

Fragments of the Future. Decolonization in Sami Everyday Life

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ABSTRACT

In this article, I use qualitative data from Northern Norway to explore how Sami fragmentation is articulated and performed in people's everyday life. The people who have participated in the project tell stories about how they experience being Sami in a Northern Norwegian context. Some have had a strong sense of Sami identity their whole life, while others have experienced great changes regarding their articulations of Saminess. Rather than understanding the in-between space between Norwegian and Sami culture as something that creates scattered identities, I analyze the performative Saminess in people's everyday life. I use a postcolonial and Indigenous perspective to discuss how decolonization, as a way of dealing with cultural fragmentation, is something that people perform in their everyday life. Indigenous peoples experience a fragmentation that is a direct result of colonization. This fragmentation thus is less a choice than a constant reminder of the loss of land, languages, traditional knowledge, and communities. The Indigenous project is thus a project of putting oneself back together again. Through Indigenous and postcolonial theory, I explore how people recreate the in-between space, altering it from something chaotic and unpredictable to a Sami-Norwegian intercultural space where they can perform their own sense of cultural belonging. As a space of decolonization, this thus becomes a creative and dynamic space where they can awaken the once hidden fragments of Sami culture in a way that make sense in their own everyday life.

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Introduction: Decolonization and detecting lost fragments

When historical visibility has faded, when the present tense of testimony loses its power to arrest, then the displacements of memory and the indirections of art offer us the image of our psychic survival (Bhabha 1994:18).

Homi Bhabha's insightful quotation illustrates the manifestation of fragmentation and hybridization in a time of decolonization. In this article, I analyze how Sami ethnic fragmentation is articulated in people's everyday life from a postcolonial perspective. While colonialism has to do with macro processes, states and international relations, it is also important to explore how the effects of colonialism manifest themselves in people's everyday life, and in their understanding of who they are as individuals. While stories of colonial representations, fragmentations and decolonization are not representative of all individuals in Sami Indigenous societies today, these narratives give us a deeper understanding of how entangled colonial relations and representations still haunt people's lives, and how people struggle to find ways of putting the fragments of the past together and make them instructive narratives for the future.

My empirical area for this project was the Lule and Marka Sami area in Northern Nordland and Southern Troms in Norway, an area where Sami and non-Sami have interacted from time immemorial, and where one cannot identify a specific moment when colonization began. The methods used in the project were participant observation and qualitative interviews. I started the data collection with participant observation in the chosen municipalities in the region, where I participated in meetings, festivals, sporting events, parties and home visits. In the end of the data collection period, I did interviews with 9 individuals from the region, where I focused on themes that I had found relevant in the participant observation. I had chosen to interview individuals between 30 and 40, as I found this group to represent a kind of transitional generation between what is often referred to as the Norwegianization period and the Sami revitalization period. Several of the participants also have mixed ethnic heritage. In this article,

I have reanalyzed the empirical material with a particular focus on fragmentation and decolonization in an everyday life context².

The concept of fragmentation is a much-debated concept in the social sciences and humanities, and is thus not specific to Indigenous people. It has been a central concept in theories of postmodernity, late modernity, high modernity and other theories that attempt to describe the contemporary society Anthony Giddens characterizes as having ‘swept us away from all traditional types of social order in quite unprecedented fashion’ (Giddens 1990:4). In a way, fragmentation, as a part of postmodernity, with corresponding ‘feelings of vertigo, anxiety and panic’ (Best and Kellner 1991:280) has become ‘the new normal’ of our time. There is, however, an important difference: Colonialism. As Rauna Kuokkanen (2000) claims, there is a need to go further than poststructuralist or postmodern objectives, since Indigenous lives are always entangled in colonial power relations, and their culture often seen by outsiders as ‘impure’ or as forever ‘destroyed’ by colonization. Kuokkanen also criticizes the representation of Indigenous culture as static:

Also talking about ‘traditional’ ways of life or ‘traditional’ culture can suggest racist notions of a frozen culture giving rise to false views of authenticity and ‘traditional practices’. This, for its part, denies development and change in Indigenous cultures. Change is natural and inevitable to all cultures and also a prerequisite of a living culture. (Kuokkanen 2000: 418)

There is thus a need for a more dynamic perspective that both focuses on how Indigenous people take an active part in cultural change, and how power relations such as colonialism, shape people’s everyday life. Even if Indigenous peoples and poststructuralist theorists share similar aspirations, the ultimate objective of Indigenous peoples is, through the deconstruction of the consequences of colonialism, a ‘real’ self-determination where intellectual self-determination plays a significant role. As Betty Bastien, Jürgen W. Kremer, Rauna Kuokkanen, and Patricia Vickers write:

Considering the material conditions of most of the Sámi, an outsider could come to the conclusion that the Sámi are not colonized. In this sense, the colonial process has found its completion by ideologically cloaking its own violence. Internalized mental colonization has been so exhaustive that even though the Sámi have their own elected bodies, welfare system, and some control over their education, none of these are based on Sámi culture. (Bastien, Kremer, Kuokkanen and Vickers 2003: 28)

² Thanks to KEL – Research group for gender, ethnicity and equality at Nord University for useful comments during this project.

Even though colonialism is considered to be a finished chapter of Norwegian national history, the everyday life of the Sami people today still exists in a system where Sami norms, values, and traditional knowledges are not always included. As Margareth Kovach writes, the different ‘post’ perspectives involve a risk of forgetting the historical and present day perspectives of Indigenous peoples, and are ‘problematic because the non-Indigenous majority are adept at forgetting this country’s colonial history, thus maintaining its reproduction’ (Kovach 2009: 75-76). The inseparable connections between Indigenous people and the cultural, political and, above all, economic system that we all are a part of today, in addition to the hegemonic, Western scientific knowledge system, continues to reproduce the colonial interruptions of Indigenous everyday lives (Kovach 2009).

However, using a postcolonial perspective, or Indigenous perspective for that matter, in a Sami context comes with some specific analytical and theoretical challenges. First, the definition of colonization as ‘settlement in a new country [...] a body of people who settle in a new locality, forming a community subject to or connected with their parent state’ (Loomba 2001: 2), does not take into consideration Indigenous people like the Sami. In contrast to a context in which there is a relatively fixed point of time from which colonization starts, the situation for the Sami people entails a different complexity.

Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999) points out that the concept of the ‘postcolonial’ is in itself problematic from an Indigenous point of view, since ‘naming the world as “post-colonial” is, from Indigenous perspectives, to name colonialism as finished business. (...) the colonizers have left. There is rather compelling evidence that in fact this has not occurred’ (Smith 1999: 101). If, from a Sami perspective, the colonizers neither arrived nor left, where is then the postcolonial? Third, if one of the main issues in postcolonial theory is to criticize the implicit Western cultural knowledge in academia, where and what is ‘the West’ in relation to Indigenous people in Europe? A postcolonial and Indigenous perspective becomes in itself an in-between space seen from a Sami-Norwegian intercultural location as is clear from Smith’s identification of ‘Indigenous postcoloniality’:

Fragmentation is not an Indigenous project; it is something that we are recovering from. While shifts are occurring in the ways in which Indigenous peoples put ourselves back together again, the greater project is recentering Indigenous identities on a larger scale. (Smith 1999: 97)

The Sami people, as an Indigenous people, is still in a colonized position economically, politically, culturally, and linguistically, even though the changes during the last centuries

regarding rights, autonomy, and opportunities for linguistic and cultural preservation and development have changed the situation for the better. As Chandra Talpade Mohanty points out, this can be understood as neocolonialism:

It is the colonialist and corporate power to define Western science, and the reliance on capitalist values of private property and profit, as the only normative system that results in the exercise of immense power. Thus Indigenous knowledges, which are often communally generated and shared among tribal and peasant women for domestic, local, and public use, are subject to the ideologies of a corporate Western scientific paradigm where intellectual property rights can only be understood in possessive or privatized form. (Mohanty 2003: 512)

In a time where the neoliberal/postmodern ideals of ‘free choice’ and individualism dominate, culture and identity become private property or individual expression rather than something collective and shared. Indigenous knowledge thus becomes a source for profit, or alternatively something that has no practical use anymore. The omnipresent colonial elements of a Sami everyday life are concealed and retold as signs of free choice and individuality, rather than of cultural oppression.

The colonization of Sábmme/Sápmi

In Lule Sami/Northern Sami, Sábmme/Sápmi refers to the Sami nation and areas where the Sami live. Sábmme encompasses parts of northern Norway, Sweden, Finland and the Kola Peninsula of Russia. There are several different Sami dialects or languages, classified as members of the Finno-Lappic language branch, belonging to the Uralic language family. In Norway, Sábmme traditionally includes areas from Hedmark in the South to Finnmark in the north, including coastal areas. Although there is no Columbus moment in Sami colonialism, it began with Christianizing in the thirteenth century, which aimed at getting political control over the Sami territories. It subsequently intensified with the emergence of the national states in the Nordic region (Hansen and Olsen 2004). In Norway, the assimilation policy towards the Sami people intensified after 1905 (when Norway became an independent nation), as the young Norwegian nation strove to enforce cultural and linguistic homogeneity (Hodne 2002). The assimilation policy reflected Social Darwinist ideas viewing Sami people as primitive people with no ability to create a civilized society, projecting Norwegian people as the ‘master race’, for example in the following account by Pastor Holm:

‘I believe the Lapp is all but immune to what, to us, is higher culture, which is the level of our culture at this time. As far as I can see, he lacks the preconditions to create a

social order that requires diligence, respect for rules, and a basic discipline in all aspects of higher form of social existence . . . for which the Asiatic nomad is not well suited, no matter how long he has been permanently settled' (Holm quoted in Evjen and Beck 2015: 30).

According to Bjørg Evjen and David R. M. Beck, Holm's view reflects a shift from exoticism to nationalism. While in some ways the Sami people had been protected by ideas of 'the noble savage' and 'the last nomads of Europe', this changed in the nineteenth century with the rise of Norwegian nationalism. The influence of nationalism meant that the focus shifted towards assimilationist homogeneity. Sami culture was seen as too different and had to be assimilated into the Norwegian culture (Evjen and Beck 2015). After the Second World War, the Norwegianization policies continued, though the focus shifted towards distribution of welfare and education. As Harald Eidheim reflects on his field work in a coastal Sami community in the postwar period: 'I knew, of course, that I was on the edges of the Lappish area, but my eyes and ears told me that I was inside a Norwegian fjord community' (Eidheim 1969: 41). From being considered primitive people with no prospects of social, cultural, or economic progress, and then an invisible people, the Sami today have moved towards a cultural, linguistic and political assertiveness, with Sami institutions like Sami Parliament as one of the greatest accomplishments (Thuen 1995).

Doing Saminess in a time of decolonization

'And that is maybe what's preserving the identity, the fact that one always has tried to escape it'. (Mari 31)³

The words quoted above belong to Mari, a Sami woman, and is from an interview with another Sami woman in the Lule- and Marka Sami area in Northern Norway. There is an apparent paradox in her statement. While Mari today is proud to be Sami, she comes from an area and a family where people did not talk much about their Sami identity, had stopped using Sami clothes and other Sami symbols, and where only the older generations used the Sami language, while the younger generations only spoke Norwegian. A change took place in the 1980s and 1990s: More and more people stood up and refused to hide their Sami belonging. Demonstrations took place, the Sami Parliament was opened, and many other Sami institutions were established. However, the act of taking back the Sami language and

³ The citations from the interviews are from the field work conducted in connection with my PhD project. Translations of the interview are mine.

traditional knowledge became a trajectory that was easier for some than for others, and in Maris home village, the Sami presence was still something that was invisible, and something that many still believed should remain invisible.

The material and performed Sami everyday life was something that I explicitly asked about in the interviews. To show Sami spirit, as a way of performing Saminess, is linked to the Sami slogan ČSV from the Sami revitalization movement in the early 1970s. The three letters ČSV stood for Čájjet Sámi Vuoiŋŋa (Show Sami Spirit), and along with similar sentences it encouraged the use of Sami clothes, joik, art and other Sami symbols in everyday life (see Stordahl 1994). This act of making Sami culture visible came as a reaction to centuries characterized by minoritization and marginalization of Sami people, both in legislation and in people's everyday life. The slogan soon became a symbol of Sami unity as a weapon to overcome the feeling of ethnic shame and inferiority. This slogan gave name to the so-called ČSV movement; a movement that still has a great impact on Sami life today, and especially on the members of the Norwegian Sami Association (NSR).

When I started analyzing my empirical material I was struck by the sometimes conspicuous absence of this kind of performative Saminess during my fieldwork. While some of the people that I met during the participant observation part of the project, were proud to show they were Sami (with traditional clothes, language use or more modern Sami fashion) others were more reluctant to perform Saminess in this way. Some were quite explicit in their explanation of their Sami identity and the lack of symbols and language. Rolf, a man in his late 30s that I met many times during my fieldwork, explicitly told me that I had to write about their lives as well, and not only 'the political Sami', as he classified the Sami who proudly wore Sami clothes and other Sami symbols. While individuals from the older generation may have reacted in that way because they feared I would revisit old memories and identities they wanted to forget all about, the younger generation reacted similarly for other reasons. I had many discussions with Rolf on Sami issues during my fieldwork, sometimes he reacted with anger, but it took some time before I actually understood what the anger was all about. On one occasion, he even yelled at me because I had not interviewed him and his relatives, because he believed that the stories of him and his family would, 'as usual', be silenced in favor of the politically engaged Sami 'elite' from their area.

I met many people like Rolf during my fieldwork. While I met many people who were proud of being Sami, the many conflicts between people in the local communities related to Sami

issues, was striking. It took me a long time to grasp what the conflicts were about. Sometimes I even think that those who were involved had trouble defining what the conflicts were about. I experienced this in a public meeting I attended during my fieldwork: I had talked about my project, and how many people still had trouble reconciling with the past. A woman raised her voice and said that she had no need for reconciliation. It was the Norwegian state who should reconcile with them, not the Sami people. A man then described an event from his youth, when some other people present had moved away from the village and refused to say hello to him in the street. He felt they were ashamed of being Sami, and thus were ashamed of knowing him, since he clearly was Sami. Another woman then interrupted him and said that her family was one of the families that had moved away from the village, and every time they came home again, the neighbors refused to say hello to them too. She felt they did not think of her as a 'good enough' Sami.

After decades of fight for the right to 'show Sami spirit' people continue to deal with the ghosts of the past. This reflects cultural hierarchies in Sami society, where there are always some who are 'more' Sami than you are, who potentially can make fun of you if you reveal that you too are Sami (Åhrén 2008). This was even clearer when I listened to people's stories from their childhood and youth. However, people generally presented themselves proudly as Sami, and none were really ashamed of being Sami, even though they were reluctant to use Sami clothes. Their struggle to find new ways of articulating and performing Saminess through examining the Sami fragments in their everyday life thus became a kind of personal decolonization process.

In the interviews, I focused specifically on how interviewees were 'doing' Saminess in their everyday life. I asked them if their Sami background was something that was an important part of their everyday life, or if it was something that they mainly kept hidden. I also asked them specifically about concrete situations and encouraged them to give examples. These were among the most difficult questions in the interviews. It did not surprise me that the participants who did not enact a ČSV Sami identity struggled with that question. At the same time, I came to an understanding through my analysis of the empirical material that what the interviewees were telling me was not about a total absence of Saminess, but rather a different way of articulating Saminess from the hegemonic ČSV Sami identity.

When Saminess is defined as 'showing Sami spirit' through material objects or language, other ways of performed Saminess are invisibilized. Performed Saminess is a deeper sense that exists

beyond these markers of identity. While some people in the region today proudly wear Sami clothes, others are more reluctant to take this step. However, this does not necessarily mean they are ashamed of being Sami. It may reflect a lack of comfort with received ways of performing Saminess. Arne, one of the interviewees, presents himself as Sami. However, he never wears Sami clothes, and does not speak Sami. He doubts that he ever will. He explains this through his childhood experiences:

‘Well, there was no one who wore Sami clothes... or things like that. Maybe some who wore Sami shoes. One or two could use some Sami words sometimes. I think it was like that. I don’t know, maybe some swearing in Sami (laughing). I believe it was so... I remember some situations like that. And some spoke better Sami than me. I know that now as an adult. Actually. However, at that time... there wasn’t that much focus on Saminess, really.’ (Arne 39)

In my interview with Arne, it was the description of an everyday life with a lack of focus on Saminess that in a way paradoxically constituted Saminess in his childhood and youth. Even so, he also expresses a performed Saminess with reference to ‘swearing in Sami’. The everyday life of the people that I interviewed reflects this cultural complexity, and their ethnic self-categorization consequently becomes complex and equivocal. When being asked about their Sami heritage, some of the interviewees started talking about the conspicuous absence of Saminess in their childhood, which reflects the minoritization and assimilation of the Sami people. He said to me that he feared that I would end up writing about those who had succeeded in taking back the Sami language and traditions, and not ‘ordinary’ Sami people who had lost the language and most of the Sami traditional knowledge, but who nonetheless were part of the local community.

‘It is like... we will never have any... well, it is the heritage from our parents. If it had been something proper and old, like from our grandparents or anything like that, but my mother has mostly things in plastic. An old coffee pot and things like that. That isn’t a heritage really.’ (Arne 39)

Arne describes a Sami present where there is no Sami material culture – no ‘heritage’. The material cultural vacuum that Arne describes is the result of decades of colonization and marginalization, where the visible material and performed parts of Sami culture was hidden away. According to Arne there is no ‘proper and old’ Sami material culture in his life, and his

ethnic self-categorization becomes ambiguous and hesitant. Mari, a woman from another local Sami community in this region, answers in a similar way:

‘I don’t think they care about that really. They have never had the need to... It’s probably nothing that concerns them, because they have never.... The only thing that they may have heard at home, was maybe when their grandparents spoke Sami. And that is probably the only thing that I have heard as well. And that has never been for a topic of discussion. We are all in the same boat really. We have always thought about those people who run around in Sami clothes as a little bit silly, really (laughing). And it is probably only in retrospect that I find it to be of any value.’ (Mari 31)

There is a similarity here between Arne’s description of not having a heritage, and Mari’s description of her friends and their lack of performed Saminess. The hidden language of their parents or grandparents becomes the only evidence for them of a shared Sami past.

‘I don’t know, really. What can I say? To be Sami when I was a kid, that was those people on the Finnmark Mountain Plateau. With reindeer grazing down the whole area, not a sustainable development and stories like that. That was so far away from where I come from or can identify with. Many people like us cannot identify with that [reality]. My friends from [name of her district of origin] are not even enrolled in the Sami electoral roll⁴. And we have never talked about it.’ (Mari 31)

Mari here marks the distinction between her own life, and the lives of ‘those people on the Finnmark Mountain Plateau’. In her stories, the reindeer herders in Finnmark become ‘the real Sami’, with a distinct and visibly different way of life. Even though the reindeer herding industry also has undergone great technological, financial and social changes during the last century, it still indirectly becomes the very symbol of a perceived ‘authentic Sami tradition’, in contrast to Mari’s everyday life. Even though Mari tries to modify this impression with references to conflicts regarding the ecological challenges of the reindeer herding industry, it

⁴ All Sámi from Norway above the age of 18, or who will reach the age of 18 in the election year, are entitled to register in the electoral roll and vote in Sami parliamentary elections. To register in the electoral roll, an individual must file a declaration stating that:

- he/she considers him-/herself a Sámi, and
- the Sámi language is his/her home language, or that at least one of his/her parents, grandparents or great grandparents have or have had Sámi as their home language, or
- he/she is the child of someone who is or has been registered in the electoral roll.

remains the 'real Sami culture' of her childhood stories. She tries to criticize and ridicule this specific part of the Sami society, but at the same time, her feelings of inferiority are betrayed.

'I have thought a little bit about it... it is like... It is quite stupid really, because... if I ever have any children, I will never be able to teach them Sami. They will never get the opportunity to participate in Sami society, because all the Sami daycare centers require that they speak Sami. It is almost as if it is cut off after me if I don't... That is quite sad really, and there are many people like us.' (Mari 31)

Mari reflects on what I analyze as an in-between space (Bhabha 1994) between the Norwegian and the Sami category. In the interview, Mari herself actually describes this as a 'being in-between' (Mari 31). She describes this in the interview as if she 'belongs to nothing, and belongs to something' (Mari 31) at the same time. In this description, the loneliness and confusion that she sometimes feels in her search for a position in Sami society is apparent. She grew up in a time characterized by great cultural changes, where Sami language and culture went from being associated with shame to becoming associated with pride. However, in people's everyday life this change is not so absolute. The loss of Sami past and the struggles to save Sami culture in the region still has an emotional impact on people's everyday life. Similarly, the repression of Sami identity in the past is never complete:

'Mum and dad, they used to... if they were angry with us children, they would say [swearing in Sami]. I am the middle child. I was maybe six or seven years old at that time, and my older siblings would send me to mum and dad to ask them what it meant. Then they had to explain to me that the words meant rotten or filthy child. And then they stopped (laughs). So we learned those words and phrases. We grew up with Sami words like that.' (Martin 38)

In Martin's childhood, Sami was a secret language that was only used privately among his parents and older relatives. Martin never learned the Sami language. He tells me that for a long period of his childhood he did not even know that he was Sami. Nonetheless, the Sami language was an important part of his everyday life. Their stories reflect a situation in which colonization and marginalization led Saminess to become a silenced topic in the local communities, but at the same time were present in people's everyday life and its activities:

'Mum used to say, 'There are strangers coming' [in Sami]. Mum has always been a messy person (...), and we understood quickly that she said that to get us children to tidy up. There were words and phrases like that. We knew that we had to tidy up quickly then. I believe she sensed that there were people coming [that she had premonitions].' (Martin 38)

In this quote, we can even see how Sami religion was a part of Martin's childhood, with his experiences with his mother's premonitions. There are many shades of Saminess in Martin's story, which reflect the cultural complexity of his childhood. Even though Martin claims that he did not know that he was Sami when he was a child, and that the material and articulated parts of the family's Saminess was something hidden, Saminess was clearly present through his family members' actions in their everyday life. Today, these stories become important ways for Martin to reanalyze his past, as a way of trying to find fragments that can be characterized as Sami that he can hand over to the next generation.

Filling the void

Decolonization in a Sami everyday life involves putting together the fragments of the past in new ways, in order to survive as a people. The fragments of the past become fragments of the future. To do this, people must identify the fragments and find ways of recontextualizing these in their everyday life. Sometimes, the fragments are not things or symbols, but represent something that I analyze as a performed Saminess or a bodily feeling of being Sami. Susanne generally presents herself as a proud Sami who has learned the language and proudly worn traditional Sami clothes. She has also learned the Sami language in adulthood. However, when I ask her if there is anything in her everyday life that she would characterize as Sami, she hesitates before answering:

'No, God, you know, it isn't something particular that I do. It's just something that I have under my skin.' (Susanne 38)

To Susanne, being Sami is more a 'bodily' feeling rather than something she does. Saminess reflects everything she does in her daily life. When she makes coffee in the afternoon, she is Sami. When she goes to a party, she is Sami. When talking about her childhood, she is more concrete, especially when talking about her grandmother. In these stories, the Sami language, Sami handicraft and traditional knowledge are more striking. This is something that I find in the other interviews as well. Arne talks a lot about his grandparents. When Arne was born, his family still lived in the small village where his grandparents lived, and used Sami as their everyday language. When they moved in his early childhood, they still visited his grandparents frequently:

'I remember the summer holidays in the fjord with my grandparents. The old village where grandmother and the others lived. We used to camp there in tents three weeks straight. I remember that very well from when I was little. I don't remember how old I

was then, but it was always fun to visit my grandmother (...), I remember that. I don't know if we had any other vacation.' (Arne 39)

Through these positive memories from his childhood, Arne positions himself in a Sami context. The summer holidays at his grandparents' home represents a performed Saminess. Sleeping in a tent, spending time with his grandparents, and memories of the fun they had, are bodily experiences with a performed Sami everyday life. This connects him emotionally to a Sami community. Arne's narrative is similar to the memories of another interviewee, Knut:

'When I grew up, we had sheep, and we used to join our parents up in the mountains to find the sheep. And then they told us stories about... "at this place, this happened" and things like that... We originally came from a reindeer herding family. From the old days, there are a lot of places that we [his family] used then. And they retell the stories from that time. Old fences for reindeer and turf huts and old reindeer paths... These are the values that we try to teach our children... The things in our culture and traditions.' (Knut 34)

Knut's ancestors were reindeer herders, and relatives of his are still reindeer herders. The childhood memories from the mountains with his family is an example of a performed Saminess that represents something beyond symbols. Knut tells me that he has never owned a suit, and that he only wears Sami clothes at weddings and other formal happenings. However, in the interview, he focuses mostly on closeness to nature. When I ask him about the concrete things that connect him to Sami culture, he answers:

'Yes, it is about... yes... duodji⁵ and food culture and learning... things that happen in the mountains in a way and in nature. We pay a lot of attention to that. We do that a lot. And listening to stories from the old days, knowing places and traces of Sami hut foundations and stones. These kinds of things... My grandmother tells me things like this. It has become important to me especially after I grew up to find these places. And then she tells me [about these places] and explain, and then I go up [in the mountains], and call her. "I'm not finding anything here", "Yes, it should be there" and things like that.' (Knut 34)

Through his walks in the mountains, he is able to visit the past through his grandmother's stories from the old days, and through traces of old Sami hut foundations and stones. His walks become a kind of performed Saminess, a way for Knut to connect the past, the present and the future. Even though his grandmother is too old now to join him, she is still present through technology.

⁵ Sami handicraft

In the mountain, he can phone her and ask her about the places that he visits, and she tells him stories from the past.

‘It is important to us that they [his children] join us... I tell them things that I know about these things. If they don’t catch everything that I say, they at least understand some of these things. They at least know about places with blister sedge⁶ and things like that. My father is also very interested in this. That we should know about different things.’ (Knut 34)

Through these walks with his children, he is able to pass on the fragments of the past to his children. The walks connect them bodily to the culture and the nature to which they belong. The Sami past, with its buildings and people who are long gone now, remains present through these walks. Knut says that this is a kind of Saminess that one cannot read in books or learn at the university. It is something that one must experience physically and in nature. For Knut, the Sami culture is something that one should learn by spending time in nature and by walking in the footsteps of his ancestors.

Closing remarks

One important part of the decolonization processes among Indigenous people, including the Sami people in Scandinavia, involves recovering from fragmentation, fighting for a society that enables this recovery. However, this is not only a political process, but a process that each individual with a Sami past must choose to take or not to take. People find new ways of linking together the past, present, and future, both emotionally, politically and through every-day activities. For Sami individuals like the ones I have interviewed, the process of detecting and reconnecting fragments of the past is an important part of the process of decolonization. While the use of clothes and language for some is the most important way articulating Sami identity, others are not comfortable with this way of showing Saminess. For them, a walk in nature, a boat trip or spending time with their family and telling stories from the past can be just as important way of performing Saminess in their everyday life. Putting the fragments together again involves processes in people’s everyday life, where fragments of the past becomes fragments of the present and the future. Research on Sami issues must address people’s everyday life and how they actually live their life, rather than just reproducing stereotypes of a

⁶ *Blister sedge* is used traditionally in Sami shoes as insulation. A suitable amount of dried blister sedge is used inside the shoes around the foot.

pure and authentic Sami culture, where the colonization of Sami land, culture and rights is silenced.

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