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"It's more like it doesn't even exist": stories of hauntings as a way of resisting colonial elimination of Sámi presence

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Abstract

In this article, I explore how haunting as a theoretical concept is useful for analyzing the emotional effects of colonization and forced assimilation of the Sámi, the Indigenous people in Norway, Sweden, Finland and Russia. While some still find it difficult to talk about what it means for them to be Sámi today, telling stories about hauntings is paradoxically something that they do more easily. Through theories concerning affect, emotions and haunting, I explore how these stories represent something more than elements of the Sámi religion. The act of telling these stories can also be analyzed as metaphors for both a continued connection that people have to the landscapes and their ancestors, and as a way of dealing with the emotional ambiguity of trying to find new ways of articulating a continuing Sámi presence.

Keywords

colonization, emotions, hauntings, Sámi, storytelling

Introduction

Hauntings can be understood as an expression of an unresolved relationship with the colonial elimination of Indigenous Sámi presence. Inspired by Avery Gordon's (2008) concept of hauntings and its role in sociological theory, I argue that theoretical exploration of Indigenous hauntings challenges, unsettles and uncovers the colonial past and present in ways that allude to the presence of those who are silenced, excluded and expelled, and undermines the integrity and stability of western temporal spaces (Cameron, 2008). In this article, I use qualitative material from the Julev Sámi (the Sámi language spoken around the Tysfjord fjord in Norway and the river Lule in Sweden) and Stuornjárgga and Innasuolo Sámi areas in Northern Nordland and Southern Troms in the Norwegian part of Sábme (Julev Sámi name for the Sámi nation or Sámi territories) to analyze how stories about hauntings can be analyzed as an articulation of emotions related to the discrimination and cultural loss that the Sámi have experienced as a people.

Hauntings and ghosts can be allegorical representations of Indigenous people and their relation to the colonial states, as remains of the *fading* and *disappearing* Indigenous individuals and their languages and cultures. Concrete stories about hauntings and ghosts in local communities can also be analyzed in relation to coloniality. The stories about hauntings are used to express a Sámi presence, and an emotional attachment to their history and the landscape that for them have been so present.

While the Sámi people have been living in Norway, Sweden, Finland and the Kola Peninsula in Russia since time immemorial, the use of the concept of Indigeneity in relation to the Sámi people is a relatively new phenomenon. When the first Indigenous convention was adopted in 1957, the Norwegian Government decided that its provisions did not apply to the Sámi. It was not until the political conflict over the Alta hydropower plant in Finnmark in Northern Norway in the 1970s and early 1980s that the Sámi were eventually recognized as an Indigenous people with land rights (Ravna, 2020). While Norway ratified International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention No. 169 on Indigenous and Tribal Peoples in 1990 (Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development, 2020), the three other countries, namely Sweden, Finland and Russia, have yet to ratify this convention, even though its principles can be regarded as an expression of international Indigenous law which also has implications for these countries. Article 1b of ILO 169 defines Indigenous peoples as follows:

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> Peoples in independent countries who are regarded as Indigenous on account of their descent from the populations which inhabited the country, or a geographical region to which the country belongs, at the time of conquest or colonization or the establishment of present state boundaries and who, irrespective of their legal status, retain some or all of their own social, economic, cultural and political institutions. (International Labour Organization, 1989, "Part 1. General Policy" section, Article 1.1.b.)

Despite being inhabited by a relatively small number of Sámi individuals, the Julev, Stuornjárgga and Innasuolo Sámi areas in Norway are quite a heterogenous region, due to the historical variation in language and traditional livelihoods, with nomadic reindeer herding, fishing, farming and later industrialization as important aspects of the areas' history (Evjen & Hansen, 2008). The forced assimilation policy, called the Norwegianization policy, also had various different effects on villages and families (Minde, 2010), and this still has an impact on the individuals today (Dankertsen, 2014, 2015). This is also a region where the Sámi language and culture hold a relatively strong position today, given their marginal position in both Norwegian and Sámi society.

Recently, the need for truth and reconciliation commissions has been an important topic of debate in Norway, Sweden and Finland. In Norway, the Norwegian Parliament formally approved the establishment of such a commission in 2018. A central political premise for the commission is that the Norwegianization process continues to influence Sámi communities today, and that this must be dealt with politically (Bergstø & Fylkesnes, 2016). This process in Sámi society opens up a new debate on the link between politics and emotions, between colonization and reconciliation, and between the Sámi past, the present and the future, including the more silenced and hidden parts of it.

It is often said that the Sámi do not talk about emotions and problems, and that being strong and managing on their own is an important value in Sámi society. They use metaphors, body language and silence as a way of communicating, especially when talking about problematic issues (Dagsvold et al., 2020). Stories about hauntings can be analyzed as something more than just entertainment or remains of the old Sámi religion. I argue that the reason they use these stories to articulate their Sámi belonging is that these stories represent more than religion. They are a way of articulating agency and resistance to the structures of elimination that, even after decades of revitalization politics, still hold a tight grip on their perceived opportunities to exist as a people.

Background: colonial structures in Sábme

Colonization takes shape through series of entanglements that are often manifested through affective flows that connect and disconnect people through power dynamics (Dennison, 2018). The colonization of Sábme took place gradually through different phases, and in various ways in the four different countries where the Sámi people have traditionally lived—Norway, Sweden, Finland and Russia. I focus primarily on the Norwegian side of Sábme. I acknowledge, however, that there are both differences and similarities between the different groups of Sámi and between Sámi in the different countries.

The consolidation of the states in 900–1000 involved a change. While the earlier interethnic contact had been organized by local merchants, the contact was now more and more organized by the states (Hansen & Olsen, 2004). The first Christian churches in Sámi areas were built in the 11th century, and the influence of Christian beliefs can be seen in Sámi religious practices at the time (Hansen & Olsen, 2004). Systematic Christianization of the Sámi did not occur before the 1700s, with Thomas von Westen (1682–1727) as the most prominent priest and missionary in Sámi areas in Norway at the time. It was then that the state and churches' agenda to destroy the Sámi religion and worldview escalated dramatically. They banned Sámi religious ceremonies, executed the noajdde (shamans), destroyed Sámi drums and banned the yoik, the traditional Sámi way of singing (Hansen & Olsen, 2004). In the mid-1800s, the Swedish and Sámi preacher Lars Levi Læstadius (1800–1861) entered the scene. Læstadius and his followers established a common ground between the old Sámi religion and Christianity (Zachariassen et al., 2021). This makes the link between Sámi and non-Sámi worldviews and religious beliefs complex and ambiguous (Falkenberg, 1941; Myrvoll, 2010; Nergård, 2000; Paine, 1965).

While the colonization of non-western societies can often be linked to specific events, the colonization of the Sámi people was a more gradual process. A relevant concept is the settler colonial logic of elimination (Wolfe, 2006), whereby colonization is linked to social structures and power, rather than just the occupation of lands and waters. In this perspective, colonization is a structure, not an event, that aims at replacing one culture with another, eliminating the other culture through assimilation, marginalization or, in the most drastic way, through genocide (Wolfe, 2006).

While elimination is a fairly strong word, it is relevant to use Wolfe's (2006) concept to reflect upon the intentions and results of the Norwegianization policy, the forced assimilation policy in Norway, aimed at replacing the Sámi languages and culture with Norwegian (Minde, 2010). The Norwegianization policy was effectuated from around 1850 up to approximately 1980. A fund, known in Norwegian as Finnefondet, using the derogatory term Finn for Sámi, was established by the Norwegian Parliament in 1851 to shift the culture and language to Norwegian for all citizens (Minde, 2010). The policy had the "school as the battlefield and teachers as frontline soldiers" (Niemi, 1997, p. 268). The changes that occurred in the aftermath of the Alta controversy of 1979–1981, a controversy over a hydroelectric power plant on the Alta River in the Northern Norwegian part of Sábme, ended the era of explicit assimilation policy (Minde, 2010). The establishment of the Sámedigge (Sámi Parliament) in Norway in 1989 (Sámedigge, 2019) is one of the greatest accomplishments of Sámi mobilization in Norway from that period (Minde, 2010).

Materials and methods

The empirical material comes from a qualitative project from 2011 to 2013. I started the project with participant observation, whereby I lived in one of the communities for a period over 3 months. I also visited several of the Sámi villages in the area, attended services in one of the local Læstadian congregations, and attended festivals, meetings, sports events, parties and other more informal activities. I also became a board member of Sálto Sámesiebrre, one of the local Sámi associations. It must be noted here that Sálto Sámesiebrre is a part of the Norwegian Sámi Association (NSR), a national organization that functions as both a cultural and political organization and is currently the largest political group in the Norwegian Sámi Parliament. I am Sámi myself and have been a member of NSR since I was a student in Oslo. While the period during which I conducted active fieldwork was only around 3 months, I have continued to take part in Sámi activities in the region, and I also have many Sámi friends that I spend a lot of time with. Even though I do not have a Sámi family background from this region, I consider this Sámi region to be my home now.

I conducted interviews with nine men and women from the Julev Sámi, Stuornjárgga and Innasuolo Sámi area in Northern Nordland and Southern Troms in Norway, in addition to participant observation at seminars, festivals and meetings, and in informal interaction with people in local communities. I focused on the age group between 30 and 40, because this age group grew up during a time with many changes in Sámi society—locally, nationally and internationally. The Sámi Act was passed in 1987 (Kommunal-og distriktsdepartementet [Ministry of Local Government and District], 1987), and the Norwegian Sámi Parliament opened in 1989 (Sámedigge, 2019). Árran Julev Sámi Center in Tysfjord, now Hamarøy municipality, opened in 1994, while Várdobaiki Sámi Center in Evenes Municipality opened in 2002.

It is relevant to study this age group because their challenges and opportunities have differed somewhat from the younger and older age groups, due to the drastic political changes previously mentioned in Sámi society that occurred during their formative years. While the Sámi languages and culture before their time were understood as something that was about to disappear, they have proven that change is possible. The region is now a vital Sámi region that has succeeded in combining the old and the new and in taking pride in their own existence. I considered this when I recruited people to participate in the study, since I also wanted to include people who had a strong sense of belonging, as well as people that might not have even wanted to publicly express that they were Sámi. I recruited people through word of mouth, through acquaintances or through getting to know them in their communities. In the interviews, I focused on how they articulated *doing Sáminess* in their everyday lives. I asked about their childhood, youth and everyday lives today, and how they understood themselves in relation to previous generations and their family members. I also asked if, and in what ways, *being Sámi* was important for them, and how this was reflected in their everyday lives and activities. Their stories reflected their personal histories of growing up and living in communities that had changed drastically during their lifetimes.

Being of mixed ethnic origin myself, with a Sámi father from a community that was severely affected by the forced assimilation policies and marginalization, the project would also be a journey for me as a researcher and as an individual. As a qualitative researcher, I bring my own understanding and personal experiences into the complex process of qualitative research methods. This is grounded in an understanding of the researcher as a participant in social reality, as a whole person, where I learn more about the field of study through interaction with people. As a participant, I can never expect to fully understand the world as it is seen through local people's eyes. Yet in interaction with people, I can tune into their reality by way of my own social sensitivity in the research process and in the dialogues (Kramvig, 2005).

The interview as such is a complex reality where I as a researcher must navigate, not only in relation to the words expressed, but also in relation to emotional and other bodily sensations that tell us something about what is at stake (Staunæs & Søndergaard, 2005). I am inspired by what Sara Ahmed (2004) describes as emotions existing in the social reality that "are not 'in' either the individual or the social, but produce the very surfaces and boundaries that allow the individual and the social to be delineated as if they are objects" (p. 10). I have analyzed the interviews by focusing on the ways in which socioemotional structures are articulated by people that I came to know during my fieldwork.

Theories on affect, emotions and haunting

Theories on affect, emotions (Ahmed, 2004; Wetherell, 2015) and hauntings (Busbridge, 2015; O'Reily, 2007) analyze these as parts of social structures and processes. This is also linked to colonial structures. Certain individuals, such as women, children, Indigenous people and people of color, are often implicitly understood as more emotional than Euro-American men; they are thus represented as if they have a connection to a more primitive time, with a closeness to nature. The western history of reason is, therefore, also a history of controlling emotions (Elias, 1939/1978). Perspectives on emotions open up new ways of understanding how colonial structures continue to be present in Indigenous societies, as well as new ways of analyzing Indigenous agency and resistance.

I see the stories of hauntings as something more than expressions of Sámi religion. They are ways of expressing the continued presence of Sámi culture and individuals in the landscapes from which the colonial state sought to eliminate them. This is in line with the indirect and metaphorical ways that Sámi people often communicate, especially when talking about emotional and problematic issues. An example of this *double communication* in Sámi culture is the yoik, the Sámi traditional form of song, that according to Harald Gaski (1999) communicates more than

its esthetic value. The yoik's social function often involves an encoded message that might be difficult to capture without a broad knowledge of the context of the story told through the yoik. A Sámi listener might therefore grasp the encoded message that an outsider might not understand (Gaski, 1999). Like the yoik, traditional Sámi storytelling has also had a normative social function in society, through both socializing and empowering the listeners through metaphors and allegories, often in relation to dealing with otherness and identity management (Cocq, 2008).

Sámi traditional beliefs consist of an intimate connection between the living and the departed, the natural and the supernatural, the visible and the invisible, and this side and the other side (Hansen & Olsen, 2004). It is often said that the family was the most important unit in the traditional Sámi worldview; and the family included both the living and the departed (Hansen & Olsen, 2004). Hauntings as a theoretical concept may be analyzed in relation to, and as a reaction to, colonial history, by re-enacting memories from the past through emotional and special stories of an embodied, emotional engagement with hauntings. Hauntings are not only about the dead and buried, but must also be understood as a way of articulating how past injustice and abusive systems of power are perceived in everyday life. Individuals continue to (re)emerge in landscapes from which they supposedly have been removed (Busbridge, 2015). Hauntings as a concept is relevant due to its "affective dimension, a dimension that creates a sense of the imminently important, present, and disruptive" (O'Reily, 2007, p. 1). This framework reveals how the past, present and future are connected through socioemotional structures.

Hauntings can be analyzed as both a metaphor and an embodied presence in relation to colonization. They are a reversal of the *colonial uncanny*, where the past interrupts the present through ghostly disruptions that undercut the colonial order based on rationality (Mukherjee, 2019). While the colonial logic of elimination seeks to remove all Sámi elements—that is, the existence of Sámi presence in the past, present and future—hauntings are ongoing and open relationships with this Sámi presence. The power of hauntings is that they tell us more about our time and about ourselves than they tell about the past; they express powerful anxieties, desires and regrets. There are parallels between hauntings as reminiscent of the past—of times that no longer exist—and ghosting in the present, turning present day Indigenous people into ghosts as a way of eliminating them. The colonial logic creates an image of Indigenous people as almost mystical creatures linked to a lost nature, or as shades of the past, rather than as humans of flesh and blood who live in the present (Thrush, 2007).

The researcher's religious encounters in the field

One of my first encounters with hauntings as a researcher in Sámi areas was as a young research assistant in Finnmark in Northern Norway. During my first night, I experienced strange sounds in the room, as if someone walked through my room and screamed outside my window. While I initially sought to dismiss this as a weird, yet normal sound in the house, the locals did not. When I met people in the village, they asked me where I lived during my stay, and when I told them, they answered with things like: "Oh, so you dare to stay there?" They then gave me good advice about how to behave, such as talking directly to the ghosts and explaining that I was just going to stay there for a while as a visitor, so that the ghosts would accept me and leave me alone.

I have often used this story in encounters with Sámi people later in my career, as an icebreaker to invite people to tell their own stories. When I started my fieldwork in the areas some years later, I often experienced, late at night, that people told stories about hauntings. While this was often merely for entertainment, I gradually came to understand that these stories represented something more. A woman from the region explained to me that she had never experienced hauntings herself, that the ghosts usually *know* who to show themselves to, and that they will never appear to people who are not strong enough to handle them. This meant that I was a strong person, she told me. This brief conversation shows how hauntings are not just expressions of Sámi religion, but also stories that express emotions and silenced Indigenous presence in the landscapes.

What struck me was the discomfort that some people felt when discussing what it meant for them to be Sámi, while they could tell stories about haunted houses and landscapes with such eagerness and joy. I acknowledged that their need to tell these stories involved more than mere entertainment or an easy way out of my difficult and uncomfortable questions about identity. Their stories reflected a sense of community that they shared with other Sámi people in their community, even though some of them had lost both the language and traditional knowledge. This is something that I found useful when interviewing people who struggled to find words to articulate what it meant for them to be Sámi, and their complicated path out of cultural invisibility.

People told stories to each other about hauntings in the specific house or area, or stories about other creatures from the invisible world. They were often about individuals who had not had a proper burial and therefore haunted the area (Myrvoll, 2010). There were stories about dead people that continued to move among the living, for example, about the rávgga, a creature that was once a person lost at sea, that can come up from the seashore, and the æbok, a ghost of a child born in secrecy and buried somewhere out in nature. These stories were often told in relation to rivers and lakes in the area. One night we gathered in a låvdagoahte, the Sámi tent. An elder started to tell stories from the village. The children encouraged him to tell the stories about the æbok, and he told several stories about his experience with æboks in the area. When I walked home that evening with the people I was staying with, they showed me the specific brook that was in one of his stories. Karen (39 years old) said that when she was a child, she was scared to death when she had to walk alone in that area. However, she told these stories with such pride that I understood how they represented something more than just her fear as a child. The haunting was thus, paradoxically, a way for her to feel

connected to the landscape where she, her family and her ancestors had lived for generations.

"I was never told at home that I am Sámi"

Mari grew up in a small village that had historically been mostly inhabited by Sámi, but today the language and traditional knowledge have almost disappeared. While her grandparents still spoke Sámi when she was growing up, her mother never learned the language, and Mari did not learn it either.

> We shouldn't speak about it, something that was collectively connected in a way, or we just understood . . . we shouldn't talk about that these kinds of things. So, my years of youth, it was like running away from it, or not running away. I cannot say that I had any traumatizing experiences. It's more like it doesn't even exist. (Mari, female, 36 years old)

While Mari feels that she is Sámi, she has trouble finding ways to express what this means to her in her everyday life. The emptiness that Mari expresses shows how the logic of elimination works. The quote shows us how the silence made Mari question her childhood and youth and whether she was even part of the Sámi community. The Sámi culture was something that was hidden in plain sight. Even though it was very much present, it was something that one should not talk about. We see how Mari struggles with finding words to describe how Sámi culture is part of her life, and what this means to her. In her stories about her upbringing and family, the silencing of Sámi language and culture represented something that created no space for dealing with the emotions that she experienced related to her cultural loss. As an adult, this silencing of everything that represented her Sámi background is still something that is difficult for her to talk about. Even though during her lifetime she has experienced a shift from a situation where the Sámi culture was almost invisible, to something that one should be proud of, she still struggles to find her place in Sámi society. However, in our conversation, she came to the conclusion that this struggle is paradoxically what makes her feel connected to Sámi society, because she knows that many people have similar experiences.

Hidden stories—hidden empowerment

Sámi storytelling tradition has existed even in times where the visible signs of Sámi culture were hidden. Martin is a good example of how the Sámi culture was hidden in plain sight. Like Mari, Martin told me about his childhood as a time where no one in his family wanted to talk about their Sámi background. Martin said that as a child, he did not even know that he was Sámi, because nobody in his family had told him. Both his parents spoke Sámi.

> Everyone knew that most of the people were Sámi, but it was something that one shouldn't talk about. (Martin, male, 39 years old)

The Sámi language and traditions had become secret knowledge that the children were not to know anything about, a practice that, back then, was not uncommon in Sámi families that wanted to help their children succeed in Norwegian society. They had adopted the persistent idea that there was no future in being Sámi, and that if one wanted to succeed in life, one had to become Norwegian. Children like Martin had been so socialized into the silencing and marginalization of Sámi symbols that he could not even see the most visible signs of being Sámi. Martin also grew up in a Laestadian family, like many of the people in this area. Being Christian, which in this context means being an active member of the Laestadian congregation, was an important part of his upbringing:

> It must be said that they have always been Christian, so the Sámi [culture] . . . . It is Christianity that has been the most important thing. And therefore it [their Sámi background] have not been an issue in the family, not before we became adults. So things like the Sámi clothes, I have never worn that, I wore it once in a wedding . . . . When they started talking about opening the Sámi center, there were several petitions for and against it. Dad was on that list against it. So, I personally, I have always loved Christianity, so therefore it hasn't really been natural to take part in the Sámi [community]. (Martin, male, 39 years old)

The complexity of Martin's religious upbringing shows us how local religious beliefs and practices are an intricate mix between Sámi and Christian religion. The Læstadian community became important for people in the region at a time when forced assimilation and marginalization made life difficult for the Sámi people there (Nergård, 1994). It was a form of psychological protection of Sámi fellowship, and a safe space for people to express feelings and be together as a community. In this way, they could save the community, even though this sometimes involved silencing and hiding the visible elements of Sámi culture. However, the sense of belonging and comfort that Martin expressed was also somewhat ambivalent, since Christianity for him also represented the silencing of everything Sámi in his childhood and youth. When he grew up, expressing Sámi belonging was often associated with activism, something that was in conflict with the values of the Læstadian congregation. Being associated with the new Sámi center and Sámi politics was thus something that his family distanced themselves from, which in Martin's life further silenced the Sámi presence in his life.

When I interviewed Martin, he, like Mari, had trouble describing how he was Sámi, and what elements in his life were Sámi. Even though his grandmother made him Sámi traditional clothes, he felt uncomfortable wearing them, and he could not speak Sámi. When I asked him directly about what it meant for him to be Sámi, he made jokes, maybe as a way of dealing with the discomfort. The interview became more like a long conversation between friends than an interview, where I just had to put away my list of questions; he then started to tell stories about hauntings in the landscape.

> It was a long way down to the seashore. Anders was there [apparently a dead man haunting the area]. And the black man on the other side of the mountain. And the churchyard. And the lake. So, we were stuck in a way. (Martin, male, 39 years old)

While his stories about the Sámi language, material culture and interaction with other Sámi were something that was clearly difficult for him to discuss, the stories about haunted landscapes were something that he told with great pride and joy. Even though he talked about how scared he was as a child to even walk outside the house in the evening, he tells the stories with great happiness that is in deep contrast to his struggling way of articulating what it is for him to be Sámi, and his painful memories from his childhood. He talked about the storytelling traditions of his family, and how in his adult life this had become a way of reconnecting to the Sámi community. The storytelling tradition of his family can be analyzed as a way of hiding the Sámi in plain sight. Even though it was very much present in his childhood, it was invisible to him. As a child, he did not fully understand the meaning of it, but when he grew up, the stories and their double meaning empowered him as a Sámi. For Martin, they are now more than just mere entertainment for him as a child, or a way of teaching him about the dangers of the world. The storytelling can be interpreted, in line with Gaski (1999) and Cocq (2008), as a way of empowering Martin as a Sámi, even though he did not know this at that time.

We should consider how these stories constitute a continuity with the past, and a link between the past and the present. Retelling these stories from his childhood might be a safe way for him to articulate a sense of belonging to the landscape, his ancestors and their stories. While language, culture and material culture such as the Sámi traditional clothes might represent something painful for him, given his family history and memories from his childhood and youth, retelling these stories can be seen as a way for him to feel connected to the Sámi history and culture in the region, as well as to the Sámi landscape.

"These monsters that existed everywhere, places you shouldn't go"

Knut grew up in a family that, like others, struggled with the aftermath of the Norwegianization process and marginalization. Like Martin, Knut grew up in a family where the Sámi language was still in use, but in contrast to Martin, he did in fact have the opportunity to learn Sámi at school.

> We have discussed this many times, my father and I. That he [can speak Sámi] . . . and never . . . . I do not speak Sámi fluently, and then it is this [mental] barrier. And I cannot say that I speak Sámi with him either, even though I could have done that in certain situations. He grew of course up in another time than us, when the Sámi [language] was "banned." . . . . But somewhere it failed. (Knut, male, 34 years old)

In this quote, we see how his father's failure to teach him Sámi is still something that they discuss from time to time. Even though Knut acknowledges that his father did his best, and he too, like many others in his generation, grew up at a time where it was not easy to be Sámi, Knut still expresses a certain bitterness about this. However, he has been reconciled to his father and his own loss, and finds joy in other activities that make him feel connected to the Sámi culture:

> It is something in this culture and the tradition, if not being one with nature, so at least to learn how to make use of it. (Knut, male, 34 years old)

Here we see how spending time outdoors makes Knut feel connected to the Sámi culture. Knut tells me that his ancestors were reindeer herders, and he still has relatives that are reindeer herders. From his childhood up until today, he has spent considerable time in the areas where his ancestors used to have their herds, and has heard many stories about places linked to their activities. In the interview, he talks about the stories that he heard from family members, about how their ancestors used the landscape, and the stories connected to these places out in nature:

> At least when I was younger, . . . it was a natural part of being in the woods for example. You chopped some wood, then you were told some stories about different things, especially we had these, all these stories about hauntings and everything. That was a thing . . . . And these scary stories that we were told as kids. These monsters that existed everywhere, places you shouldn't go . . . . We also got some of this through school. My teacher. At least twice a week, she told us a really scary story. But today, it is not like that. (Knut, male, 34 years old)

In Knut's stories, the dead and the creatures out in nature were as natural as other things. To spend time with his relatives, out in nature, involved engaging in these stories through the landscape and the histories inscribed in it. We can see a kind of sadness in the way Knut tells these stories, as he adds that it is not like this anymore. While the monsters were something scary in his childhood, they now represent a time that for him is long gone. The way he expresses sadness at the fact that even the stories about hauntings have disappeared from his life can be analyzed as a metaphor for how the Sámi presence has been written out of the landscapes where his ancestors lived. For him, these stories represented a connection to the landscapes that he fears will be lost to following generations, and a fear of their becoming eliminated altogether as a people. Talking about the stories of generations long gone can be analyzed as a way of expressing his fear of losing the Sámi culture altogether, and the sadness of what is already lost. For Knut, telling these stories is a way to reconnect with the past, and by spending time in the landscape he can walk in the paths of his ancestors.

Stories about hauntings as resistance to elimination

When discussing the settler colonial logic of elimination (Wolfe, 2006), the elimination is not only connected to

policies with the explicit mission of eliminating Indigenous languages and cultures, such as the Norwegianization policy. The eliminating structures not only eliminate Indigenous cultures in the past and present; they also remove the very possibility of a future. A striking example of this is how Sámi culture has been historically excluded from, or at best marginalized, in museums (Finbog, 2015). In Norway, this is part of the process of creating a unifying national culture in the 1800s–1900s, when the Sámi were wrongfully portrayed as late settler reindeer herders from the East, "the remnant of a foreign and exotic culture centered on reindeer herding" (Finbog, 2015, p. 97).

There is a scholarly need to question the stereotypes and the way they influence how Indigenous people are represented today, and how this affects the Indigenous people themselves. As scholars we need to reflect on how we present and analyze Indigenous people in both the past and present. The imperialist nostalgia, combined with the myth of *vanishing* Indigenous people, defined Indigeneity in certain ways that consequently eliminated Indigenous presence. While anthropology has changed drastically since then, the stereotypes about who the *real* Indigenous people are still exist through stereotypes in everyday life that still shape how Indigenous people today are devalued and devalue themselves. On the one hand, colonization and policies aimed at eliminating Indigenous cultures have erased traditional knowledge and languages all around the world. On the other hand, academic disciplines such as anthropology have often been criticized for defining culture in ways that could erase the influence of western ideas, in addition to cultural change (Raibmon, 2005). As Page Raibmon (2005) argues, in referring to native American peoples:

> Indians [as written in original work], by extension, were traditional, uncivilized, cultural, impoverished, feminine, static, part of nature and of the past. Whites, on the other hand, were modern, civilized, political, prosperous, masculine, dynamic, part of society and of the future. (p. 7)

Indigeneity is thus defined in a temporal way, where Indigenous culture belongs to the past, almost as ghosts, and western culture to the future. If we as scholars indirectly or unreflectively continue to misrepresent Sámi culture as frozen in time, which only exists in museums or as ghosts from the past, we make it difficult to imagine a future for the Sámi people. While Sámi people have everyday lives that are very different from their ancestors from the past, like most people in the world, this does not mean that they do not exist as Indigenous people in a vibrant, living society. This is similar to how Sámi culture is often misrepresented—as if the stereotypical Sámi culture only exists in a pure form in the past, while the present day culture is presented solely as damaged fragments, or hauntings that remind people of a past that is long gone (Dankertsen, 2015). This stereotypical misrepresentation can also be said to be a kind of colonial elimination, as a way of eliminating the very possibility of imagining a future for Sábme. All living societies must be given the possibility to develop and change on their own terms. However, we must also acknowledge how colonialism has tried to eliminate Indigenous people all around the world, including the Sámi. This text has therefore been an attempt to find a way out of this pessimistic way of defining Sámi culture, in terms of what it is not, by outsiders more informed by stereotypes than living Sámi individuals and communities today.

In the article, I have shown how stories about hauntings also have had a central function in everyday life. They must be understood as something more than *relics* of the old Sámi religion. They have also functioned as a way of socializing people into a Sámi worldview and empowering people through the way they center the individuals in relation to the natural and spiritual world, to their past and to the Sámi society. Even in communities where the visible signs of the Sámi presence, such as the language, clothes and other material culture, for decades was something that often was hidden or silenced, the storytelling traditions have been ways of socializing individuals into a hidden Sámi community that was very much still present. The stories about hauntings therefore had a double meaning (Cocq, 2008; Gaski, 1999) that connects individuals to their Sámi community not only through knowledge, but through emotional experiences of both joy and fear.

Conclusion

Stories about hauntings can be understood as an expression of an unresolved relationship with the colonial elimination of Sámi presence. The numerous stories of hauntings in Sábme are ways of reconnecting people to the landscape and their ancestors, bringing them together in the present, and creating new possibilities for a Sámi future. There is a need for perspectives on the relationship between past and present Indigenous societies that consider the colonial impact on Indigenous lives without presenting individuals as ghosts in their own communities, that is, without the possibility of an Indigenous future. We also need to move beyond nationalistic and essentialist concepts of cultures and identities that present people as frozen in time, without the possibility for change. While change is central to all societies, change is also linked to colonization and marginalization in Sámi societies.

As Avery F. Gordon (2008) points out, we live in a world where hauntings continue to exist as social practice, even though we live in a time where logic, reason and scientific facts are supposed to be the only source of knowledge. The stories about hauntings represent more than just ghost stories for mere entertainment, or fragments of the old Sámi religion. While some of the interviewed Sámi individuals had trouble finding words when talking about their sense of belonging to the Sámi language, culture and community, I was puzzled by the ease and eagerness with which they talk about these things. This shows us that these stories are significant for understanding how people feel that they are connected to the Sámi culture. This is also something that is in line with Sámi patterns of communication, where the use of metaphors, body language and silence are ways of expressing issues and emotions that might be too difficult to talk about directly (Dagsvold et al., 2020). While these

stories might represent elements of Sámi religion still present, they can also be analyzed as a way of articulating the trauma and unresolved emotions related to the colonization, forced assimilation and marginalization of the Sámi people.

The stories about hauntings can also be analyzed as ways of connecting to the landscape and to the ancestors, through narrating the Indigenous presence and emotional investment. Through telling the stories about hauntings, people can discuss issues that might be too difficult to talk about directly. The stories thus function as a way of empowering people, through the hidden and often double meaning of the stories and the emotional investment of both the storyteller and the listener. Even in communities where the visible signs of being Sámi almost disappeared, or disappeared completely in certain Sámi communities, the storytelling traditions continued to connect people to their past and to the Sámi community in a way that often was hidden even for those who grew up listening to the stories in their childhood and youth. However, as they grew up, the meaning of the stories often emerged and became an important way of empowering them and reconnecting them to a Sámi community that they had been a part of all along.

In recent years, rise of the interest in the emotional aspects of colonization can be seen in the trend of truth and reconciliation commissions, including the truth and reconciliation commissions in the Nordic countries. These processes should include a reflection on how these commissions can contribute on both a political and emotional level, through an analyzation of how the Indigenous Sámi people's past, present and future are connected.

Author's note

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Glossary

Sámi language

Julev Sámi	the Sámi language spoken around the Tysfjord fjord in Norway and the river Lule in Sweden; one of the more widely spoken Sámi languages
låvdagoahte	a Sámi tent; in North Sámi it is called lávvu
noajdde	the Sámi shaman
rávgga	a creature that was once a person lost at sea, that can come up from the seashore
Sábme	is the Julev Sámi name for the Sámi nation or Sámi territories.
Sálto Sámesiebrre	a local member cultural and political organization; a member organization of the Norwegian Sámi Association
Sámedigge	The Sámi Parliament
yoik	a traditional form of song in Sámi musician be used as a noun: a yoik, or as a verb, to yoik; each yoik is evoking, for example, a person, an animal or a place
æbok	a ghost of a child born in secrecy and buried somewhere out in nature—often in rivers and lakes

Norwegian language

Finnefondeta	a fund established by the Norwegian Parliament in 1851 to shift the culture and language to Norwegian for all citizens

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