta River started in 1970³⁹(Hætta, 2020, p.10).

5.4 Indigenous Sovereignty, and The Sámi Pavilion (Venice Biennale, 2022)

Finbog (2020) stresses how both duodji and dáidda are part of a broader Indigenous epistemological framework. Although the dichotomy between duodji and dáidda persisted “in the early years of the Sámi ethno-political movement” (p.30), today, the experiential knowledge connected to duodji is gaining more influence on the artistic processes of Sámi contemporary dáidda “ensuring a movement between artistic expression and traditions that equally emerge from the sociomaterial context of duodji and dáidda” (p.30). One example of this can be found in Máret Anne Sara’s exhibition at the Sámi Pavilion⁴⁰ (Venice Biennale

³⁸ The debate around the distinction between dáidda and duodji, fluid at the beginning, was further clarified in 1993 in the journal *Dáiddárleksikona/Sámi Artist Lexicon*, edited by Synnøve Persen: “Álbmut duodji- ... is practiced in homes in the Sámi milieu in general; Čehpiid duodji- ... the craftsmanship of ornamental objects; Duodji/dáidda- artistic practice; the dividing line between craft and art is erased; Dáidda/duodji- The practice that has its origins in álbmut duodji, but takes on contemporary forms of expression”(Persen, 1993, in Hætta, 2020, p.42).

³⁹ The Committee that led the protest in 1970 was known as *Aksjonskomitéén mot neddemming av Masi/ The Action Committee Against the Inundation of Máze*, as reported by Hætta (2020). Some of the Mázejoavku artist group members were also leading members of the Committee (p.10).

⁴⁰ Despite considering the whole Sámi Pavilion experience as an example of reasserting Indigenous sovereignty through art, I refer to the work of Máret Anne Sara. Sara is a well-known Sámi artist and novelist from

2022), including *Gutted- Gávogálši*, the (reindeer) stomachs, and *Ale suova sielu sáiget*, a massive baby mobile made from aborted reindeer calves⁴¹, and botanical elements from the tundra⁴². With *Gutted- Gávogálši*, Sara meant to address the political debate “about the individual, and mental-health issues” in Sámi society and other Indigenous communities (Andrew, 2022, p.14). *Ale suova sielu sáiget*, focuses on the issue of defending the reindeer calves from predators, which is very delicate, as one can quickly “become the criminal” (Andrew, 2022, p.27). For Máret Anne Sara’s family and many other reindeer herders, the herd symbolizes hope, as do future generations. While creating the installation, Sara was carrying her firstborn child, wondering “how to raise a child who has positive belief in the future. How do you maintain that for the coming generations?” (Andrew, 2022, p.28). The installation incorporates two contrasting smells; one is the smell of fear. The hormones released when the reindeer is scared smell something sour, and this smell stays in their body. In 2020, Máret Anne Sara and perfumier Nadjib Achaibou created another smell for the Sámi Pavilion. I smelled it when I went there in late June: the smell of hope is a sweet one.

5.5 Accounts on Sámi Literature and Music

Sámi scholar Harald Gaski (2011) traces the origins of Sámi literature back to the oral literary legacy of Sámi narrators and storytellers and the origins of Sámi poetry and music to joik. The oldest Sámi poems are, in fact, joik texts, addressing both everyday issues and the different migrations up until the colonization (Gaski, 2011, p.35). However, some joiks were double-layered, containing underlying political messages inviting the Sámi audience to “resist cultural suppression and assimilation” (Gaski, 2011, p.36). In this sense, “even art from earlier eras can, by its content and through new interpretations, speak to the people of today” (Gaski, 2011, p.37). The first book written in Sámi by a Sámi is *Muitalus sámiiid birra* (Turi’s book of

Guovdageaidnu, in Sápmi, with a reindeer-herding background, working with different materials, including reindeer bones, skins, and entrails. Sara’s approaches “make visible the political and social issues affecting Sámi people” (Finbog et al. 2022, p.118). *Pile o’ Sápmi*, composed of 400 reindeer skulls and legal documents, was realized to draw attention to her brother’s fight against the Norwegian State that wanted to cull his herd, forcing him into bankruptcy. The work is now displayed at the National Museum of Norway in Oslo (see García-Antón and Brissach, 2022).

⁴¹ It was explained to me that the abortions can be triggered by intense fear caused by predators, e.g., strong noises caused by machines, helicopters (H.S. Pedersen, conversation, June 23, 2022).

⁴² Sámi elder, and duodji practitioner Karen E. M. Utsi, has been working closely with Máret Anne Sara for her Biennale exhibition, especially concerning Sámi traditional knowledge.

Lapland), published in 1910 in both Danish⁴³ and Sámi, which describes Sámi traditions and values while presenting a critique of colonization. Writing as a means of resistance and critique to the assimilation process was also the aim of Anders Larsen (1870-1949), who wrote *Beaivi-álgu* (Daybreak), a fiction that reflected on the contemporary society and the status of Sámi culture vis-à-vis the Norwegianization.

Sámi literature and music started flourishing in the 1970s, along with Sámi cultural revitalization, the former striving against the loss of the Sámi language caused by the assimilation policies (Gaski, 2011, p.42). Paulus Utsi (1918-1975) emerged as Sámi cultural figure, working as a duodji teacher and poet. His work, gathered in two main collections, *Giela giela* [Ensnare the Language] (1974) and *Giela gielain* [Ensnare with the Language]⁴⁴(posthumous, 1980), addresses the importance of preserving the Sámi language while learning the Language of the majority to expose “the majority’s linguistic manipulation of the Sámi” (Gaski, 2011, p.43).

Multi-artist Nils-Aslak Valkeapää/Áillohaš/Áilu (1943-2001) debuted as a musician in 1968. He contributed to the joik revitalization by holding public joik concerts, breaking the ban on joiking initiated with the Christianization, and scandalizing a big part of the Sámi population (Skåden, 2020, p. 56). In the 70s, he started experimenting with some collaborators and friends, mixing joik with jazz and global influences, while he debuted as a writer in 1971 with *Terveisiä Lapista* (Greetings from Lapland).

Ruoktu Váimmus (Trekways of the Wind), published in 1985, tries to convey “why the whole surrounding- including landscapes, people, weather, the bushes, the lakes - why it all is a part of a person, an inseparable part of that person’s whole identity” (Gaski, 2011, p.44). The collection *Beaivi, áhčážan* [1988; The Sun, My Father, 1997], ties together the past and the present through documental material, photographs, and poetry. Gaski (2011) considers the play *Ridn’ oaivi ja Nieguid Oaidni* (The Frost-haired and the Dream-Seer), which was premiered in Japan in 1995 as Valkeapää’s artistic legacy, expressing “the indigenous peoples’ view that the future for the whole human race is dependent on our showing respect to Mother Earth” (Gaski, 2011, p.45). *Eanni, eannážan* (The Earth, My Mother), the counterpart to *Beaivi, áhčážan* was meant, according to Gaski (2011), to “open up a wider perspective on the place and importance of indigenous peoples in the world” (p.44).

⁴³ Translated by the ethnologist Emilie Demant (1873-1958).

⁴⁴ In Sámi, the words figuratively describing ‘learning a language’ have the literal meaning of “looking to see if there is anything caught in the snare” (see Gaski, 2011, p.43).

Rauni Magga Lukkari was born the same year as Valkeapää. Her poetry spaces from having a Sámi identity emancipatory focus to a more feminist one, addressing feelings of oppression, “alienation, superficial modernization, and social isolation,” as shown in her collection of poetry *Árbeeadni* (The time of the lustful mother, 1999) (Gaski, 2011, p.45). Synnøve Persen (b.1950), part of the Mázejoavku, also writes texts and poems to accompany her art, using a minimalistic style (Gaski, 2011, p.46). Other contemporary authors are concerned with describing “the times in which the Sámi live and what it is like to be a Sámi at the turn of the millennium” (Gaski, 2011, p.51). Among others, Sigbjørn Skåden is described by Gaski (2011) as “capable of using tradition in a creative way, at the same time as he is concerned with universal questions that he allows to take shape in a language both old and young” (ibid.)

During the revitalization, the joiks that were recorded by the ethnographers in the first decades of the century were re-politicized, recontextualized, and revitalized on the verge of the broader political movements for Indigenous Peoples’ rights. Over the last decades, Sàmi music has become a “dynamic arena characterised by a plethora of musicians, performance spaces, musical institutions and mediating technologies” (Hilder, 2012, p.163). Among others, Mari Boine, an internationally well-known Northern Sámi musician and singer, combines Sami elements with other more global Indigenous ones in a genre defined as pop-rock. Her texts, at first more concerned with Sámi colonization, gradually became open to - and inspired by themes common to other Indigenous Peoples (Valkeapää, 2021). Frode Fjellheim is a South Sámi performer, composer, and teacher spanning different musical genres while exploring the possibilities of the joik tradition. As Hilder (2012) has argued, “one fascinating feature of Fjellheim’s creative process is the way he has used the documentation work of earlier joik researchers as inspiration for his own works, mirroring strategies of musical revival in other Nordic and global contexts” (p.169).

This panorama, enriched by the Sàmi music and cultural festivals (e.g., Riddu Riđđu and Mårkomeannu) and by the emergence of Sàmi recording labels, has contributed to the revival of Sàmi languages and identities while “enabling the Sàmi to represent themselves in local, national and international arenas” (Hilder, 2012, p. 163-164).

6 Data Findings and Analysis

Outline

Considering the research questions, and informed by the theoretical framework, I analyzed the conversations held with Sigbjørn Skåden, Joar Nango, Johan Sara Jr, Elina Waage Mikalsen, Hilde Skancke Pedersen, and Sara Inga Utsi Bongo, following the six-phases approach of reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2021). The three main themes, namely ‘what a Sámi person was and could be, and what Sámi art was and should be’, ‘art puts questions in all directions’, and ‘can you see into the future?’, were created according to a circular conception of time. The first theme, addressing how the artists relate to Nils-Aslak Valkeapää and his motifs, was broken down into four sub-themes: ‘No single voice can represent us all’, the ‘necessary shaman’, ‘you can do whatever you want’, and ‘good-enough’ Sámi.

The second theme, ‘Art Puts Questions in all Directions’, inquiring about the role that creative practices play for the participant artists, was divided into three sub-themes, ‘exploring questions’, ‘by doing what I do’, ‘ghosts, holes, and in-between spaces as possibilities’.

The third and last theme, ‘can you see into the future?’, tackles these possibilities as imagined futures, and it is organized into three sub-themes: ‘a collective voice that questions (Western) development’, ‘radical change demands uncomfortable questions’, ‘creating spaces as a healing process’. Other reflections connected to the analysis of the conversations will be discussed in Section 6.4: *Summarizing*.

6.1 Theme One: “What a Sámi person was and could be, and what Sámi art was and should be”⁴⁵

6.1.1 ‘No Single Voice Can Represent Us All’

The only time Sigbjørn Skåden (b.1976) saw Áillohaš was on the stage of Riddu Riđđu Festivála, in 1997 or 1998, when saluted by the Sámi audience as a prophet, a voice who could

⁴⁵ Skåden (2020, p.53).

represent all the Sámi (2020, p.51). Yet, in the author's sharp words, "the validity of this is more emblematic than it is real. No single voice can represent us all" (p.51). Skåden, who became a published writer three years after Áillohaš's death, coming from a different background, never truly recognized himself in Áillohaš's motifs.

Despite always respecting Áillohaš as a person and as an artist and being aware of his 'presence' – he references Áillohaš creatively, for example in his second book, *Prekariáhta lávlla* – [Song of the Precariat, 2009] - Skåden had issues with the hegemony Áillohaš represented. Thirty years ago, the Sámi landscape was "less accepting for the Sámi that came outside of that hegemony" (S. Skåden, conversation, December 6, 2021), and he grew up not feeling recognized - or better, represented- in the whole Sámi community. Compared to the hegemonic reindeer herding Sámi culture with which Valkeapää was associated, Skåden (2020) felt "a parenthesis, that we were stories not worth telling, that our voices were not valid when push came to shove" (p.53).

Although Valkeapää himself was very inclusive towards Sámi from different backgrounds, Skåden refers to what he represented in terms of Sámi identity and the way he was made an example, "like a recipe for how to write as a Sámi" (*ibid.*)

"in the framework of his background, Valkeapää is a Sámi archetype. He represents the sort of Sámi reindeer herding background often seen on postcards and in other exotifying and simplistic expressions. It is an aesthetic- though in essence undisputedly Sámi- that in part is forged and controlled by a mainstream perception of the representational Sámi and therefore easily turned into something stencil-like and unprogressively preservationist." (Skåden, 2020, p.52)

Valkeapää "just did his thing as an artist and activist," writes Skåden, "even though it remained largely connected to a general perception of what a Sámi person was and could be, and what Sámi art was and should be." (Skåden, 2020, p.53). Especially as a young man, Skåden felt ambivalence towards these 'dominant narratives,' acknowledging their importance for Sámi as a people but at the same time recognizing their role in narrowing "the space for the spectrum of Sámi narratives that are seldom or never heard" (Skåden, 2020, p.54). He argues that Sámi artistic expressions coming out of this frame cannot be other than "predictable", gaining interest from the outside while being "enhanced from within the archetype group (and indeed among most other Sámi) because it, after all, represents a group living under tough pressure" (Skåden, 2020, p.52). Moreover, in his view, the recognition and status received by Sámi artists, both outside and within Sámi society, "has at the same time hindered innovation within

the Sámi arts because of its somewhat exalted hegemonic status” (*ibid.*). As previously discussed, to fit in narrow and rigid legal understandings of indigeneity, the *pluriversality* and multidimensionality of Sámi narratives risks getting essentialized. However, according to Skåden, Sámi literature is nowadays becoming more variate, and this is a good achievement, as Sámi society needs “other types of literature, that negotiate or discuss those kinds of issues” (S. Skåden, conversation, December 6, 2021).

6.1.2 “The Necessary Shaman”

Joar Nango (b.1979) agrees with Sigbjørn Skåden about Valkeapää’s uncritical reception and maybe needed “mythologization”. In his view, Valkeapää played a crucial part in the revitalization of Sámi culture, taking on the role of the “necessary shaman” (conversation, December 17, 2021). Considering him “super visionary,” Nango always admired the “different artistic expressions, and the categories [Valkeapää] worked with,” together with his very direct way of working, “uncensored, raw,” not elitist or conceptual (*ibid.*).

According to Nango, Áillohaš sacrificed a lot as an artist to create “spaces where we can reclaim our pre-Christian type of religious and sort of belief system and cosmologies” (*ibid.*). Valkeapää considered himself a *Sámiid reangga*, “a servant for the Sámi people” (Finborud & Holm, 2020, p.32). In this way, he hoped to inspire the next generations and “rebuild self-confidence to cherish their threatened culture and demand protection for their traditional livelihood and habitat” (*ibid.*). Johan Sara Jr (b.1963), who knew Áillohaš personally, describes him as having “one foot in the Sámi tradition and one in the contemporary way” (conversation, February 2, 2022). Playing with contemporary registers, he aimed at producing music without Western instruments, revitalizing Sámi culture while looking at the future.

Sara Jr. admits that Norwegians and Sámi think totally different, as the Sámi think holistically, especially if coming from a reindeer herding family, where the traditional knowledge associated with nature is still applied to read the signs from the nature (*ibid.*). How to communicate this Sámi dimension to the West? “You cannot catch that tempo if you have never been moving the reindeer herd from the winter-land to the summer-land. It is the same tempo the shaman uses when he goes into trance with the drums” (J.Sara Jr., conversation,

February 2, 2022). Áillohaš caught these tempos, which could be understood by someone who shared the same contextual experience and he tried to make it understandable or relatable to the West. Sara Jr. found his way into Sámi music through Áilu, and despite being inspired by him, Sara Jr. wants to express his voice and culture in his own way.

With his field recordings, Áillohaš was documenting for future generations; he was always looking ahead, projecting Sámi culture into the future. In Sara Jr's words, "he woke up people, to take care of nature, to be a part of nature, to express nature, and our culture, the stars, and the levels over the earth and under it"⁴⁶ (conversation, February 2, 2022). According to Sara Jr., Áillohaš was also interested in the pre-colonization perspectives, doing research that he applied to - and expressed through - his multidimensional art. Gaski, Nordström, and Salisbury, the editors of *The sun, My Father* (1997), illustrate how in the context of the cultural revival Áillohaš' work "served as a link between the past and present" (p.2).

According to Joar Nango, "There is something very romanticized about the way he uses imagery, ... And how he sort of speaks about this connection with the landscape, and nature, between nature and culture" (J. Nango, conversation, December 17, /2021). Nevertheless, Nango believes he was truthfully straightened the Sámi cultural dimension and the connection with nature (*ibid.*). As Áillohaš stated in the BBC Radio 3 "Between the Ears" broadcast (1994), explaining what *Goase Dušše*⁴⁷ was about, "I have been telling people... and especially Sámi people, that we are part of nature". He was referring to the Sámi philosophy and relational ontology, "looking attentively from the perspective of the manifold relations that make this world what it is" (Escobar, 2016, p.17). At another level, genuinely concerned about the state of the world and about the commodification of nature brought by coloniality, he was trying to communicate to the West that human beings are intrinsically part of nature.

According to Joar Nango, today many Sámi artists are trapped in this "romanticized" idea that Áillohaš is known for, that the Sámi are 'nature people', leaning on it in a way "that somehow binds you... If you say that you are a nature person, it is more of a commitment in that" (J. Nango, conversation, December 17, 2021).

Although referring to a different context, Comanche writer Paul Chaat Smith (2009) warned against the exoticization that can result from romanticization which "has encompassed and permitted a range of historical responses from destruction to idealization" (p.18).

⁴⁶ Sara Jr. refers here to Sámi cosmology, which encompasses three realms: the upper one, the realm of the gods, and spirits; the middle one, the world of ordinary people, and the underworld, called *jábmiidáibmu*, the world of the dead (see Kuokkanen, 2000, p. 416).

⁴⁷ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Nks3MpP-NaU>

Nevertheless, Nango argues that romanticization is part of being Sámi, something they must deal with (conversation, December 17, /2021). Nevertheless, self-representation is crucial against the reductive and essentializing framework of indigeneity.

6.1.3 ‘You Can do Whatever you Want’

Multi-artists Elina Waage Mikalsen, Hilde Skancke Pedersen, and Sara Inga Utsi Bongo acknowledge the influence Valkeapää has had on their education and artistic identities. Mikalsen recognizes his role in introducing her to the field recordings, and, discovering how it is possible to experience the freedom of working with different means of expression (conversation, February 10, 2022).

Similarly, Pedersen acknowledges how important Áillohaš has been for her and for the Sámi artists movement, which he helped establishing in 1979. She was also inspired by his multidisciplinary way of working, which gave her freedom she did not know she could have (conversation, June 23, 2022). In 1991, Pedersen realized the scenography for Áillohaš’s poetry concert at the Arctic Arts Festival in Harstak/Harstad, using textile, plywood, and acrylic, inspired by his use of the sun symbol in his visual art, a direct reference to Sámi cosmology⁴⁸.

Bongo mentions how strong was the influence of Áillohaš when she started as an actress at the Art Academy in Oslo. Especially, young artists like her were inspired by his poem “*Mu rohktu lea muovainuss/My home is in my heart,*” which she turned into a monologue for the audition at the Academy (S. I. Utsi Bongo, conversation, August 22, 2022). In addition, Áillohaš influenced her interest in joik (*luohti*), and made people realize how vital Sámi knowledge is, even for everyday life (*ibid.*). In fact, the way he accurately describes the lifestyles and details can be easily grasped by someone with the same reindeer herding background (*ibid.*). As a duojár specialized in traditional colors, she is particularly interested in how Valkeapää used them in his visual art, in relation to the traditional clothes and the seasons. When referring to his multi-dimensionality, Bongo emphasized how crucial this aspect has been for Sámi artistic identities, mirroring the interconnectedness behind all we have in the land (conversation, August 22, 2022). Valkeapää, in this sense, walked up a path for

⁴⁸ The Sámi are considered the children of the sun, according to one myth (Gaski, Nordström, & Salisbury, (Eds.)1997, p.2). Valkeapää was honoring that myth by re-using the symbol of the sun in his visual work, “reaching back into the Sami past from the point of view of a modern Sami” (*ibid.*).

Sámi multi-artists today, almost telling them, “It is ok, you can do whatever you want; actually, you do not need to follow one, and be a perfect painter... as long as you feel good you can do whatever you want”. In this way, she continues, Sámi artists can freely use all methods and techniques to express their ideas (S. I. Utsi Bongo, conversation, August 22, 2022). It may be possible to read this multi-dimensionality as a “resistance against the tendency toward specialization that is found in western art, as opposed to a more holistic approach that is found in the art of indigenous peoples” (Gaski, 2011, p.33). This interpretation is also attuned not only with decoloniality, implying the de-linking from the ‘imperial imaginary’ (Mignolo, 2011, p.48), but also with the Indigenous understanding of sovereignty and self-determination intended as the re-establishment of Indigenous Peoples’ own epistemologies and ontologies, imaginaries, futures. In this sense, Kuokkanen (2000) emphasizes how for many Indigenous artists there is no distinction between “arts”, “aesthetics”, and other daily activities, as “through the Sámi life-style, each moment of life becomes an artistic experience” (Valkeapää, 1983, p.60).

6.1.4 ‘Good-Enough’ Sámi

“Some had been basically fishermen before, some reindeer herders, some reindeer hunters. One guy explained that it was all contingent – on what restraints and opportunities arose. None of it was definitional. But the world ‘knows’ that the Sámi are reindeer herders” (Durham, 2013, p.29)

Skåden asserts how he felt some expectations on being a Sámi writer, and “an irritation that everyone... if you write in Sámi, you are expected to write nature poetry” (conversation, December 6, 2021). His rebel spirit made him to purposefully avoid writing about nature, at least in his early books, challenging him to write about something else. As the Sámi language is full of those themes, nature themes, he decided to play with the language differently, feeling that “we [Sámi] need a variety ... we need other themes” (*ibid.*). Skåden is extremely aware of what it means to be inside a language, and especially a minority one, being conscious of the “literary landscape of the Sámi language” and the Norwegian one. Ironically, he became more interested in writing about nature when writing in Norwegian, as the Norwegian literature “does not have that surplus of the Sámi perspective” (*ibid.*). The different objectives when writing in Sámi or Norwegian may show something similar to what Gaski (2011) argued about joik being multi-layered: writing in Sámi is directed to the Sámi who can speak the language.

Writing in Norwegian means addressing the books to the Sámi, particularly the ones who, due to the same assimilation policies learned Norwegian and lost the Sámi language, and to the Norwegian majority speakers.

Gaski (2011) contextualized this kind of multilayered writing as speaking to both the Sámi audience and a more global one. In this way, Skåden still expresses Sámi issues when he writes in Norwegian, using references that a Sámi person can easily grasp. Undoubtedly, he writes “about minority experiences... the experience of belonging to a native minority or an Indigenous minority and what that entails in different ways” (S.Skåden, conversation, December 6, 2021). Especially when writing in his local dialect, he contributes keeping the language alive. He speaks to the Sámi person with their experiences, knowledge, doubts, difficulties, and fears; for example, when tackling the issue of finding a partner for Sámi young people, due to “the frailty of Sámi culture, the frailty of Sámi language, how marginalized it is, and the person’s aspirations to be a part of bringing Sámi language into the future, keeping it alive in a way through your children” (*ibid.*). Issues like this are also connected to the question of what kind of future one wants to live in, and the role everyone has in shaping it. It means thinking generations back, and generations forward, according to a cyclical understanding of history.

As previously said, there are multiple dimensions in Skåden’s writing, as he tries to write in layers, so that the subject can be appreciated by other people than Sámi. In this regard, Skåden believes that what it means to be in between worlds - a hybrid - is still not emphasized enough in Sámi literature (S.Skåden, conversation, December 6, 2021).

If politics is held responsible for “answering the question of who [Sámi] are as a people” and thus “for creating meaning and identity” (Gaski, 2008, p.222;), many Sámi still contest the status of the Sámi parliament (*ibid.*). Some consider themselves a hybrid, as not only are the borders between Sámi and Norwegians blurred, but many Sámi live in an urban context, absorbed in the capitalist ways of living and away from the land of their families, taking them to question their identity as Sámi. What it means to be in “between being traditional Sámi and modern, what it means to be in between Sámi and Norwegian, what it means to be in between” is under-communicated, at least in the explicitly political forms of art (S. Skåden, conversation, December 6, 2022). Instead, through his work, the author wants to emphasize what it means for him to be within the Sámi sphere while “having all these connections to other things” (*ibid.*).

In one of his books of poetry that was never translated from Sámi, Skåden tried to draw a parallel between Sámi fight “in the modern world” and “the punk-rock music culture that

came out in England as an identity crisis, from the children of the poor people who worked in the mines” (S. Skåden, conversation, December 6, 2022). As he argues, both generations grew up “on the ruins of a culture” (*ibid.*), albeit for different reasons. Skåden unfolds what it is like to grow up while trying “to find my way from those ruins and trying to understand whom I am going to be, whom can I be” (*ibid.*). In his writing, he mixes influences and hybridities, using other formats, for example, the Shakespearian one, and applying them to the Sámi context(s).⁴⁹ For the author, exposing the hybridity

“is crucial to Sámi to recognize who we are; we actually are not just the people we are when we stand on that barricade, shouting ‘no to mines’... deeper into the personalities, our doubts, our fears not being ‘good-enough’ Sámi, because that is what we comment too, ‘Am I actually good enough?’ that is a big question for a Sámi person...and...when all the public displace of being Sámi becomes something... one-dimensional, it is an identity problem, I think, for many Sámi. So, I try to speak to those, to that identity, to that many-dimensional identity” (S. Skåden, conversation, December 6, 2022)

Mikalsen is also concerned with these multi-dimensional identities. Being in-between two worlds, she uses both Sámi language, Norwegian, and English, when it comes to describing her work to the broad public. Similarly, the artist works with topics that are important for people who stand in between, “who are both Norwegian and Sámi” or come from heavily assimilated areas, like the sea Sámi areas (conversation, February 10, 2022). While speaking to people ‘in between,’ Mikalsen tries to define other ways of being Sámi, away from the colonizing gaze of authenticity. For her, it is also a matter of self-representation, “as it is so easy to get lost in those stereotypes that have been defined by the majority culture, on how Sámi culture, Sámi artists should look like, and I try to break those chains” (*ibid.*).

⁴⁹ For example, in one of his books he applied the Shakespearian speech of Henry the Fifth, to a Sámi musician’s monologue before performing on a Sámi Eurovision context in Kautokeino (S. Skåden, conversation, December 6, 2021) See also Gaski (2011).

6.2 Theme Two: ‘Art puts questions in all directions’

6.2.1 Exploring Questions

“The straightjacket [sic] of authenticity, as defined by others, is too restrictive. A push toward Indigenous methodologies, as I see it, would not replace one conservative framework with another but finally give us the space to discuss, debate, and find answers and ask questions in our own words, on our own terms” (Kanakano, 2014, 90-91).

“From a Sámi perspective, I almost feel I am considered like a non-political writer,” claims Skåden when addressing the political aspects of creativity and art (conversation, December 6, 2022). He believes that “art should not be about statements, but about exploring questions” (*ibid.*) as creative expressions have more value if they are “truth-seeking explorations”, whereas “politics is not truth-seeking” (*ibid.*).

Despite his first irritation regarding the expectations of writing about nature, he admitted that his cli-fi novel, *Fugl* (2019) can be read as eco-political. The idea for the book, he argues, came from a critique of Petter Dass being regarded as “the father of Northern-Norwegian literature,” the first to describe the Northern-Norwegian landscape poetically. Particularly, Skåden criticizes how he supposedly set out “how we should think about our landscape” (conversation, December 6, 2021). Although the ecological and anti-colonial critique is not explicit in the book, Skåden tried to convey what it means not to understand the landscape anymore, which is what happens when the relationship between humans and the landscape gets abstract, and particularly, when Indigenous knowledge is lost. Skåden navigates what it means to be a Sámi living in the city, away from the family background and the landscape: it becomes more and more abstract to be a Sámi if one is not grown up connected to the landscape, and fewer Sámi have a practical/pragmatical and “tactile connection with their ancestry landscape” today (*ibid.*). He is concerned that this abstract relation will cause the Sámi to be disconnected from the land. This is the result of coloniality as implicating both epistemicide and ecocide: the severance of this “backbone” sensation, of the tactile relationship between the people and their land.

Furthermore, Skåden tried to describe “what it means to be part of a landscape and then someone else comes along and has a different perspective on the same landscape, which is, of course, a historical reference” (conversation, December 6, 2021). *Fugl* was initially written in Norwegian, then translated into French, conceived for a broader audience. Without being

overtly activist, Skåden's way of writing encloses different registers and levels of understanding, which intersect in a flow that takes the reader deep to the heart of the human condition, where, depending on the reader, many questions can arise.

From the Sámi standpoint, he argues, it is not just understandable but necessary, the need to make statements, as the situation poses concrete and almost existential issues for the Sámi. Due to coloniality, Sámi always needed art to be political. Skåden discusses and problematizes the need for artistic expressions to make a point for the Sámi voice to be heard (S. Skåden, conversation, December 6, 2021).

These art expressions or strategies, whose role is crucial, are not meant for the Sámi; rather, they speak to the majority societies, generally meant to be “understandable enough” (*ibid.*). However, Skåden claims that the Sámi community also needs “art that works on the premises of art, and actually has questions,” allowing for Sámi artists to question themselves and their identities (*ibid.*). Although this ‘truth-seeking’ form of art is more complex, for Skåden, it is valuable, necessary, and more interesting, not being reduced to one dimension. In fact, “when art puts questions in all directions,” artistic expressions have the potential to be a motor for inner development and change and not just a “confirmation of already given truths” (*ibid.*). He also believes that we could call this type of art *existential*, instead of political (S. Skåden, conversation, December 6, 2021). With this claim, Skåden does not mean that art should not be political; on the contrary, art should be political, expressing a critique “without going into dialogue with practical politics, without being politics” (*ibid.*).

Skåden emphasizes how it is also a problem of representation: “does every Sámi person feel represented by this “pencil-sharpened political statement art”? He argues that Sámi identity is not only defined through oppositions (*ibid.*).

Contextually, the term *existential* could indicate an art that does not relate to *existence* in Western terms, as “the special way in which human beings are in the world, in contrast with other beings” (Deranty, 2019), but rather to the way in which human beings are in the world, in *connection* with other beings, and to the existence of *some* human beings in relation to *others*, as coloniality imposed the Western ontology and epistemology onto other ways of seeing and being in the world. The meaning of existential, in this sense, is intertwined with ontology, when existence is connected to how the human being “relate[s] to the world” (Deranty, 2019), and with freedom, in the sense of an active engagement in the world” (*ibid.*). This ontological aspect of existentialism is linked to aesthetic considerations, since “artistic practice is one of the prime examples of free human activity, it is therefore also one of the

privileged modes of revealing what the world is about” (Deranty, 2019). However, the existence of the Sámi and other Indigenous Peoples is colonized, as the way in which they would relate to the world is erased by the colonality of being.

Whenever realities are discredited as “ignorant, backward, inferior, local or particular, and unproductive or sterile”, they are considered non-existent (Santos, 2012, p.52). Inasmuch as “the social production of non-existence points at the effacement of entire worlds through a set of epistemological operations concerning knowledge, time, productivity, and ways of knowing” (Escobar, 2016, p.15), and to not abide by these “epistemological operations” (*ibid.*) affecting absences, it is crucial for the Sámi “to build a strong art that does not make statements, that is not pre-programmed to mean something about something” (S. Skåden, conversation, December 6, 2021). In this sense, Skåden hopes that Sámi artists will be in the condition of making more art than politics in the future (*ibid.*), according to the freedom of deciding what kind of artists they want to be.

Joar Nango, who does not consider himself an activist but rather “an artist, with a certain sense of performance” (conversation, December 17, 2021), discusses the role of Sámi artistic expressions in similar terms. For Nango, art is “a mirror-image of the world,” a space where it is possible to express freely, almost like a parallel dimension where these expressions exist (*ibid.*). However, this world is not - or should not be - one-dimensional. On the contrary, as Nango argues, artists these days allow themselves to play more with the formats, being more ‘dangerous’ (*ibid.*). For him, the art world needs “expressions that are allowing these thoughts to be strengthened,”; for them to be strengthened, they need to be criticized, challenged, deconstructed, “talked about and investigated from as many angles as possible” (*ibid.*). Political activism does not allow for that, and its powerful statements should be questioned to be considered truly strong (*ibid.*). Therefore, while he likes to play with the formats, some of them being informed by the activists’ way of working, he wants to be free to not “evaluate things through the political agenda” (*ibid.*). For him, it is about finding a “breathing room within his creative practice and partly political stance-strategic evasion as post-capitalist critique” (Zeiger & Nango, 2020). The global Indigenous dimension also plays a crucial role in the struggle against coloniality and for posing crucial questions. Nango highlights how fruitful it can be to be part of a more international type of Indigenous discourse, which for him means “to see yourself a bit from the outside” (J. Nango, conversation, December 17, 2021). It is valuable to see the parallels and the connections between different contexts, and exciting to strengthen “the international network around this type of art conversations,” (*ibid.*). For

instance, working with practicalities, he is interested in the dichotomy of chaos and order, connected in turn to the deconstruction of the “institutionalized idea of control, in our society, and to be able to adapt more flexibly, and elastically to whatever happens around us” (J. Nango, conversation, December 17, 2021). The adaptability of a culture to the surroundings is enshrined in Sámi philosophies and pedagogy. *Jahki ii leat jagi gáibmi* («One year is not another year’s brother»): one must always be prepared for changes, and in this sense, the knowledge related to the environment is crucial to find solutions for “all kinds of challenges, especially in unusual or unexpected circumstances” (Porsanger& Virtanen, 2019, p.293).

This adaptability also underpins *indigenuity*,⁵⁰ intrinsically connected with relational ontology, described as a “third space” in between processes of deconstruction and reconstruction (Kapoor, 2008)⁵¹. More than a concept, indigenuity is the pragmatic response of Indigenous cultures to the lived environment, the application of Indigenous intergenerational and experiential wisdom to solve practical everyday life problems (Wildcat, 2021). Nango describes indigenuity without fixing its meaning, but describing instead that “it’s the small acts, fixing and coping strategies used in everyday life” and specifying what is not “it’s a response to lived reality, not an intellectual cognition” (Nango, 2013;2021). While the frameworks coming from the global international contexts can be inspiring, Nango stressed the importance of deconstructing them before applying them to the local context and building a conversation (J. Nango, conversation, December 17, 2021), as the sense of connectedness communicated by these international frameworks, and by the decolonizing project, for example, cannot come at the expense of local realities.

6.2.2 By Doing What I Do

“Sometimes just being yourself is the radical act. When you occupy space in systems that weren’t built for you, your authenticity is your activism.”
(Welteroth, 2019, p.191)

When Mikalsen started educating herself as an artist, she thought she had to be an activist to be considered a Sámi artist. Today, she believes that putting her expressions out there, working with “topics like spirituality, and taking that seriously, *is* already political. To

⁵⁰ A portmanteau word connecting ‘Indigenous ingenuity’. See Joar Nango and Silje Figenschou Thoresen’s Indigenuity Project (2013), and Daniel Wildcat’s definition found in <https://www.monah.org/indigenuity>

⁵¹ See also Datta (2013), Wilson (2008), and Escobar (2016).

make space for Sámi understanding of the world, the connection between human and non-human ... it *is* political” (conversation, February 10, 2022, emphasis added). So, in a way, she could be considered an activist, albeit not using the activist language directly in her art. Nevertheless, expressing the urgency of Sámi issues like many artists do is necessary. What Mikalsen wonders with a bit of concern, is “how much of it gets through, how much of it gets lost within art institutions, and the communication of the work to the public” or in the curatorial frames (*ibid.*).

A similar concern is shared by Pedersen when highlighting the importance of the participation of Sámi artists at important exhibitions, such as Documenta and Venice Biennale, for the Sámi voice to reach the broad public. In fact, for Pedersen, the central feature of Sámi activism is for the Sámi voice to be heard: “it is long overdue to make our voices heard, and some of us try to make our voices heard through art” (conversation, June 23, 2022). It is crucial for the institutions to get the message, so that these art installations will speak for generations. Nevertheless, she addresses the limits of these venues as being too specialized; only the people willing to go there will be exposed to the messages, and this may not be enough to fight coloniality and capitalism, especially in the wide European societies. In her opinion, the role of social media is crucial to reach more people (*ibid.*). Although the new generations of artists work very politically, claims Pedersen referring to the artists participating at the Sámi Pavilion, not all the artists in Sápmi work in an explicitly activist/artist manner.

Pedersen, who works as a solo artist and as part of the collective Dáiddadállu, considers herself politically active, trying to reach the audience, “in a moving way” (H.S.Pedersen, conversation, June 23, 2022). Despite not using explicit activist language in her work, for her “everyone has the same aim, just different tools and languages to express it” (*ibid.*). While it is crucial to address urgent issues regarding Sápmi, like reindeer pastures, mining, or windmills, as Maret Anne Sara does with her art, in her view there are other ways of being an activist, at least for those who cannot be active protesters. Her way, what she calls a “quiet kind of activism,” is to try to convey Sámi art through taking care of Sámi institutions and organizations, sacrificing time from her creative work (H.S.Pedersen, conversation, June 23, 2022). An example of this “kind of practical, philosophical, and political” activist way is to fight for a Sámi art museum in Karasjok while educating Sámi curators to *indigenize* the institutions. Pedersen uses her strength in other ways, feeling to be part of a movement, of a wave: “it is great that we have different possibilities of expressing ourselves” (*ibid.*). The image of a wave made me think about the statement by Métis artist and professor David Garneau “art

moves us but does not necessarily move us to action. ... it changes our individual and collective imaginaries by particles, and these new pictures of the world can influence behaviour" (Bailey, 2017, p.46). Moreover, the lines between art and activism, culture and politics can be blurred. For instance, the MTL collective (Center for Creative Ecologies, 2017) considers the process of "research and organizing, aesthetics and action, theory and debriefing and analysis" as part of a dialectical art practice.

Sara Inga Utsi Bongo emphasizes the pragmatic aspects of the interconnectedness of duodji and nature. To face and solve the need for clothing and everyday items (e.g., bowls, cups), it is possible to use the natural products of the land, which may differ from area to area based on what the land gives⁵². A vital principle when fetching natural resources is connected to refraining from taking more than is needed. This is due to practical reasons, as fetching is hard work, but most importantly, to maintain a balance in nature and the future generations (conversation, August 22, 2022). She provides the example of *duorkat*, the small wood used for the mattress in the tent: it is crucial to "fetch it here and there" and not just in one place not to destroy the growth. Similarly, children are taught not to think the living reindeer as "material" to use. The message is simple: "you get what you get, and sometimes you get that material, and you will be very happy with it, with this special material, but when you do not get it, you just have to deal with it" (*ibid.*).

Cosmology is connected with the fetching and preparing of the materials: for example "when the moon is getting bigger," a time known as *dievimannu* (or *dievasmannu*), "it is a good time to do everything, to get the material, or to cut your hair for example" (S.I. Utsi Bongo, conversation, August 22, 2022). Cosmology is related to the cycle of nature, and even if some practices are not in use anymore, the mindset is still related to the seasonal cycles. How things are done becomes more important than *what* is done (*ibid.*). When, after the winter, the sun comes back in the North, nature starts to live again. At the end of June, the plants have much lymph in them, which is an excellent time to harvest the edible ones. In addition, many rituals rooted in immaterial knowledge are related to the use of different duodji items (*ibid.*). Bongo wrote her master's thesis on the colors and patterns in traditional clothing reflecting the contrasts of the surrounding nature. In fact, the aesthetics of duodji is also connected with the cycles of nature, although not everyone pays attention to it (S.I. Utsi Bongo, conversation, August 22, 2022).

⁵² For example, for the *gjedka*, the child's cradle, one may use different types of wood based on local resources. (S.I. Utsi Bongo, conversation, August 22, 2022).

For Bongo and her family, duodji has always been related to practical needs. In this world, where too much is produced and wasted, duodji items are realized to last. However, duodji and *Árbediehtu* - traditional knowledge - are now used and referred to in Sámi arts, and many beautiful and decorated duodji items are produced today to be sold, besides the scope of practical and everyday needs (*ibid.*). Ancestral knowledge and duodji have also become “something you can use in a political manner” (*ibid.*). In this regard, activism is seen as necessary for more people to make those kinds of choices: when duodji and traditional knowledge are used politically, the idea can become more important than the actual item (S.I. Utsi Bongo, conversation, August 22, 2022), by significantly impacting politicians, scientists, and their decision-making processes, thus improving the world we live in (*ibid.*). Bongo agrees with another duodji practitioner, whose full name she cannot remember, who once said: “I do not need to make political art; by doing what I do, I make a political statement.” In this sense, “Indigenous sovereignty can also be a personal experience” (Bauder & Mueller, 2021, p.12) if “sovereignty is just what I do, and *how* I do it” as reported by Thorner et al. (2018, p.274, emphasis added). Comparably, Bongo argues that “by doing what we do and making choices we have been reflecting on, maybe it is political enough, and it is what we need to make the change” (conversation, August 22, 2022).

Preziosi and Farago (2012) discuss the existence of a place in between, where matter not only viewed as a thing, but “a way of using things- from a perspective that is not tied to specifically European understandings of artistic significance” (p. 86). This third space is conceived also as a place of “enunciation, identification, and negotiation” (p.87), but also, a space to speak back, to resist, to take back Indigenous sovereignty. An example is the pair of traditional shoes she made for her master’s thesis in duodji, named ‘Just a pair of winter shoes,’ now exposed in Tromsø Rådhuset. The shoes are not decorated, “they are just made with a very special material,” states Bongo (*ibid.*). However, they communicate that living in a multicultural society, “there is a lot more to the society than only the Western ideas and Western manners” (*ibid.*). Thus, for her, the choices one makes can be decolonizing, even though it is important to actively work for decolonization to happen (*ibid.*). Her area of work is education, and she contributes to the creation of the duodji curricula for Norwegian schools. This critical process implies many discussions on implementing the Sámi content in all subjects at all levels of the Norwegian curricula (*ibid.*). If it is crucial to make Sámi history and practices visible, Bongo argues, teaching how to be culturally ethical and aware of cultural appropriation is also essential (*ibid.*). Therefore, delivering the right content for the teaching material is a

practical part of decolonizing, aiming at including other knowledges besides the Western one. Along this journey, she also created digital teaching material on cultural appropriation (S.I. Utsi Bongo, conversation, August 22, 2022). Reflecting on it, she claims that maybe “one way of decolonizing [is] doing what you can in your position... what you feel is right towards your own people and other peoples who do not have the benefits of living as a majority in a country”. However, what one can do, depends on the available tools one has (*ibid.*).

Johan Sara Jr. remembers when being Sámi was not considered a good thing, and protesting was the only way to fight discrimination. In those days, discrimination and the loss of languages hit the Sámi communities, especially among the Sea Sámi⁵³. The punk-rock culture inspired him to rebel and fight the system; at the same time, he reclaimed the *joik*, due to its flexibility and adaptability, with which to fight for a better society⁵⁴. Showing the Sámi fighting spirit, Sara Jr. promised himself to dedicate his life to fighting for Sámi culture while repeating himself: “do not forget who you are. You are Sámi, and you have to fight all your life because it is not going to change so fast” (J.Sara Jr., conversation, February 8, 2022). Although the situation today in Sápmi is improved, and being Sámi is now often met with pride, as Pedersen contends (conversation, June 23, 2022), Sara Jr. recites these words as a reminder for Sámi younger generations: “never forget, be aware, it can happen, as the society is always changing, and you need to fight, find something to fight with” (J.Sara Jr., conversation, February 8, 2022). This struggle is rooted in the present temporality of coloniality and projected into the future, conjoined with the role of artistic expressions as tools to reclaim Sámi sovereignty and self-determination.

6.2.3 Ghosts, Holes, and In-Between Spaces as Possibilities

In her work, Mikalsen considers noises, scratches, and ‘failures’ from the field recordings as part of the relation with the environment (conversation, February 10, 2022). In a previous interview for SHAPE+ Platform (2020), the multi-artist affirmed her interest in “unwanted sound, or sound that is considered wrong,” such as “a shaking hand sending vibrations, the thundering noise of wind in the microphone membrane”. The artist referred to them as “unwanted” sounds before realizing they are ‘small gifts’ occurring “in the encounter with an environment” (*ibid.*). In this sense, Mikalsen works with the lost connection with nature

⁵³ Sara Jr, Pedersen and Mikalsen have Sea Sami background from coastal areas, where the effects of the war and Norwegianization were particularly destructive, especially regarding Sámi language.

⁵⁴ In fact, it is possible to joik about everything. Joik, in this sense, represents a true example of cultural adaptability.

and her Sámi history, trying to push forward a perspective on nature that could represent a solution if society would take more into account Indigenous thinking (conversation, February 10, 2022) to re-orient the current state of things and envision different futures by emphasizing Indigenous values, such as relationality between humans and other beings.

Relationality also implies to be humble and accept what comes. For Mikalsen, these unforeseen sounds - and holes on a more *visual* ground- become possibilities. The holes thus become a *poetic* but pragmatic figure for “both loss of memory, loss of knowledge, history, silence, entrances, portals” (*ibid.*). They can also be seen as a decolonizing strategy if not focusing on the loss one fantasizes about what could have been or still can be (*ibid.*). Even though, as Mbembe argues, “there are irreparable losses that no compensation can ever bring back” (Bangstad & Nilsen, 2019), Mikalsen considers holes as portals to other dimensions, referring to *hauntology*, for which the futures that could have been haunt the present.

As multi-artist and theorist John Akomfrah expresses in the video-installation *Vertigo Sea* (2015), hauntology is not just about the past haunting the present. Rather, “these specters refuse to rest because they are continually newly conjured and produced in the ongoing tragedies of the now” (Demos, 2020, p.83).

The concept of hauntology is strictly connected with the one of *Indigenous futurism*, for which the futures can be re-imagined and created⁵⁵. However, as Quijano argued, the idea of a future horizon is “far different from a mystical or magical imaginary which might transcend history” (2002, p.77). From an Indigenous perspective, hauntology is connected to the pre-colonial past and in the form of lost and brutally disrupted futures. Mikalsen connects these holes as portals to the Sámi perspective on “how we think about the dead, or our relationship with the underworld⁵⁶” imagining the underworld people as ghosts coming back from the pre-colonial past (conversation, February 10, 2022). Seen in this sense, these portals “to futurity and potentiality” (Streeby, 2018, p. 149), can reveal to be a transformative type of world-making, which centers, according to Streeby (2018), “the transformative dimensions of the worlds and futures imagined by Indigenous people” (p.118) confronting colonialism and ecocide.

⁵⁵ “Hauntology is not just a symptom of the times, it is itself haunted by a nostalgia for all our lost futures” (see Gallix, *The Guardian*, 17 June 2011).

⁵⁶ There are two main traditional legends as referred to by Máret Ánne Sara (2018). The spirits of the dead unbaptized children are called *eahpáraš*. They refer to, for example, spirits of children born outside of marriages, or children with disabilities, who could not “be coped with in a nomadic lifestyle and a harsh climate” (p.144). Whereas the *ulddát*, the underworld people, live in a parallel world underneath the surface of the Earth, and they are invisible “unless they want to be seen” (p.145). Generally, Sámi children are taught “to live in a mixture of fear, solidarity, curiosity and respect for the other beings, creatures or spirits with whom you coexist” (Sara, 2018, p.145).

Although Joar Nango admires - and is inspired by - the framework of Indigenous futurism, he believes that sometimes Indigenous activists, thinkers, and artists lack critical sense when they lean too much on it without contextualizing it. Through contextualization it is possible to develop “our own perspectives, and our own language about these types of futures” (J. Nango, conversation, December 17, 2021).

Combining the ‘romanticized’ idea of nature “with other elements that are not romanticized at all”, which are also part of the Indigenous Sámi culture, for example,

“the motorized petrol fuel vehicles used in traditional reindeer herding” or “the snowmobile and the smell of exos, and gasoline... and the noise it makes, and all of that, it is an image very far from the image that Áillohaš tries to create about the reindeer herding” (*ibid.*)

Nango works with space and materiality, this “nitty-gritty, dirty, very pragmatic type of aesthetical space” albeit not disconnected from the cosmology. In a way, Nango still relates and works with the same themes Áillohaš was, albeit using very different types of images, going beyond this “one-dimensional understanding of things” (J. Nango, conversation, December 17, 2021). Acknowledging the hybrid Western commercial culture that influences everyday life, Nango uses a different lens, a contemporary one, through which the traditional elements connected with the closeness to nature take on different aesthetical forms (*ibid.*). Post-Capitalist Architecture TV (Nango & Bongo, 2020-) is a streaming series made in response to the Covid-19 pandemics, about “architecture after the fall of capitalism”, created as a prologue to Nango’s exhibition at Bergen Kunsthall. The series investigates, through conversations with different kinds of contributors, “how Indigenous cultures relate to a broader discussion on space” (Bergen International Festival, fib.no). Nango criticizes who looks at Indigenous lifestyles as something ‘folkloristic’ pertaining to the past: traditional knowledge is alive, and it is possible to learn a lot from these flexible and future-looking traditional lifestyles and attitudes (J.Nango, conversation, December 17, 2021). In this sense, tradition is a flexible, pragmatic, and critical selection, accommodating changes “resourcefully between present dilemmas and remembered answers: a pragmatic, not a messianic orientation” (Clifford, 2016, p.157). Looking at the examples he conveys in Post-Capitalist Architecture TV, society could re-orient itself.

6.3 Theme Three: ‘Can You See into the Future?’

“I am warning you; do you see? Do you find yourself? Can you see into the future?”

Johan Sara Jr (J.Sara Jr., conversation, February 8, 2022)

6.3.1 A Collective Voice that Questions (Western) Development

In one way or another, everyone deals with the environmental crisis, and Nango’s response is very direct, believing that “working locally, with movement and material, and the flow (flow of materials and flow of people nda)” means learning and listening to people who maintained the connectedness with the lifecycles, away from the commodified way of seeing space and materiality (conversation, December 17, 2021). Post-Capitalist Architecture TV looks “beyond this sort of globalized and commercial capitalistic system, that has eaten us as cultures all over the place” (*ibid.*). The response to climate change and capitalism, consists therefore, for Nango, in looking beyond and underneath it, while seeking for those smaller-scale types of livelihoods, lifestyles and economical flows, “because economy exists everywhere” (*ibid.*). The problem lies “in the conception of development as linear, unidirectional, material, and financial growth, driven by commodification and capitalist markets” whence it follows the idea of progress as a marker of a pretentiously- universal well-being (Kothari et al., 2019, p.xxii). This capitalistic ever-expanding idea of evolution, which implies leaving nature behind, it is not possible when the human beings are repositioned in a world of relations, not able to control nature (J. Nango, conversation, December 17, 2021). In a relational perspective “things and beings *are* their relations, they do not exist prior to them” (Escobar, 2016, p.18, emphasis added). Nango looks at the world with a gaze, being curious and asking questions to everyone, regardless of social status “academics, but also your car mechanic, or your neighbor, or your grandfather” (*ibid.*), as evident in Post-Capitalist Architecture TV.

Similarly, Bongo criticizes the consumeristic view in today’s world, and the overproduction of items that are not really needed; getting the resources from nature in a sustainable way is something totally forgotten (conversation, August 22, 2022). She explains with concrete examples how the environmental crisis has tangible consequences on traditional knowledge, and duodji. For example, fetching the grass traditionally used for the shoes has become more difficult during this season, due to high levels of humidity and water in the

ground of “areas that are usually dry at the end of the Summer” while other areas of the world are unusually dry (*ibid.*). The change does not affect the material itself, the duojár claims, but it impacts traditional knowledge, directly connected to the territory and to the use of materials (*ibid.*). The places where it was possible to find the grass may change, and traditional fur shoes, for instance, may not be used anymore, due to changing weather conditions: when the snow is melting “you cannot use those fur shoes” (S.I. Utsi Bongo, conversation, August 22, 2022). The use of snow mobiles for herding has also an impact on duodji and traditional knowledge, although, as Bongo claims, is not necessarily bad, as “everything becomes much easier” (*ibid.*) and there is less work to do. However, the products are less used, and this affects the income of the practitioners who try to make a living out of duodji. Sámi epistemologies, and duodji, are concerned with the idea of balance between humans and nature, which is applied, for example, in taking only the strict necessary from nature, thinking “several generations ahead”.

Similarly, Skåden is concerned about the future, although he still believes that what has not happened can still happen, in a utopian world. It is about people, what we prioritize and give more value to, but most importantly it is about political choices, what is considered valuable and what is seen as development” (conversation, December 6, 2021). For example, a country like Norway is “caught in the capitalist consumerist logic of what development it is supposed to be” (*ibid.*). In Áillohaš’s poems there are very political statements, which carry on an easily identifiable critique against consumerism and colonization. However, on the other hand, “when he talks about the world, he talks about little things, you know, all the tactile nature” (S. Skåden, conversation, December 6, 2021). According to Skåden, he was concerned about the future while being nostalgic of the past (*ibid.*). Of course, the two levels are compellingly connected; for Skåden “it is a way of pointing at something”, raising awareness of what could have been. For this reason, Skåden argues that Áillohaš could be considered an indigenous futurist. Áillohaš’ contribution, since his early songs in the 60s, was to try to make people -inside and outside the Sámi sphere - understand that development (the Western kind of development *nda*) can be something else than what we have been taught the last hundred years” (*ibid.*). Áillohaš denounced this in *Tereisia lapista*, (1971) [Greetings from Lapland], questioning what development meant, and what kind of development did the world need for the future.

For Skåden, the micro-local changes can make a difference in the way of thinking, representing hope for the future. He considers the Sámi collective voice - although not all Sámi agree – as prioritizing “nature over money” (conversation, December 6, 2021). Concurrently,

the “Sámi and other Indigenous communities... represent something valuable when it comes to opposing or proposing development as something else than what it is” (*ibid.*). The Sámi collective voice, expressed through artistic expressions, can have the role of questioning “that mantra of development that comes from consumer capitalistic growth” perspective (*ibid.*). In fact, when artistic expressions question development, they “present alternatives”, pointing towards different ideas of what development is (*ibid.*).

Skåden discerns less anxiety, and more variety in the “Sámi way of doing things” today. The new Sámi generations are very politically conscious, they are also “better at being Sámi out”, despite living in the cities, if compared to when he was a young exponent of the Sámi Youth Organization (conversation, December 6, 2021). However, he is concerned that maybe “being Sámi is becoming more abstract for them”, eventually resulting in being disconnected.

Sara Jr was seven or eight years old when his father taught him to listen to the soundscape of nature (conversation, February 8, 2022). This way of listening accompanied him as a way of witnessing the climate changes, especially as the weather now is not stable as it was ten or fifteen years ago (*ibid.*). Inspired by Valkeapää’s way of making music, Sara Jr. became more interested in joiking, technically and epistemologically wondering “how we see the world through sound” (*ibid.*), which is the ground question of acoustemology, an interdisciplinary area of study interested in how sound shapes our way of relating to the world. With his music trilogy *Transmission*, he researched and expressed the origin of joik, focusing on how the sounds of nature inform - and are transmitted to - the vocal tradition (*ibid.*). Through the trilogy, he also articulates the importance of protecting the traditional techniques while experimenting with them, as they are not fixed, but flexible. *Almmiravddas*, (horizon in Sámi), his last record released in 2021, expresses different layers and emotional landscapes, “in a quiet way” (*ibid.*). He recorded it during the Covid-19 pandemics, which for him was a time of reflection, especially regarding the *tempo* of this world: “we humans in the West are too fast in destroying the world we live in”, he claims (conversation, February 8, 2022). As Áillohaš was doing through his art and music, *Almmiravddas* addresses each person (J.Sara Jr., conversation, February 8, 2022), conveying, through a “quiet tempo,” the importance of reflecting during these times (*ibid.*).

For Pedersen is vital to preserve nature as our home, while keeping in mind the next generations; however, “it is a very hard struggle against capitalism, against that profiting idea that is so strong” (conversation, June 23, 2022). The commodification is also reflected in the overproduction of garments, constantly thrown away, while overspending has become a

comfort for people (*ibid.*). That is why her motto is to try not to buy anything new, supporting recycling and second-hand shopping. Using second-hand textiles or packaging materials from the food industries in her art, she gives a second life to discarded things that would otherwise be thrown away (*ibid.*). Using these materials also represents a challenge for her imagination to find solutions to create aesthetically beautiful pieces (*ibid.*). Pedersen refers to an installation she made using pharmaceutical garbage for the nursing room in Hammerfest's hospital, and to the one called *Fápmu- Kraft* (power, nda) intended for an elderly home in Alta, that she realized using glass insulators discarded by the power industry. Pedersen claims that like waste materials "elderly people, people with dementia and ill people are considered useless in a capitalistic productive society, but they are still very valuable and beautiful" (conversation, June 23, 2022).

For the artist, the current climate crisis parallels to being trapped between pollution and capitalism; this feeling is well enshrined in the installation/performance *Klimaterra - RitDePassageUnnatural*, (Suikkari and Pedersen), which premiered at Nuuk Nordic Culture Festival 2021. The project was presented via Zoom as a walk-through video accompanied by conceptual text wrote by Suikkari⁵⁷. In the text, the artists describe *Klimaterra* as a multiroom space in the form of a tunnel, which turns out to be the insides of a living creature, whose intestines are full of garbage, especially plastics. However, everyone who enters the installation/performance is free to make associations; the space can in turn represent a whale, a mammal, or Mother Earth (H.S. Pedersen, conversation, June 23, 2022). Disclosing the almost "seducing aesthetics" of plastics, attractive and dangerous at the same time, Pedersen and Suikkari address opposite emotions related to ecocide: the dark and gloomy dimension, reflected in the lethargy and the absence of care, and hope. Two female characters - embodied by the two artists - live inside this space, symbolizing these two dimensions. The one fighting for air, water and freedom is without age, she could be "old or just born, or perhaps a fetus" (H.S. Pedersen, conversation, June 23, 2022). Mother Earth, portrayed as the caretaker of the planet, has accentuated Sámi features, to emphasize the relevance of Sámi traditional knowledge and other Indigenous knowledges and philosophies, as a hope for the living "on the other side of the tunnel" (*ibid.*).

⁵⁷ Unfortunately, it was not possible to have a conversation with Suikkari.

6.3.2 Radical Change Demands Uncomfortable Questions

Mikalsen argues that for a radical change to happen, we need to “organize, stand together, across groups and ethnicity backgrounds” (conversation, February 10, 2022). For the artist is also crucial to listen to and integrate Indigenous voices and ways of relating with the landscape, as well as considering other economies than the one based on capitalism, centered on borrowing, sharing, and exchanging. We discuss how difficult it seems to think outside the capitalist framework, which pervades everything now. Capitalism “explains everything and justifies the current state of affairs as the only possible one” (Santos, 2018, p. ix). Compared to some generations back, argues Skåden, it has become not only unattractive, but impossible “to live like our grandparents”, sharing the same worries they had (conversation, December 6, 2021). Everyone has become accustomed to wealth, especially within the Norwegian welfare system, “even though is kind of even, we have too much, we are used to having too much, and that is a problem, how you are going to change that?” (S. Skåden, conversation, December 6, 2021). It would help, Skåden claims, to prioritize the small-scale jobs against the big industries, but when imagining a different future than capitalism, he does not seem too optimistic, as “banks and currencies have become something that cannot be changed” (conversation, December 6, 2021). As Santos (2014; 2018) contends “in a time characterized by so much desertification of alternatives, it is as difficult to imagine the end of capitalism, colonialism, and patriarchy as to imagine that they will have no end” (2018, p. ix). At the same time, it is easy to blame capitalism; however, as Skåden acknowledges, “we are all caught in it”, and it is hard to get out of it, “even though you ideologically want to” (conversation, December 6, 2021).

On the topic of self-determination and what indigenizing would entail, Skåden poses uncomfortable but crucial questions, expressing his doubts about how it would be if Sámi were to achieve political self-determination, discussing the example provided by the Navajo Nation with the uranium mines⁵⁸.

“We are in a position to be very principle and ideological because we do not have a system, we are not responsible for a system (...) we can stand, we can be pure, we can stand

⁵⁸ For more information about the history of uranium mines in Navajo territories see, for instance the Written Statement of the Navajo Nation Prepared for the House Committee on Natural Resources Subcommittee on Energy and Mineral Resources on Uranium Mining: Contamination and Criticality and H.R. 3405, the Uranium Classification Act of 2019 <https://www.congress.gov/116/meeting/house/109694/documents/HHRG-116-II06-20190625-SD013.pdf>

there and our rhetoric and our back is clear because we do not do that, we do not allow uranium mines on Sámi soil, and we do not allow windmills, and we do not allow someone else doing all that, someone else is keeping our children in schools, someone else is giving us health services, someone else... there are other decision-makers who are responsible for that” (S. Skåden, conversation, December 6, 2021).

“We do not know”, he continues, “what an actual Sámi country would be like, but of course, it would make Sámi politicians responsible for other things than just being that voice” (*ibid.*). Of course, this discussion is contextualized in the Norwegian welfare system, with the standards everyone is used to, as in a welfare state it is demanding to keep the level of wealth and health care for everyone, and “everyone wants to have a health care system, for example, when their life or the life of their beloved is endangered” (*ibid.*). The logic of permanent crisis in which capitalism thrives, leads people “to live and act in crisis but not to think and act critically” (Santos, 2018, ix). The discussion brings us to pose a hard-to-answer question, projected in the future, but situated in the present: “Is it going to be affordable in the future, to actually keep everybody alive?” (S. Skåden, conversation, December 6, 2021).

6.3.3 Creating Spaces as a Healing Process

On December 10-11, 2021, I attended the pre-opening of the collective space *Maddi*, a new interdisciplinary artistic and cultural space in Tromsø. The space articulates almost like a body, taking the guests to the core. In the multiple rooms, it was possible to feel the openness to different aesthetic, social, and political points of view, embodied in performances and conversations. The air was filled with poetry and music, a true exchange, made possible by the collective formed by eleven art professionals, Joar Nango, Sigbjørn Skåden, Maria Utsi, Hanne Hammer Stien, Geir Tore Holm, Nasra Ali Omar, Gaute Barlindhaug, Mathias Danbolt, Bodil Kjelstrup, Gisle løkken and Helga Marie Nordby.

During the conversation we had a week later, we addressed the importance of creating this space. Nango shared the feeling that artists with Sámi Indigenous heritage are often invited or tokenized to represent alternative perspectives into spaces where the framework around them possesses real power and meaning (conversation, December 17, 2022). He believes these frameworks and spaces want to present themselves as diverse and inclusive, without contributing to a real change (*ibid.*). In the art world instead, Nango and other Sámi artists can

create new formats owned by themselves, which does not mean they are not critical spaces. Conversely, “these formats need to be able to possess and invite criticality” (conversation, December 17, 2022). A way to do that, in Nango’s view, is to integrate “a lot of different perspectives as deep as possible into the conversation” (*ibid.*). The Mađđi project is about creating this type of space, while building an institution, in the form of a Sámi space and platform, where it is possible to invite other contributors while owning the conversation. As Nango further contends, it is crucial that this space is “portraying itself, and that it exists as a very generous space, where self-criticality is welcomed, including critical voices towards ‘what it means to be Sámi’” (*ibid.*). Owning the conversation also means allowing people that resist, that disagree with “this type of colonial questions”, into the conversation, challenging them into a space whose boundaries are Sámi-owned: “that’s when you can really talk about decolonization”, argues Nango (*ibid.*).

This kind of space is also explored by Nango through *Girjegumpi - the Sámi architectural library* (2018-). As part of the ‘Girjegumpi’ project over the years Nango assembled more than four-hundred books, articles, and materials (Nasjonal-museet Arkitektur, 2021). *Girjegumpi* (‘girje’ means book, while ‘gumpi’ describes a “movable herder’s hut on sled runners”) refers to both the book collection and the structure containing and transporting it (*ibid.*). The books cover different areas/topics, including Sámi architecture and literature, other Indigenous Peoples traditions, decolonization, and Indigenous futurism. *Girjegumpi* is meant to be a platform for discussions about Sámi and Indigenous architectures, but also about decolonial practices. Moreover, juxtaposing Sámi elements with Norwegian ones, it can be seen as a space of encounter framed in a Sámi format. *Girjegumpi*, in this sense, “demands the inclusion of indigenous peoples’ perspectives by itself being inclusive” (Nango, 2021, Nasjonal-museet Arkitektur). It is a continuously growing and multi-layered project, combining “carefully devised manoeuvres with a consistent use of chance and coincidence” (Nasjonal-museet Arkitektur, 2021).

Nango is concerned about indigenization being similar to the idea of decolonizing, “just another step further removed from the Eurocentric perspective” (conversation, December 17, 2022). However, connecting it to Mađđi, he wonders if indigenizing, a term that he would rather prefer to ‘decolonizing’, may correspond with acts of creation on a smaller, collaborative, even impulsive, and truthful way, while bringing “Indigenous cosmologies at the forefront” (*ibid.*).

The focus being not on the acts *per se*, but on the people creating something together, people “who also happen to be Indigenous put[ting] themselves out there” (*ibid.*). Nango self-identified first as a Sámi, and secondly as an artist (conversation, December 17, 2022). However, many artists with Indigenous backgrounds recognize themselves in the “artist first” or post-Indigenous sensibility (Norwegian crafts, 2019), implying a “rejection of false and biased categorization” while drawing “attention to the fact that the artist’s indigeneity is not necessarily validated through their art” (*ibid.*). Nango shares some of these concerns, sometimes considering being Indigenous as an abstraction while wondering if the constant framing of everything as Indigenous can also bind or suffocate the artists instead of liberating them (*ibid.*).

Pedersen is aware of coloniality, as she argues, “we are now in an era of re-colonization” (conversation, June 23, 2022), often masked as “the green shift”, while being *de facto* “green colonialism”. For the artist, Indigenous means creating spaces. Recalling the words of Walsh (2009), decoloniality is not about “reverting the colonial”, but rather refers to the creation of “‘places’ of alternative constructions and exteriority” (Resende, 2018, p.28). As director of the board of the Sámi Dáiddaguovddáš (Sámi Center for Contemporary Art), she is fostering the creation of a Sámi Art Museum which could represent both an international research center and a space for educating Sámi leaders who “understand the art, the organization building from within” (H. S. Pedersen, conversation, June 23, 2022). Thus, she refers to the important role artistic expressions have in spreading “knowledge about many different Indigenous Peoples, and the Sámi and their thinking” (*ibid.*). Pedersen emphasizes the importance of the new generations, both for the use of social media in disseminating the knowledge, and as hope for the future. In this way, her artistic work with the schools is political, if it is about “helping the [new generations], feeling proud, and hoping that the children will get more knowledge about the ways of the world, politics, and our own history and culture” (*ibid.*).

Sara Jr. reveals that since the years 2010-2011 his way of approaching music has become more introverted and closer to nature; with *Almmiravddas*, he started reflecting on the need for peace, for himself and for the Sámi: “I can do what I want, in silence...because the Sámi people cannot be protesting all the time, as the expression is going to be very hard all the time. We also have to find a good way, find peace...” (J.Sara Jr., conversation, February 8, 2022).

Music is not *just* music, for him, it always relates to something else, whether describing a landscape or sending a message. Sara Jr. builds his work for the future, hoping that his soundscapes will help future generations to handle their daily lives (*ibid.*).

Mikalsen questions the idea of indigenizing, particularly regarding highly assimilated areas, such as the Sea Sámi ones: “What does it even mean to *indigenize*” if so much is lost, the knowledge about Sámi culture, the relationships between humans and non-humans gone?” (Conversation, February 10, 2022). It is only possible to reconnect to this lost knowledge in different ways, ‘redefining things’, based on what is possible to assume from the remaining local traditions or from other places (*ibid.*). Still, this reconnection does not give the knowledge back, about the protocols, for instance on “how to behave around sacred places. That is forever lost, and it haunts” (*ibid.*). Nevertheless, for Mikalsen indigenizing would come later in the process, after the crucial first step of acknowledging what is lost and that “we have the right to be angry and sad” (conversation, February 10, 2022).

She visualizes it as a verb: “not to take away something, but to make space” (*ibid.*). Returning to Mikalsen’s metaphor of holes as possibilities, the artist regards indigenizing as a way of filling those holes with something, instead of drawing attention to what is not there (*ibid.*). If holes are possibilities, according to Mikalsen, imagining another future, or what could have been, can also imply reconnecting with the past. The decolonizing process, in this way, can be understood as a healing process: the absences, through the performances, are transformed into living “statements of presence” (*ibid.*). As Diana Taylor (2003) has argued, “we learn and transmit knowledge through embodied action, through cultural agency, and by making choices”(p.xvi). Performances, for Taylor, function as an episteme, a way of knowing, as “to say something *is* a performance amounts to an ontological affirmation” (Taylor, 2003, p.3).

The performance also functions as epistemology and a methodology, bringing together what has “historically been kept separate” (*ibid.*). I attended Elina Waage Mikalsen’s performance⁵⁹, called *Mii golgahit joga, bálgá, njuvccaid, váriid/ We Pour the River, the Path, the Swans, the Mountains* (2022), on August 10, 2022, as part of the Oslo National Museum’s inaugurating exhibition *Jeg Kaller Det Kunst*. The joik and bodily performance moved like a flow through the museum’s collection presentation⁶⁰, where the Sami history has

⁵⁹ In collaboration with Katarina Barruk, Viktor Bomstad, Ingrid Frivold and Trine Hansen.

⁶⁰ Purposefully, the performance started in Room 45, a room named “True to Tradition”, then flowed following a path going to colonialism to the hope for justice: Room 49, “History and Mythology”, room 50 “Biblical

been erased or made absent. In fact, due to epistemicide, some realities were *made* absent “through silencing, suppression and marginalization”, produced as non-existent” (Santos, 2012, p.52). Following this path of *absences*, the performers sought to fill the holes left by colonialism, with the living presence of joik canalized in their bodies and passed as a healing word, from ear to ear. This challenging -for the majority - but at the same time internally healing flow, was meant to repair a relation. If it is true, as Mbembe contends, that some losses are beyond repair, to compensate, as Kwame Anthony Appiah argues, is about offering to repair the relation (Bangstad & Nilsen, 2019). In other words, creating spaces can also represent a “decolonial option”, where is possible to share the “colonial wounds” across different movements and struggles (Vasquez & Mignolo, 2013) while generating knowledge and creativity.

Contextually, for the Sámi, performative practices and the “performative spaces within, symbolize a form of healing and progress that help redefining what Indigenous tradition is, and what it can be to the people who create and perform it” (Hunter, 2014, p.1). At the same time, epistemic reconstitution (E-International Relations, 2017) implies thinking beyond Western cosmology and pretentious universality from the intersections of “spaces that modernity could not and still cannot imagine” (Walsh, 2006, p.23⁶¹).

On the rooftop of the National Museum, as part of the same temporary inaugurating exhibition, Joar Nango⁶², built a *darfegoađi* (Sámi traditional hut made of pine and birch, and turf, *nda*) called “A House for All Cosmologies” (2022). He described it as a “small breathing lung with a fireplace, a place to crawl into...in the middle of Oslo’s asphalt and concrete jungle” (Nango, Nasjonalmuseet, 2022, my translation). Most of all, it represented an embodied space, intended as the experience to sit by the fire side by side with whom is there, “without having to say anything. Just sit there, together” which is something that the young people living in the city do not experience often (*ibid.*). This text was on the entrance door:

“No Public Apologies”. The Norwegian Roma population is eagerly waiting for an apology for what happened to their families during Porajmos. Norwegian Roma were exposed to harsh Norwegianisation policies, both before, during and partly after the Second World War. The group has also been affected by strict immigration policies and expulsion from their own homeland. The Norwegian Jews and Romani (Tatars) have recently received

Inspiration”, room 54 “A Revolution in Paining”, and finished in Room 57, “Stand up for Justice”, before moving up to the terrace where Elina’s family offered homemade rognbollsuppe for everyone.

⁶¹ Translated by Fregoso (2014).

⁶² In collaboration with Tobias Aputsiaq Prytz, Eystein Tallera.

a public apology from the Norwegian state for the treatment they have been subjected to. When will the Norwegian Roma receive such an apology? ‘The Holocaust did not last until the end of the war for us. It lasted until 1972 when the last citizenship case was granted’” (my translation from Norwegian).

I believe this to be a message that resistance, and art, to be truly transformative, must encompass different struggles.

6.4 Summarizing

On a global level, Áillohaš was making use of the pluri-dimensionality of his creativity to send an urgent message regarding the future of our planet. On a local dimension, he represented the “necessary shaman”, hoping to inspire the future generations of Sámi to cherish their culture and revitalize it after centuries of colonization and coloniality. Although not all the Sámi felt represented by his “Sáminess”, incarnating the reindeer-herding background, the decolonial impetus demanded unity as a people, amid the global Indigenous movements demanding cultural and political rights. While the connection with the landscape was seen as encompassing all the themes, the first theme presented different ways of relating with Valkeapää, the doubts and expectations associated with being a Sámi artist, connected with the way Valkeapää was taken as an example of how to be a ‘good Sámi’, but also the role he had for liberating creativity from the barriers imposed by the Western understanding of art.

The second theme questioned the instrumental use of art and creativity to make political statements, while acknowledging the role creative practices in posing critical questions. In this regard, either questioning the status quo- at a Sámi local level, and globally- or simply stating what and *how* they are - Sámi creative practices show different individual degrees of political commitment and activism, albeit being inherently political - where political means transformative.

Simultaneously, I had to redefine what political and activist means. If Indigenous activism is intended as direct nonviolent action meant for Indigenous voices and knowledges to be heard and considered in decision-making processes and policies, the role of activists is to address the majority people, or more generally the “West”, for those collective voices to be heard and resonate through artistic expressions. The commonalities behind the pan-movements, hereby considered as articulated phenomena, can prompt alongside “positive

notions of ‘indigenesness’”, a deeper meaning of “political” understood as transformative (p.55). Along these lines, artistic expressions, and peculiarly Indigenous ones, can help challenging the “hegemonic frames of modernism” (Finbog, 2020, p.30). The metaphor of the “holes as possibilities” (E.W. Mikalsen, conversation, February 10, 2022) – also embodying a methodology deep-rooted in Sámi onto-epistemologies and cosmology, provided a connection between the continuity with the past, and the visions of the future. Ghosts, holes, and in-between spaces are thus considered as “the borders of the entanglement” (Mignolo, 2018) from which it becomes possible to question Western dichotomic onto-epistemology, recognized as the presupposition and justification for colonialism, epistemicide, and ecocide.

Theme Three illustrates decolonial and future-oriented speculations, addressing the critique to Western development as a linear process, and the role of Sámi collective voice as a valuable alternative. As creating the future is something “related to the context in which the future is supposed to happen” (J. Nango, conversation, December 17, 2022), for being truly transformative, creative practices must be connected to the local contexts, and to the localized futures contributing to the pluriverse. Theme three also poses uncomfortable questions demanded by a radical change of perspective, including possible different futures beyond capitalism and colonialism. Finally, it accounts for the role of the new generations in representing the hope for the future, reclaiming Sámi-owned creative spaces and self-determined futures as part of a healing process. Recalling my research question, - what is the role of Sámi creative expressions in decolonizing/indigenizing Sápmi and imagining possible futures? – I came to consider decolonizing and indigenizing as verbs, positioned in a spectrum of *possibilities*.

One of my main preoccupations was understanding the difference between decolonizing and indigenizing, starting from the critique of decolonization as a mean to polarize the debate, as a construction within the academic Eurocentric discourse, advocating for “liberal tolerance or feel-good diversity” (MTL Collective, 2018, p. 194). Consequently, I hoped to fill the gap between the *what* - academic and theoretical understanding of decolonizing/indigenizing - and the *how* – the way they are embodied in Sámi creative practices. Different authors tried to tackle down what decolonization is about. As a form of epistemic disobedience, and a practice of “testing, questioning, learning”, it has been described as “a combative process that has as its horizon another way of being in this world, one more amenable to our collective existence” (MTL Collective, 2018, p.194); as a creative process, one that is contextual and place specific (Tuck & Yang, 2012); one that requires constant

questioning, “tuning in another type of presence”, and “listening to the world instead of controlling it”, as expressed by Nango (conversation, December 17, 2022).

As I intend them now, concerning the Sami context, decolonizing implies an epistemological scrutiny, an emancipatory project aiming at addressing and dismantling the colonial ideology of superiority and the universalism embedded in the persistent structures of coloniality. Indigenizing implies the creation of Indigenous-owned spatio-temporalities, re-centered on Indigenous values and epistemologies, being plural, non-conceptual or elitist, rather resembling what Joar Nango contended - “acts of creation on a smaller, collaborative, even impulsive, and truthful way, while bringing Indigenous cosmologies at the forefront”, and being more concerned with the *how* than the *what*, with creating something together (conversation, December 17, 2021). Concurrently, “it is not about looking for blueprints for how to save the world” but rather, about recalibrating the gaze towards the world, while listening to it, and “lowering your shoulders and try to be a bit more open to what surrounds you because... it is already there, and it is around everyone” (*ibid.*).

Considering Sámi creative practices as a site of world-making entailed relating them to self-determination and sovereignty; as Cherokee Nation attorney general Sara Hill claimed, sovereignty is “the right for us to decide what we want to become” (Mann, 2022, p. 53). In this regard, sovereignty is not concerned with preserving what it was but about “the right to be a separate people with a separate destiny” (Mann, 2022, p. 53), which pertains to creating different futures rather than becoming “what others wanted them to be” (*ibid.*).

In this sense, Sámi creative expressions hold the power of re-establishing Indigenous sovereignty, imagining and creating self-determined spaces *as* futures. Art, in fact, is believed to have the ability to “change our minds- inspiring us to take on different perspectives and to reimagine our worlds” (Nossel, 2016, p.103). The implications for human rights, and Indigenous rights in particular – are crucial insofar as both the theories and the practices of human rights ought to be informed by the struggles for social justice, contextually intended as epistemic reconstitution- towards pluriversality.

7 (Almost) Thirty Years After *Goase Dušše*: Conclusive Remarks and Recommendations for Future Research

Áillohaš was aware of ecocide, and for some, *Goase dušše*, composed in 1993, was a mournful cry, almost an obituary (Vister, 2020, p.120)

“I am so often there that I almost know, hour by hour, the ongoing in nature. I know when certain birds are singing. I know where to find them. And I can take this technique with me... Sadly, this is no longer right. You know, the last five years... the world is changing...It was completely different only four years ago...Today you do not know where to find the birds... The world has changed so severely, and I almost think... there is no way back... I am not sure if nature still exists. I mean, the birds are dying, they will become extinct, I mean nature will die...Very, very ready to die too, yes, because I do not want to live in a nature that is not a nature...I have done something like a final grouping. If you listen, you will help. Not me, but nature”⁶³.

More than a symphony, *Goase dušše* warned about the state of nature, becoming even more urgent now, thirty years later. However, as the state of nature is an urgent matter, so is coloniality. Áillohaš role was critical both in acknowledging colonialism as “dispossessor of Sámi futures” and in leading the way towards a different future for the Sámi. While it was vital to acknowledge the continuity between his multi-faceted legacy and Sámi contemporary artists, it is also crucial to contextualize him acknowledging the need for other themes to be represented, for example, what it means to be in-between worlds. Building on Clifford’s ‘articulations’, I identified Sámi creative and artistic practices, as “a site of ongoing translations and articulations (including dis-articulations)” of a “dynamic tradition critically reworking its colonial history” (2016, p.159).

While, as Kuokkanen (2000) contends, “Indigenous Peoples cannot remain apolitical in their struggles” (p.415), the statement “Indigenous art is inherently political” (Martineau & Ritskes, 2014, p.1), inspired me to understand the role of artistic practices in the Sámi context concerning the *spectrum* of decolonizing-indigenizing. *Decolonization* still presupposes a relation, albeit a truth-seeking and derogative one- and indigenization stands for something

⁶³ An extract of the radio introduction to *Goase dušše*, broadcasted by Sveriges Radio on April 17, 1993. The conversation between Gunilla Gustafsson and Nils-Aslak Valkeapää was transcribed and translated from Swedish to English by Elin Már Øyen Vister (Vister, 2020, p.120-121).

different, not connected with Western conceptualizations but rather with creating alternative temporalities and spatialities, rooted in Sámi onto-epistemologies. Referring to decolonial freedom, points, in this sense, to the “cleansing of the coloniality of being and of knowledge” (Mignolo, 2011, p.48).

However, in my view, decolonization and indigenization ought not to be considered on a linear continuum going from one end (decolonization) to another (indigenization), but rather as different, sometimes simultaneous, intersecting, complex moments involving different dimensions – global in one case, local, in the other, - having a common goal: *pluriversality*.

Reclaiming the right of the Sámi to imagine and struggle for “the conditions that will allow them to persevere as a distinct world” (Escobar, 2016, p.19) is thus interconnected with the creation of Sámi-owned spaces where to critically discuss both Sámi and cosmopolitical concerns. Consequently, acknowledging the pivotal role of Sámi creative practices - in their multidimensionality – in imagining, and shaping these self-determined futures, is crucial to fill the gaps left by legal definitions of sovereignty and self-determination. Hence, Sámi creative expressions can be political in a transformative way, and not “in a restrictive and hegemonic sense” (J.Nango, conversation, December 17, 2021) without being overtly activist.

The point being, that Sámi creative practices *can* be political, holding that potentiality embedded in the very same way Sámi experience art, creativity, and life. At the same time, Sámi creative practices, especially in terms of collective voice, *had* to - and still *must-* be political due to coloniality of power, threatening Sámi sovereignty over what and who Sámi people want to be and which futures they want to live in.

While not all the Sámi artists participating in the conversations considered themselves *activists*, all of them argued that this “political statement art” is also needed for the collective cause of the Sámi to be heard. Notably, that does not mean that they do not consider themselves as activists, they just refrain from framing their creativity in the restrictive language of explicit political discourses that are not “truth-seeking” nor “transformative”. As the MTL Collective contended,

“What if, as artists and cultural producers, when we speak of “art” and “activism,” we put both under erasure? What if we strike art to liberate it from itself? Not to end art, but to free it from the circuits of capital, white supremacy, settler colonialism, and debt, and to unleash its powers to imagine that which is not immediately apparent. And, what if, as we reject the specialization of activism, we choose a never ending process of experimentation and questioning, or, we choose, as the Zapatistas say, to “make the

path by walking.” Let art be training in the practice of decolonial freedom.” (MTL 2017, creativeecologies)

From these sites of decolonizing practice, human rights can be understood “as collectivist rather than individualist, embodied not abstract, contingent rather than certain, interdependent and interconnected instead of autonomous and unencumbered” (Fregoso, 2014, p.587). In asserting alternative values, rights can be understood as “potentially liberating praxis rather than as a mode of governing through formal procedures enacted by states” (Fregoso, 2014, p.586).

As I believe artistic practices should put “questions in all directions”, while answering my research questions, other questions emerged - for example, concerning the struggle against heteropatriarchy and coloniality of gender in Sápmi; what the restrictive definition of indigeneity entails for the Sámi living in urban contexts, or regarding the implications of capitalism temporal dimension and coloniality of time, in terms of productivity, for Sámi elders and people with disabilities – for which, I suggest further research. As García-Antón (2018) argues, "posing questions is a way of hearing out a language, making audible new forms of speech and grammar" (p.13). Posing questions is crucial to tackling the complexities of plural spaces and voices that are minimized and colonized. These questions should remain questions and multiply, until they can be set free.

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Annex 1: Artists' Biographies

Annex 2: Nils-Aslak Valkeapää/Áillohaš's extended biography

Annex 3: *Bajás guvlui viggamin Sápmái dudjomat/ Sámi Culture Against the Grain (Jåks, 1979)*