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ARTICLE

GHOSTS, HOLES AND HYBRID SPACES: IMAGINING SÁMI-OWNED FUTURES THROUGH SÁMI CREATIVE PRACTICES

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Abstract

Identifying colonialism as the “dispossessor of Sámi futures,” the research on which this paper draws investigates the role of Sámi creative expressions in decolonizing/indigenizing Sápmi and imagining possible futures through a decolonial framework encompassing decolonizing methodologies and critical arts-based research. The artistic practices of Sámi artists Elina Waage Mikalsen and Joar Nango were discussed through in-depth conversations held with them and in light of decolonizing theories seeking to de-link artistic expressions from the “colonizing gaze of authenticity” fostered by Western modernity and coloniality.

Furthermore, the paper argues for considering decolonization and indigenization as complex and interlaced processes, part of a global-local spectrum. While Sámi creative expressions are political in a transformative and healing way, they can foster the creation of Sámi-owned spaces, where to discuss both local and cosmopolitical concerns while considering Sámi sovereignty as the right to pursue Sámi’s self-determined futures.

Keywords: Indigenous futures, Decolonization, Indigenization, Sámi creative practices, Elina Waage Mikalsen, Joar Nango

INTRODUCTION

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.

(Kanako, 2014, 90-91)

Denying “multiple ontologies of human diversity,” colonialism destroyed Indigenous epistemologies¹, including Sámi² ways of being in the world. In this essay³, I analyze the role of Sámi creative expressions in decolonizing/ indigenizing Sápmi and imagining possible futures. The paper proposes to do so through a decolonial lens whilst seeking to close 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. Hence, this paper reads the contemporary struggles for Indigenous self-determination and sovereignty as first and foremost ontological struggles towards the *pluriverse*, a world where many worlds can fit. Significantly, while decolonization is hereby considered “in epistemic terms,” 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.⁴ Referring to the Sámi artistic context and to the conversations held with two Sámi contemporary artists and considering the poietic, transformative, and healing potential of Sámi creative practices, I argue that the latter can be understood as sites of articulations - and disarticulations - of traditions, hybridity, Indigenous sovereignty, and self-determination. By creating bridges over cultural divides and “opening new avenues for learning about our shared histories, responsibilities and visions of the future,”⁵ creative practices are inextricably connected with the radical need for social justice. Multi-artist John Akomfrah⁶ claims that artists – by making alternative futurities visible and holding historical failings accountable, act as “custodians of a possible future.”⁷

Nonetheless, I wonder with Todd⁸, who has the right to imagine different futures? “Who is dominating the conversations about how to change the state of things?” Latour⁹ considered climate a “cosmopolitical concern”; however, as not all humans are equally responsible for ecological disasters, “not all humans are equally invited into the conceptual spaces where these disasters are theorized or responses to disaster formulated.”¹⁰ 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.”¹¹

In fact, colonialism in Sápmi “is not a temporality that has passed; it is a far-reaching structure that persists”; 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.¹²

This paper addresses the multidimensionality of Sámi contemporary creative expressions and identities taking Sámi artists Elina Waage Mikalsen and Joar Nango's productions as a reference. After summarizing the interpretive and methodological framework, the article outlines and discusses some of the outcomes of the conversations held with the two artists while arguing for considering decolonization and indigenization as complex and interlaced processes, part of a spectrum encompassing global and local contexts. Finally, the paper argues that Sámi creative expressions have healing potential, transforming "holes" and losses into "possibilities"; furthermore, they hold the capacity to foster the creation of Sámi-owned spaces and frameworks, where it becomes possible to discuss both local and cosmopolitical concerns while allowing criticalities that eventually strengthen Sámi sovereignty as the right to pursue Sámi's self-determined futures.

UNMASKING WESTERN MODERNITY AS JUST-ONE-HISTORY-AMONG-OTHERS¹³

Framing Norway in the context of 'Nordic colonial complicity' and 'Nordic colonial exceptionalism,' as alleged by Loftsdottir and Jensen¹⁴, in this paper I interpret Sámi contemporary artistic expressions through a decolonial framework, albeit contextualizing the specificities of colonial processes in Scandinavia as "typically more insidious, gradual and less physically violent."¹⁵ Nevertheless, this paper builds on the concept of *epistemicide*, the deliberate destruction of Sámi Indigenous epistemologies, "their memories and ancestral links and their manner of relating to others and to the land"¹⁶ and coloniality, a term proposed by Quijano¹⁷ to describe and unveil the persistent and colonial Western logic of domination which continuously undervalues Indigenous peoples' perspectives. Despite *epistemicide* and coloniality representing a common struggle for the Sámi and other Indigenous Peoples, I approach indigeneity as articulated, arguing with Clifford¹⁸ for the necessity of contextualizing the struggles and acknowledging the diversity of Indigenous cultures.¹⁹ In this study, decolonization is intended as "epistemic reconstitution," which implies the de-linking from "the Western values of commodification and exploitation and the recentring of Indigenous epistemes and values such as relationality, reciprocity, and responsibility."²⁰

The idea of traditional futures²¹ provided a starting point to re-think tradition as a non-dichotomic and complex site of re-articulations and cultural

transmission, useful in reclaiming Indigenous peoples' present and future(s). This paper additionally draws on Indigenous futurism²², which describes the Indigenous creative expressions that imagine and create Indigenous futurities based on the re-articulation of traditions, where futurities represent "a place on their own terms – an imagination cut free of the constructs of colonialism."²³ Acknowledging the danger of recent years, noted by Tuck and Yang²⁴ among others, related to the inflated status of the terminology connected with *decolonization*, which is often used to provide "a radical shell to familiar ideas and practices of multiculturalism that operate well within the comfort zone of established institutions,"²⁵ I move away from the general deconstructing critique, which does not reflect on the "epistemic, existential or aesthetic delinking" enshrined in the original significance of decolonial thinking.²⁶ Moreover, I argue for a "re-politicization of decoloniality as foremost concerned with the struggles of Indigenous Peoples."²⁷ Epistemic decolonization implies the "recovery of epistemic rights, the destruction of Eurocentrism, de-westernization" and indigenization.²⁸ As Smith stated, indigenizing implies two dimensions: a disconnection from the "colonial ties," followed by a recentring of "landscapes, images, languages, themes, metaphors and stories of the indigenous world" rooted in "alternative conceptions of world view and value systems."²⁹ Nevertheless, aiming at closing the gap between theoretical understandings of what it means to decolonize/indigenize and the way Sámi artists perceive and relate to these processes through their creative practices, in the following sections I introduce the artists with whom I had in-depth conversations.³⁰

Answering the call by Denzin, Lincoln, and Smith³¹ about the need for dialogue between Indigenous methodologies and critical methodologies, the methodology used for this inquiry was auto-constructed drawing on decolonial methodologies, inspired by Indigenous methodologies³² and critical perspectives. For the purpose of my research, I choose 'conversations' over the term 'interviews,' which I believe minimizes the hierarchical feeling that the term 'interview' alone communicates while creating a relaxed atmosphere of dialogue.³³ Referring to bell hooks, "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."³⁴

ELINA WAAGE MIKALSEN: HOLES-AS-POSSIBILITIES AND THE HEALING POTENTIAL OF PERFORMANCES³⁵

In her work, Sámi/Norwegian multi-artist Elina Waage Mikalsen addresses topics that are crucial for people who 'stand in between', who, like her, are both Norwegian and Sámi or come from heavily assimilated areas.³⁶ At the same time, Mikalsen strives to define other ways of being Sámi, "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." Mikalsen, with her creative practice, seeks to break

those chains.³⁷ One of the central themes she works with is the lost connection between humans and their environment – which includes other non-human presences, particularly referring to the loss of Sámi ancestral knowledge, one of the devastating consequences of coloniality. Sámi philosophies should be taken into account, particularly in this moment in which it becomes urgent to look at and care for the planet with a different gaze. Fostering Indigenous thinking and Indigenous gaze could represent a crucial turn in “re-orienting the current state of things and envision[ing] different futures by emphasizing Indigenous values, such as relationality between humans and other beings.”³⁸ In fact, relationality between all beings, including “the land, the rivers, our ancestors long passed, animals and other creatures,”³⁹ is a crucial value embedded in Sámi epistemologies. In turn, relationality is intertwined with reciprocity and responsibility, requiring us to be humble and accept what comes from nature and life circumstances. Consequently, Mikalsen came to look at the noises, scratches, and vibrations from her field recordings, for example, “the thundering noise of wind in the microphone membrane,” not as ‘unwanted sounds’ but rather as ‘small gifts’ occurring in the “encounter with an environment,” and thus, as co-creators.⁴⁰ Mikalsen traced a parallel between these ‘unforeseen sounds,’ and holes “in the veil,” drawn on by the multi-artist as a poetic and pragmatic figure for “both loss of memory, loss of knowledge, history, silence, entrances, portals.”⁴¹ At the same time, the poetic potential of artistic expressions allows the artist to consider these holes as possibilities; beyond what is *not*, the focus grows to be on filling the holes by imagining what could have been. For Mikalsen, holes “in the veil,” as cavities, cracks, and hollows, are to be considered openings leading to other dimensions. Representing possibilities, these portals bring together different temporalities – and *spatialities* – acting as a bridge between what once was or could have been – the *no longer* – and the *not yet*.⁴² Mikalsen refers to these two dimensions as *hauntology*⁴³, for which both the abrupted pasts and the aborted futures haunt the present, and to Sámi *cosmo-spatialities*, encompassing the worlds beyond and underneath the earth.

In one of Mikalsen’s experimental tracks, named *Rođu Govkkit/Glenner i Vier*, these presences coming from above and from below are acknowledged and deeply felt as part of the artist’s physical and emotional experience and as a source of personal growth:

Now I know. I know now. Some things come from below. I’ve been alone for a couple of days. sssh... Some things come from above. sssh... I hurried home one evening. He was standing on top of the park. I feel like he was there for a reason. He was there for me to listen. sssh... Can I listen to? Listen to my heart. This is my heart.⁴⁴

On a figurative level, ghosts come to represent the lost pasts and futures by the hand of colonialism and coloniality; in this sense, as Akomfrah⁴⁵ contends, the

specters “refuse to rest because they are continually newly conjured and produced in the ongoing tragedies of the now.”⁴⁶ On a more ontological and visual level, these openings are considered by Mikalsen as portals to the underworld, embodying the Sámi perspective on “how we think about the dead, or our relationship with the underworld,”⁴⁷ while envisaging the underworld people as ghosts coming back from the pre-colonial past.⁴⁸ Connecting past and future, these ‘holes-as-portals’ can also be conceived as spaces in which it becomes possible to re-imagine and create different futures. In this regard, the concept of hauntology can be linked to Indigenous futurism, concerned with the creation of alternative futures. However, as Quijano argued, these alternative futures are not to be envisioned as “mystical or magical” by transcending history.⁴⁹ Representing possibilities in the form of possible futures, the process of ‘filling the holes’ can symbolize a transformative type of world-making⁵⁰ while confronting the ongoing consequences of colonialism, embodied by *epistemicide* and *ecocide*. Consequently, for Mikalsen, imagining different futures as ‘filling the holes’ can be seen as a decolonizing strategy.⁵¹ The artist argues that the initial phase is ‘visualizing the holes’, acknowledging what is lost, and that “we have the right to be angry and sad.”⁵² Accordingly, indigenizing would come after this crucial step, although Mikalsen questions the whole idea of indigenizing, particularly referring to highly assimilated areas as the Sea Sámi ones⁵³, where the effects of the Second World War and the following Norwegianization were particularly destructive.⁵⁴ So much is lost, not only in terms of language, but of the knowledge embedded in it regarding the culture and the relationship between humans and non-humans.⁵⁵ The only thing it is possible to do is try to “reconnect to this lost knowledge in different ways,”⁵⁶ drawing on the remaining local traditions and the Indigenous global narratives, albeit this reconnection does not give the knowledge back. For instance, the knowledge connected with “how to behave around sacred places... is forever lost, and it haunts.”⁵⁷ Compared to decolonizing, whose prefix *de-* implies ‘to take away something’, Mikalsen visualizes indigenizing as both ‘making space for something’ and ‘filling the holes *with* something.’⁵⁸ If holes are possibilities, re-imagining what was and what could have been implies a reconnection with the past.

Mikalsen’s performance⁵⁹ *Mii golggahit joga, bálgá, njuvccaid, váriid/ We Pour the River, the Path, the Swans, the Mountains* (August 10, 2022) moves along these lines. The *joik*⁶⁰ performance was part of the new Norwegian National Museum’s inaugurating exhibition in Oslo, named *Jeg Kaller Det Kunst* (I call that art). As a moving flow, it traversed the museum’s collection, following “a path of absences”⁶¹ while making evident the erasure of Sámi history from the Norwegian one because of coloniality and *epistemicide*, which silenced, suppressed and marginalized some realities, producing them as “non-existent.”⁶² By acknowledging these absences, “the performers sought to fill the holes left by colonialism with the living presence of *joik* canalized in their bodies” and spread to the audience, from ear to ear, as a healing word.⁶³



Figure 1.
Elina Waage Mikalsen whispers a *joik*
as part of the performance *Mii golggahit
joga, bálgá, njuvccaid, váriid/ We Pour the
River, the Path, the Swans, the Mountains*
(August 10, 2022).
© Annar Bjørkli/Nasjonalmuseet

This healing flow was seeking to repair a relation. Recalling the words of Kwame Anthony Appiah, Mbembe argued that despite some losses being beyond repair, “to compensate is about offering to repair the relation.”⁶⁴ Put in different words, filling holes can symbolize creating the space for healing: acknowledging absences, recognizing the losses, and sharing the “colonial wounds”⁶⁵ while “generating knowledge and creativity.”⁶⁶

Consequently, the decolonizing – indigenizing practices can be understood as a healing process if “the absences, through the performances, are transformed into living ‘statements of presence.’”⁶⁷ In fact, as Diana Taylor has argued, performances function as an episteme, a way of knowing and bringing together what has “historically been kept separate.”⁶⁸



Figure 2.
Elina Waage Mikalsen, Katarina Barruk, Viktor Bomstad, Ingrid Frivold, and Trine Hansen, jolking on the roof of Nasjonalmuseet at the end of the performance, (August 10, 2022).
© Alessia Marzano

Concurrently, for Indigenous peoples –and the Sámi in this specific context, performative practices and the “performative spaces within, symbolize a form of healing and progress that help redefine what Indigenous tradition is, and what it can be to the people who create and perform it.”⁶⁹

JOAR NANGO: SÁMI-OWNED SPACES AND NITTY-GRITTY AESTHETICS⁷⁰

Maddi, a collective, artistic and cultural space in Romsa/Tromsø⁷¹, opened its doors on December 10, 2021. The building is articulated like a body, with a central corridor opening to several rooms; in each of them, one could breathe poetry and music while exchanging “aesthetic, social, and political points of view, embodied in performances and conversations.”⁷² A week later, I had a conversation with Sámi artist and architect Joar Nango, during which we reflected upon the importance of *Maddi*, and the value enshrined in the creation of Indigenous-owned spaces.

Nango shared the impression that too often Sámi artists run the risk of being tokenized when invited to represent ‘alternative perspectives’ in spaces that possess “the real power and meaning.”⁷³ By accommodating Indigenous artists’ perspectives, these formats aim at being portrayed as diverse and inclusive without promoting a real change.⁷⁴ The art world, which Nango considers a parallel dimension, “a mirror-image of the world,” grants a space for Sámi artists to freely express and create new formats owned by themselves.⁷⁵ Away from being one-dimensional, these Sámi or – broadly speaking – Indigenous-owned spaces should both “possess *and* invite criticality,” integrating different perspectives “as deep as possible into the conversation.”⁷⁶

For Nango, while artists should feel free to play with the formats and “be more ‘dangerous,’” the art world needs artistic practices that allow their perspectives to be strengthened by being criticized, challenged, “deconstructed, talked about, and investigated from as many angles as possible.”⁷⁷

The *Mađđi* project intends to build a Sámi institution, a space where to “invite other contributors while owning the conversation”; it is key to emphasize how 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.”⁷⁸



Figure 3.
One of the exhibition rooms in the collective/artistic space Mađđi. The room reproduced the circular space of the traditional Sámi tent, *lavvu*, where to have conversations while sharing coffee and food. Romsa/Tromsø (December 10-12, 2021).
© Alessia Marzano

‘Owning the conversation’ implicates allowing people that have different perspectives – on colonialism for example, into the conversation, “challenging them into a space whose boundaries are Sámi-owned”: “that’s when you can really talk about decolonization.”⁷⁹ Reflecting on the meaning of indigenizing and its relationship with decolonizing, Nango wonders if indigenizing may be compatible with “acts of creation on a smaller, collaborative, even impulsive, and truthful way while bringing Indigenous cosmologies at the forefront,” relating it to the Mađđi project.⁸⁰ In this regard, indigenizing would not focus on the acts but on “people creating something together, people who also happen to be Indigenous put[ting] themselves out there.”⁸¹ Nango further suggests how being Indigenous sometimes

can be an abstraction, wondering “if the constant framing of everything as Indigenous can also bind or suffocate the artists instead of liberating them.”⁸²

Over the years, Nango gathered books and various materials to assemble *Girjegumpi - the Sámi architectural library* (2018-), a multi-dimensional and continuously growing project. *Girjegumpi* – in northern Sámi ‘girje’ means book, while ‘gumpi’ describes a “movable herder’s hut on sled runners” – defines both the book collection and the structure containing and transporting it.⁸³



Figure 4.
Detail of the movable herder's hut on sled runners / *Girjegumpi*, the Sámi architectural library by Joar Nango. Nasjonal-Museet Arkitektur, Oslo (October 14, 2021)
© Alessia Marzano

The wide book collection embraces different topics and publications, such as Sámi architecture and literature, Indigenous Peoples' traditions, decolonization, and Indigenous futurism. More than a library, *Girjegumpi* exists as an itinerant space for discussions and decolonial practice and a Sámi-owned space of encounter for different cultures and perspectives, demanding “the inclusion of indigenous peoples' perspectives by itself being inclusive.”⁸⁴

Despite Nango being inspired by global narratives like Indigenous futurism, he cautions Indigenous artists and activists from applying them uncritically. The global Indigenous dimension is indeed crucial in the struggle against coloniality,

allowing crucial questions to circulate and strengthening the connections between different contexts.⁸⁵



Figure 5.
The books in the poetry & fiction section, Detail of Girjegumpi, the Sámi architectural library by Joar Nango, Nasjonal-Museet Arkitektur, Oslo (October 14, 2021)
© Alessia Marzano

Nevertheless, he particularly encourages contextualization to be able “to develop our own perspectives and our own language” around our own futures.⁸⁶ To materialize these futures, Nango works with different types of *spatialities*, reviling how Sámi cosmology is not standing apart from pragmatic and material spaces. Nango’s projects foreground a “nitty-gritty, dirty, very pragmatic type of aesthetical space,”⁸⁷ combining some ‘romanticized’ aspects of nature “with other elements that are not romanticized at all” but are nonetheless part of Sámi culture. Hence, “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” depict an image that is distant from the ones typically associated with reindeer herding.⁸⁸ These elements prompt a complex, articulated and multidimensional understanding of Sámi culture, against and beyond the colonial “gaze of authenticity,”⁸⁹ bringing about the acknowledgment of existing *hybridities*. Along these lines, Nango recognizes the influence of Western commercial culture in everyday life by combining it with more ‘traditional elements’ emphasizing the closeness of Sámi culture to nature. *Post-Capitalist Architecture TV* (Nango and Bongo, 2020-), a streaming series made in response to the pandemic, addresses

the decolonizing role of architecture – conceived in the broad sense of “how Indigenous cultures relate to a broader discussion on space”⁹⁰ - “after the fall of capitalism.” Nango looks at the world with a unique gaze which takes him to be curious and ask questions to everyone. The format of *Post-Capitalist Architecture TV* embodies this gaze, involving conversations between Nango and contributors encompassing different spheres, “academics, but also your car mechanic, or your neighbor, or your grandfather.”⁹¹

Indigenous lifestyles are still too often looked at as ‘folkloristic’ or as pertaining to the past, according to an *allochronistic* idea. However, traditional knowledge is alive and evolving, and Nango believes there is a lot to learn from these “flexible and future-looking traditional lifestyles and attitudes”, looking at these examples, society could re-orient itself.⁹² This is in line with Clifford’s idea of tradition as a flexible, pragmatic, and critical selection, having the capacity for changes while circling “resourcefully between present dilemmas and remembered answers: a pragmatic, not a messianic orientation.”⁹³

Nango’s response to the global crisis is very pragmatic and situated; “working locally, with movement and material, and the flow” – of materials and flow of people – also implies learning from and listening to “people who maintained the connectedness with the lifecycles, away from the commodified way of seeing space and materiality.”⁹⁴ *Post-Capitalist Architecture TV* aims to look beyond the “globalized and commercial capitalistic system that has eaten us as cultures all over the place.”⁹⁵ The capitalist system is built upon a “linear, unidirectional, material” conception of development as financial growth which is “driven by commodification and capitalist markets”; in this scenario, progress is conceived as an indicator of a “pretentiously-universal well-being.”⁹⁶ This “ever-expanding idea of evolution” is reflected in the idea of nature as an object and a mere resource. Looking beyond and beneath the capitalist system, Nango’s *Post-Capitalist Architecture TV* draws attention to other economic flows embedded in smaller-scale livelihoods: in fact, “economy exists everywhere.”⁹⁷ Moreover, as Nango argues, humans cannot control nature if they think of themselves as living in a world of relations.⁹⁸ From a relational perspective “things and beings *are* their relations.”⁹⁹ Working with practicalities implies a reflection on the “institutionalized idea of control in our society” and the importance of being able “to adapt more flexibly and elastically to whatever happens around us.”¹⁰⁰ To always be prepared for changes is part of Sámi philosophies and pedagogy; ecological knowledge is vital to find solutions for “all kinds of challenges, especially in unusual or unexpected circumstances.”¹⁰¹ Adaptability also upholds *indigenuity*¹⁰², described by Wildcat as the pragmatic application of Indigenous transgenerational and experiential knowledge to the lived environment to solve everyday problems. As Nango¹⁰³ argues, “it’s the small acts, fixing and coping strategies used in everyday life” specifying that “it’s a response to lived reality, not an intellectual cognition.”¹⁰⁴

CONCLUSIVE REMARKS

It is hard to imagine different futures – particularly bright ones – in the midst of an environmental and global crisis. To find an alternative to the capitalist way of inhabiting the Earth, which “explains everything and justifies the current state of affairs as the only possible one,”¹⁰⁵ Elina Waage Mikalsen argues for the necessity of integrating Indigenous voices and ways of relating with nature while considering other economies centered on sharing, borrowing and exchanging.¹⁰⁶ The multi-artist further claims that for a radical change to truly occur, the resistance ought to be unified and organized “across groups and ethnicity backgrounds,” linking different movements and struggles.¹⁰⁷ Regardless, epistemic reconstitution, emerging from the space opened by the decolonial option, implies thinking beyond Western “pretentious universality”¹⁰⁸ from the intersections of “spaces that modernity could not and still cannot imagine.”¹⁰⁹ I agree with Joar Nango when he argues that the future is “related to the context in which the future is supposed to happen.”¹¹⁰ To be truly healing and transformative, creative expressions ought to be connected to local contexts; in this way, they can contribute to reclaiming Sámi-owned spaces and self-determined futures.

One of the main preoccupations of the research behind this paper was to narrow the gap between “the *what* - academic and theoretical understanding of decolonizing/indigenizing - and the *how* – the way they are embodied in Sámi creative practices.”¹¹¹ I believe decolonizing/indigenizing practices to be *possibilities* – for questioning, unlearning, and learning, imagining, with Tuck and Yang¹¹², decolonization as a creative process, contextual, place-specific, and requiring constant questioning. Thinking with Nango, decolonization demands “tuning in another type of presence...listening to the world instead of controlling it.”¹¹³ Indigenizing is centered on the creation of Indigenous-owned spaces, rooted in Indigenous values and epistemologies and embedded in collaborative acts of creation.¹¹⁴ Both processes, conceived by the author as part of a spectrum rather than separate projects, are concerned with recalibrating the gaze toward the world, which entails listening to and integrating Indigenous epistemologies, “lowering your shoulders and try [sic] to be a bit more open to what surrounds you because... it is already there, and it is around everyone.”¹¹⁵

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- 1 Breny Mendoza, *Decolonial Theories in Comparison*, 56.
 - 2 The Sámi people (also known as Sámit or Sápmelaččat) are Europe's northernmost recognized Indigenous People. Their ancestral land is situated in the Fennoscandian region and is known as Sápmi in Northern Sámi.
 - 3 This article is a re-adaptation of the author's master's thesis research, conducted in 2021-2022, and based on in-depth conversations held with six Sámi artists residing in Norway. For the purpose of this volume, which explores the Indigenous gaze in artistic practices and in response to colonialism, I chose to only refer to two of the participating artists, Elina Waage Mikalsen and Joar Nango.
 - 4 Rauna Kuokkanen, *Towards an Indigenous Paradigm*.
 - 5 Stephanie Bailey, *The Power of Creative Expression. Three Artists Reflect on their Work Related to Truth and Reconciliation*.
 - 6 See Akomfrah, *Vertigo Sea*.
 - 7 T.J. Demos, *Beyond the World's End: Arts of Living at the Crossing*, 83-84.
 - 8 See Todd, "Indigenizing the Anthropocene."

- 9 See Latour, "Whose Cosmos, Which Cosmopolitics? Comments on the Peace Terms of Ulrich Beck."
- 10 Ibid, 244.
- 11 Terike Haapoja, *Opening speech for The Party of Others. Manuscript in author's possession.*
- 12 Katya García-Antón and Liv Brissach, "When the Red Calves Arrive, the Hope Returns. Sámi Healing and Sensate Sovereignty in Máret Ánne Sara's Practice," 85.
- 13 Refer to Alessia Marzano, 'Art Puts Questions in All Directions': *Sámi Creative Expressions and Self-Determined Futures.*
- 14 Kristin Loftsdottir and Lars Jensen, *Whiteness and Postcolonialism in the Nordic Region: Exceptionalism, Migrant Others and National Identities*, 1.
- 15 Rauna Kuokkanen, *Restructuring Relations: Indigenous Self-determination, Governance, and Gender*, 8.
- 16 Liisa- Rávná Finbog, *The Story of Terra Nullius. Variations on the Land(s) of Saepmie that Nobody Owned*, 5; See also Boaventura de Sousa Santos, *Epistemologies of the South: Justice Against Epistemicide*, 18.
- 17 See Quijano, "Colonialidad y modernidad/racionalidad."
- 18 James Clifford, *Returns. Becoming Indigenous in the Twenty-First Century*, 54.
- 19 In this regard, I am aware of my positionality as a European outsider when I use the terms Western and Indigenous, although in a descriptive way, and of their inaccurate or too broad connotations. For this purpose, I mostly refer to Sámi people and local contexts while seeking to avoid generalizations.
- 20 Alessia Marzano, 'Art Puts Questions in All Directions': *Sámi Creative Expressions and Self-Determined Futures.* See also Kuokkanen, *Towards an Indigenous Paradigm.*
- 21 Clifford, *Returns. Becoming Indigenous in the Twenty-First Century.*
- 22 Grace L. Dillon ed., *Hive of Dreams: Contemporary Science Fiction from the Pacific Northwest.*
- 23 See Art and Culture Maven Blog. *Indigenous Futurism: STOiK - Pareidolia.*
- 24 See Tuck and Yang, "Decolonization is not a Metaphor."
- 25 MTL Collective, *From Institutional Critique to Institutional Liberation? A Decolonial Perspective on the Crises of Contemporary Art*, 194.
- 26 Madina Tlostanova, et al. *Do We Need Decolonial Feminism in Sweden?*, 1.
- 27 Marzano, 'Art Puts Questions in All Directions'.
- 28 Mendoza, *Decolonial Theories in Comparison*, 56-57. See also Marzano, 'Art Puts Questions in All Directions'. I have replaced the term 're-Indianization' found in the original text with re-Indigenization, more appropriate for the context of this paper.
- 29 Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*, 147.
- 30 The conversations were held via Zoom for contingent reasons, particularly regarding the Covid-19 pandemic, the artists' commitments, and the long distance between the participants and me. Additionally, the conversations were in English and were semi-structured to leave space for the participants to expand on some topics and for me to ask follow-up questions. I consider the conversations as a co-constructed space. Particular emphasis, during the research, was given to reflexivity and ethics regarding research conducted with Indigenous peoples.
- 31 See Denzin, Lincoln and Smith, *Handbook of Critical and Indigenous Methodologies.*
- 32 Based on the moral obligation, particularly valid for non-Indigenous researchers, for accountability, reciprocity, responsibility, and respect, See Rauna Kuokkanen, *Reshaping the University: Responsibility, Indigenous Epistemes, and the Logic of the Gift.*
- 33 Marzano, 'Art Puts Questions in All Directions'.
- 34 bell hooks, *Talking Back: Thinking Feminist, Thinking Black*, 131. See also Marzano, 'Art Puts Questions in All Directions'.

- 35 Elina Waage Mikalsen (b.1992) is a Sámi/Norwegian multidisciplinary artist, singer, and performer, who experiments with art, film, drawing, textile, text/sound installations, and music. Born in Romsa/Tromsø, she currently lives in Oslo, where she graduated with a master's degree from the Academy of Fine Arts. In her works, she addresses the theme of identity and explores her Sea Sámi background. In 2015, she was named "young artist of the year" at the indigenous festival Riddu Riđđu. Mikalsen exhibited in many festivals and venues, including Nuuk Nordic Culture Festival (Nuuk, Greenland), Kunstplass Contemporary Art Oslo, Trøndelag Center for Contemporary Art (Trondheim), The North Norwegian Art Exhibition, and recently performed at the National Museum in Oslo (2022). Last summer and autumn, the artist exhibited at Lofoten International Art Festival (LIAF) and Singapore Biennale with a commissioned work.
- 36 Elina Waage Mikalsen, conversation with the author, February 10, 2022. See also Marzano, 'Art Puts Questions in All Directions', 70.
- 37 Ibid.
- 38 Marzano, 'Art Puts Questions in All Directions', 79.
- 39 Finbog, *The Story of Terra Nullius. Variations on the Land(s) of Saepmie that Nobody Owned*, 7.
- 40 Elina Waage Mikalsen, conversation with the author, February 10, 2022; Marzano, 'Art Puts Questions in All Directions', 78.
- 41 Ibid, 79.
- 42 Michael Coverley, *Hauntology. Ghosts of Futures Past*, 9.
- 43 The neologism was originally coined by Jacques Derrida, *Spectres de Marx*, 1993.
- 44 Audio retrieved from <https://soundcloud.com/elina-waage-mikalsen>, text in Norwegian kindly provided by the artist through email message, July 6, 2022, and translated by the writing author: "No vet æ. Æ vet no. Noen ting kommer underfra. Æ har vært aleina i et par daga. sss... Noen ting kommer inn fra sia. sss... Æ skynta mæ hjem en kveld. Han sto på toppen av parken. Æ føle at han va der for en grunn. Han va der for at æ skulle lytte. sss... Ka lytte æ til? Lytte til hjertet mitt. Det her e hjertet mitt."
- 45 See Akomfrah, *Vertigo Sea*.
- 46 Demos, *Beyond the World's End*, 83.
- 47 Sámi cosmology conceives the underworld as a parallel world beneath the surface. As reported by Máret Anne Sara (2018), it is populated by many creatures, such as the *eahparaš*, including the spirits of dead unbaptized children, spirits of children born outside marriages, or children with disabilities (p.144). The underworld people the *ulddát*, are generally invisible "unless they want to be seen" (p.145). 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." Refer to Sara, "Indigenous Stories, Indigenous to Global Survival," in *Sovereign Words. Indigenous Art, Curation and Criticism*, 145. See also Marzano, 'Art Puts Questions in All Directions'.
- 48 Elina Waage Mikalsen, conversation with the author, February 10, 2022; Marzano, 'Art Puts Questions in All Directions', 89.
- 49 Anibal Quijano, *The Return of the Future and Questions about Knowledge*, 77.
- 50 Shelley Streeby, *Imagining the Future of Climate Change: World-making Through Science Fiction and Activism*.
- 51 Elina Waage Mikalsen, conversation with the author, February 10, 2022; Marzano, *ibid*, 89.
- 52 Ibid.
- 53 Mikalsen has a Sea Sámi background.
- 54 Marzano, 'Art Puts Questions in All Directions', 78.

- 55 Elina Waage Mikalsen, conversation with the author, February 10, 2022; See also Marzano, *'Art Puts Questions in All Directions'*.
- 56 Ibid, 89.
- 57 Ibid.
- 58 Ibid.
- 59 With Katarina Barruk, Viktor Bomstad, Ingrid Frivold and Trine Hansen.
- 60 The joik is a Sámi distinctive vocal style implying complex techniques and the use of the whole body for resonance. 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 The reader can refer to Tina Ramnarine, *Acoustemology, Indigeneity, and Joik in Valkeapää's Symphonic Activism: Views from Europe's Arctic Fringes for Environmental Ethnomusicology*; Thomas DuBois, *Lyric, Meaning, and Audience in the Oral Tradition of Northern Europe* and Marzano, *'Art Puts Questions in All Directions'*.
- 61 The performance, which I personally attended, started in Room 45, a room named "True to Tradition," then flowed to Room 49, "History and Mythology," room 50, "Biblical Inspiration," room 54, "A Revolution in Painting," and ended in Room 57, "Stand up for Justice," before moving up to the terrace where a homemade traditional soup 'rognbollsuppe' was offered to everyone. See also Marzano, *'Art Puts Questions in All Directions'* 89-90.
- 62 Boaventura de Sousa Santos, *"Public Sphere and Epistemologies of the South,"* 52.
- 63 Marzano, *'Art Puts Questions in All Directions'*, 90.
- 64 Achille Mbembe, interview.
- 65 A term used by Rolando Vasquez and Walter D. Mignolo in *Decolonial AestheSis: Colonial Wounds/Decolonial Healings*.
- 66 Marzano, *'Art Puts Questions in All Directions'*, 90.
- 67 Ibid. 89.
- 68 Diana Taylor, *Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas*, 3.
- 69 Justin R. Hunter, *Indigenous Creativity, Innovative Tradition: New Constructions of Ainu Performance Practice and Performative Space*, 1.
- 70 Joar Nango (b. 1979) is a Sámi architect and artist living in Romsa/Tromsø. Through "site-specific installations, video, and zines", Nango investigates intersections between art, Indigenous and contemporary architectures, Sámi constructions and materials, and new media (Zeiger and Nango). Nango studied architecture at NTNU, then founded an architecture collective called FBB with two colleagues. As an artist, he has exhibited at national and international institutions such as Documenta in Kassel / Athens, the National Gallery of Canada, Bergen Kunsthall, and the Nasjonal Museet in Oslo. He won numerous prizes, including the Art Critics Award 2020. Together with Sigbjørn Skåden, he is among the founders of the cultural collective Mađđi, which resulted from the project Romsa Kunsthall. In 2023, he will present a solo exhibition as part of the Nordic Pavilion at the Venice Biennale/Architecture.
- 71 The collective was 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.
- 72 Marzano, *'Art Puts Questions in All Directions'*, 86.
- 73 Joar Nango, conversation with the author, December 17, 2022. See also Marzano, *'Art Puts Questions in All Directions'*, 87.
- 74 Ibid, 86.
- 75 Ibid, 73.
- 76 Ibid, 87.
- 77 Ibid, 73.
- 78 Ibid, 87.

- 79 Ibid.
- 80 Ibid, 93.
- 81 Ibid, 88.
- 82 Ibid.
- 83 Oslo Nasjonal-museet Arkitektur, Joar Nango, *Girjegumpi, the Sámi Architectural Library*.
- 84 Joar Nango, conversation with the author, December 17, 2022. See also Marzano, 'Art Puts Questions in All Directions', 87.
- 85 Ibid, 80.
- 86 Ibid.
- 87 Ibid.
- 88 Ibid.
- 89 Marzano, 'Art Puts Questions in All Directions', 70.
- 90 Bergen International Festival, *Post-Capitalist Architecture-TV #Part 1-3*, n.d.
- 91 Joar Nango, conversation with the author, December 17, 2022. See also Marzano, 'Art Puts Questions in All Directions', 82.
- 92 Ibid, 80.
- 93 James Clifford, *Traditional Futures*, 157.
- 94 Joar Nango, conversation with the author, December 17, 2022. See also Marzano, 'Art Puts Questions in All Directions', 81.
- 95 Ibid.
- 96 Ibid. See also Ashish Kothari et al. *Pluriverse. A Post-Development Dictionary*, xxii.
- 97 Joar Nango, conversation with the author, December 17, 2022; Marzano, 'Art Puts Questions in All Directions', 81.
- 98 Ibid.
- 99 Arturo Escobar, *Thinking-Feeling with the Earth: Territorial Struggles and the Ontological Dimension of the Epistemologies of the South*, 18.
- 100 Joar Nango, conversation with the author, December 17, 2022. See also Marzano, 'Art Puts Questions in All Directions', 74.
- 101 Jelena Porsanger and Pirjo Kristiina Virtanen, *Introduction – a Holistic Approach to Indigenous Peoples' Rights to Cultural Heritage*, 293.
- 102 A portmanteau word for 'Indigenous ingenuity.' Refer to the original definition by Joar Nango and Silje Figenschou Thoresen's *Indigenuity Project*, 2013, and Daniel Wildcat's definition at <https://www.monah.org/indigenuity>. See also Marzano, 'Art Puts Questions in All Directions', 74.
- 103 See Nango, *Indigenuity Project and Girjegumpi, the Sámi Architectural Library*.
- 104 Marzano, 'Art Puts Questions in All Directions', 74.
- 105 Boaventura de Sousa Santos, *The End of the Cognitive Empire: the Coming of Age of Epistemologies of the South*, ix.
- 106 Elina Waage Mikalsen, conversation with the author, February 10, 2022; Marzano 'Art Puts Questions in All Directions', 85.
- 107 Ibid, 90.
- 108 Ibid.
- 109 Catherine Walsh, *Interculturalidad y colonialidad del poder: Un pensamiento y posicionamiento otro' desde la diferencia colonial*, 23.
- 110 Joar Nango, conversation with the author, December 17, 2022; Marzano, 'Art Puts Questions in All Directions', 92.
- 111 Ibid, 93.
- 112 See Tuck and Yang, "Decolonization is not a Metaphor."
- 113 Marzano, 'Art Puts Questions in All Directions', 93.
- 114 Ibid, 87.
- 115 Ibid, 93.