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“How Sámi do you feel today?”

Articulations of Sámi identities in Oslo

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Abstract

This thesis explores how Sámi in Oslo experience, articulate, and renegotiate their Sámi ethnic identity. Indigenous people are often expected to be visibly different from the majority population. Prevailing ideas of Indigenous people and their cultures tend to define Indigenous identities in terms of sharp boundaries vis-à-vis the majority population. Furthermore, Indigenous people are frequently assumed to be rooted in their ancestral homelands, and to be intimately connected to nature, rurality, and a traditional way of life. In light of such notions, an Oslo Sámi identity seemingly becomes a paradox. Based on qualitative interviews with Sámi living in Oslo, this thesis argues that dominant notions of who a Sámi is can create both incentives and constraints for individuals' navigation of ethnic identity. The people this study concerns fall between the alleged mutually exclusive categories of "Sámi" and "Norwegian", on the one hand, and "Indigenous" and "urban", on the other. They do not resonate with dichotomous understandings of Sámi and Norwegian culture and identity, nor with ideas that view Indigenous identity as incompatible with living in locales such as Oslo, an urban area located outside the Sámi ancestral homeland. Depending on context and purpose, they navigate within dominant notions of Sámi culture and identity while also creating alternative ways of articulating their Sámi identity. In doing so, they renegotiate what it means to be Sámi.

Key words: authenticity, ethnicity, identity, indigeneity, Sámi.

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Chapter 1. Introduction

On multiple occasions during my conversations with Sámi in Oslo, I was advised to visit Finnmark in Northern Norway. There, I would learn about *real* Sámi culture and identity. This advice, offered even prior to any interviews taking place, was to become one of the main themes of my research.

Indigenous people are often expected to be visibly different from the majority population (Sissons 2005, 39). Their cultures and identities tend to be presented in terms of sharp boundaries vis-à-vis the majority culture and identity. What is more, their cultures and identities are frequently assumed to be rooted in their ancestral homelands, and to be intimately connected to nature and a rural way of life. Where does this leave Sámi who live in the capital city of Norway, far from the Sámi ancestral homeland? In light of such notions, an Oslo Sámi identity seemingly becomes a paradox.

This thesis concerns people who fall between established categories in the “official scheme of things” (Sissons 2005, 39). To many Sámi in Oslo, this is dual in nature: They fall between the alleged mutually exclusive categories of “Sámi” and “Norwegian”, on the one hand, and “Indigenous” and “urban”, on the other. In a sense, they are part of both the minority and the majority population. From an Indigenous perspective, this creates a complex situation, as they can be described as part of both the colonized and the colonizers. They are individuals who find themselves “betwixt and between” (Turner 1967) categories that seem “tidy on paper” (Eriksen 2010, 77).

However, as this thesis aims to demonstrate, dominant notions of who a Sámi is can create both incentives and constraints for individuals’ identity navigation. Depending on context and purpose, Sámi in Oslo navigate within both dominant notions of Sámi culture and identity and alternative ways of articulating their Sámi identity. By this means, they are engaged in continuous renegotiations and redefinitions of who a Sámi *really* is and where a *real* Sámi lives. Ultimately, they are arguably challenging the assumed boundaries of Indigenous identities.

Who are the Sámi?

Today, it is officially recognized that the Norwegian nation-state was founded on the land of two peoples – Norwegians and Sámi (Pedersen 2002, 167). The Sámi are an Indigenous people and ethnic minority of Northern Europe who have traditionally resided in the northernmost regions of the present-day nation-states of Norway, Sweden, Finland, and Russia. These

regions, understood as the Sámi place of origin, are today referred to by the name of *Sápmi*,¹ a land that, in territorial terms, stretches from central Scandinavia to the Kola Peninsula of Russia (Eriksson 2002, 239; Berg-Nordlie and Andersen 2022, 31).

The Sámi were formerly referred to as “Lapps” or “Finns” by non-Sámi, and their lands as “Lappland”, “Lappmark” and “Finnmørk” (Berg-Nordlie and Andersen 2022, 31). Nowadays, the labels “Lapp” and “Finn” are viewed as offensive and outdated. The preferred term is the name “Sámi”, which is the name used by the Sámi themselves. The Sámi language is a Finno-Ugric language and belongs to the Uralic language family (Todal 2019). It is related to Finnish, Estonian, Hungarian, and certain minority languages in Russia, placing it in a different language family from the Scandinavian languages, which are Germanic and therefore Indo-European.

The Sámi are characterized by significant diversity, both in relation to language, culture and livelihoods (Eriksson 2002, 241). There are several Sámi subethnic groups, and ten distinctive but related Sámi languages (Berg-Nordlie and Andersen 2022, 40). Specifically, the Sámi languages constitute a so-called dialect continuum, meaning that the languages change gradually from north to south in a way that makes the neighboring languages on the continuum mutually intelligible (Todal 2019). The languages have differing vitality, and some are today entirely extinct (Berg-Nordlie and Andersen 2022, 41). As the state borders of the abovementioned nations cut across the Sámi cultural-linguistic regions, these languages are spoken irrespective of national borders (Berg-Nordlie and Andersen 2022, 40).² Today, there are three official Sámi languages in Norway: North Sámi, Lule Sámi, and South Sámi.

From Norwegianization to “Truth and Reconciliation”

The Nordic countries are often presented as outsiders to the European imperialist and colonialist projects (Mulinari, et al. 2009, 1). This perspective overlooks how the Norwegian state and majority population have treated the Sámi through the centuries.

In the 1800s, Sámi presence in the territories they inhabited came to be seen as a hindrance to state interests (Berg-Nordlie and Andersen 2022, 33). After Norway gained autonomy from Denmark in 1814,³ a thorough assimilation policy was implemented, aimed at eradicating the Sámi language and culture (Pedersen 2002, 167). At this time, processes of nation-building

¹ *Sápmi* is the Northern Sámi term for the Sámi homeland. In Lule Sámi, the term is *Sábme* and in South Sámi *Saepmie*. See appendix for map.

² See appendix for map of the Sámi languages.

³ Norway was under Danish rule until 1814, and then entered a union with Sweden that lasted until 1905.

began forming a Norwegian cultural consciousness and identity centered around a shared history, language, and traditions (Pedersen 2002, 168). In light of nation-building, the emerging Norwegian nation-state aimed to create a homogenous nation by assimilating the minorities within its territories (Anttonen 2003, 62).

The national assimilation policy, the so-called *Norwegianization policy*, was initiated in the mid-19th century and stretched across a hundred-year span (Stordahl 1997, 140). This period saw the establishment of, among other things, a new language policy implemented in schools where all teaching was to be conducted in Norwegian, boarding schools where Sámi children were interned, and a Land Sales Act which prohibited the sale of land to individuals not proficient in speaking, reading, and writing in the Norwegian language (Stordahl 1997, 140; 2008, 253).

The early 1900s saw the first attempts to organize Sámi interests, but it was not until the 1950s that a breakthrough occurred (Gaski 2008, 220). Sámi political emancipation reached a turning point in the 1970s and 1980s, particularly as a result of the so-called Alta case (Bjørklund 2000, 38). The case concerned a string of demonstrations against the government's plan to construct a power dam across the Alta River in Finnmark (Gaski 2008, 220).

“The silent revolution” has been used as a term to describe the developments that followed in the aftermath of the Alta case (Minde 2003, 121). Although the construction of the dam proceeded, there were significant political developments in the years to come, including an Indigenous turn in Sámi politics. The international focus on human rights that had grown after the Second World War, and Norway's active engagement in the United Nation's human rights work, made it difficult for the Norwegian government to justify much longer the evident gap between its international engagement and the politics within its own national borders (Stordahl 1996, 56).

In the years that followed, an amendment was made to the Norwegian Constitution (1988), granting the Sámi constitutional right to preserve and develop their culture, language, and way of life (Stordahl 2008, 255). This was followed by the establishment of the Sámi Parliament, *Sámediggi*, in 1989, which institutionalized and formalized Sámi politics (Bjerkli and Selle 2015, 17, 18). In 1990, Norway became the first country in the world to ratify the ILO Convention No. 169 concerning Indigenous and Tribal Peoples in Independent Countries. By doing so, the Norwegian government formally recognized the Sámi as an Indigenous people, based on the recognition that the Sámi inhabited the area of today's Norway prior to the

establishment of national borders and on the Sámi people's self-identification as Indigenous (Bjerkli and Selle 2015, 18). Consequently, Norwegian Sámi policy is grounded in international law.

On June 14, 2018, the Norwegian Parliament appointed an independent commission, the Truth and Reconciliation Committee, to investigate the assimilation policy and the injustices committed against the Sámi, Kven, Norwegian Finns, and Forest Finns (Sannhets og forsoningskommisjonen 2023, 14). The appointment of the commission was also intended to propose measures contributing to further reconciliation. The report from the investigation was published on June 1, 2023.

Articulations of Sámi identities in Oslo

Oslo can, in a sense, be described as a microcosmos of Sápmi, as the Sámi population in Oslo is highly diverse (Berg-Nordlie, Dankertsen and Winsvold 2022, 11). This diversity is also reflected among the people in this study. They belong to various Sámi sub-groups, with different linguistic, historical, and cultural backgrounds. Some have grown up in Oslo as second- and third-generation urban Sámi, while others have migrated from areas in Sápmi. Some are from Sámi-dominated areas, others are from Norwegian-dominated areas where Sámi culture constitutes a distant past. Some have experienced the assimilation policy firsthand, others the repercussions of it. Most have both Norwegian and Sámi families, some solely Sámi, and others, with also other cultural backgrounds. A common denominator is that the people in this study have lived either all or a significant part of their lives in Oslo.

Oslo is among the top three cities with the largest Sámi population in Norway, and the first among the top five cities located outside of Sápmi (Berg-Nordlie, Andersen and Dankertsen 2022, 171). In addition, as the capital of Norway, Oslo carries special political and economic centrality and could be described as a locus of power (Berg-Nordlie, Andersen and Dankertsen 2022, 204-205). However, not much research has been conducted on Sámi identity in Oslo. This correlates with a general tendency where research on Sámi identity seems to have “left larger urban settlements as a *terra incognita*” (Olsen 2018, 30). This trend is also emphasized in relation to Indigenous people elsewhere, as contemporary studies tend to focus on Indigenous people who live in rural areas rather than in cities (Peters and Andersen 2013, 2).

To close this introduction, I would like to share a story told by one of my interlocutors. Olav worked some years ago on a control commission for psychiatric hospitals in Northern Norway.

In one of these institutions, a Sámi man had ended his life by suicide. “Our job was to check what kind of diagnosis he had. Believe it or not, the diagnosis was ‘a Sámi’.”

The appointment of a Truth and Reconciliation Committee aimed at investigating the assimilation policy and the injustices committed against the Sámi marks an important step towards reconciliation between the Norwegian state, society, and the Sámi population. There is, however, a risk that the Norwegian state, “having confessed” to racism through the report of the Truth and Reconciliation Committee, may be perceived by the majority population as also having “recovered” from it (cf. Ahmed 2012, 47). Meanwhile, Sámi people still navigate the repercussions and remnants of colonial notions and assimilation policies from the past. This underscores the continued relevance and importance of research on Sámi issues today, and particularly how Sámi experience and navigate their ethnic identity as Sámi.

Given the above, the research question of this thesis is as follows:

How do Sámi in Oslo experience, articulate, and renegotiate their Sámi identity?

Thesis overview

Chapter 2 presents remarks and considerations regarding the methodological foundation upon which this thesis rests. Chapter 3 discusses the theoretical framework of the study. Chapter 4 outlines historical and political processes that have played a significant role in shaping dominant views on Sámi culture and identity in Norway today. Chapter 5 discusses the empirical findings of the thesis. The chapter in question is composed of two main parts. The first part discusses how my interlocutors experience, articulate, and renegotiate their Sámi identity in relation to dominant notions of Sámi identity. The second part explores various ways my interlocutors experience, articulate, and renegotiate their Sámi identity within the context of Oslo. Finally, chapter 6 presents the concluding remarks and summarizes the main arguments of the thesis.

Chapter 2. Methodology

Research position

Who I am as a researcher matters (T.A. Olsen 2017, 206). This holds particularly true, as the present study rests on qualitative research (Fangen 2010, 146; Skille 2022, 833). I devote the following section to a discussion on the implications surrounding two central, and perhaps seemingly contradictory, aspects of my research position: Researching Sámi issues as a non-Sámi and conducting “anthropology at home”.

Researching Indigenous issues as non-Indigenous

“From the vantage point of the colonized [...] the term ‘research’ is inextricably linked to European imperialism and colonialism. The word itself, ‘research’, is probably one of the dirtiest words in the Indigenous world’s vocabulary” (Smith 2021, 1). With these lines, Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2021) introduces her much-cited book on decolonizing methodologies, underlining the damaging role research has played for Indigenous peoples on a global scale.

This is also relevant in relation to the Sámi. Physical anthropological and racial-biological research was conducted on the Sámi, involving measurements of skulls and bodies of both living and dead, statistical comparisons, and racial classifications (Kyllingstad 2017, 320; Dankertsen 2019, 118).⁴ It was believed that these could be correlated with mental capacity and levels of civilization.⁵

As indicated above, the power asymmetry between non-Indigenous researcher and Indigenous peoples is historically rooted. Therefore, I have found it necessary to reflect upon and critically examine my own research position (T.A. Olsen 2017, 206; Skille 2022, 841). I have sought to review my pre-existing knowledge about Sámi issues,⁶ remain critical of the sources I choose, and seek out Sámi perspectives and research conducted by Sámi scholars. Nevertheless, this

⁴ The Sámi were considered an inferior, non-European race and were thus regarded as racially different from the Norwegians, who were understood as belonging to a superior “Nordic master race” (Kyllingstad 2017, 320).

⁵ One may also add that the Sámi ethno-political movement drew on ethnographical descriptions of Sámi culture (Stordahl 1996, 100), a tendency found among many ethno-political movements (Eriksen 2010, 22). Many Sámi have adopted and related themselves to anthropological notions in their individual lives, prevalent among these being the notion of stigma found in Harald Eidheim’s work (Eriksen 2009, 41). This underscores the importance of reflecting on own research, and its possible consequences for the people involved.

⁶ This may be particularly relevant as Norwegian engagement in colonialism and Sámi perspectives have been undercommunicated in the Norwegian public sphere, education, and research (Eriksen, Aamaas and Bjerknes 2022, 21).

also entails recognizing the heterogeneity of Sámi perspectives (Eriksen, Aamaas and Bjerknes 2022, 23; Skille 2022, 831).

Researching Sámi issues as a non-Sámi individual can present certain challenges. Sámi researchers, as “insiders”, may find it easier to gain trust, especially on issues that may be regarded as personal, such as identity (Gjerpe 2013, 13). They may also pick up on certain cultural nuances, reducing the risk of cultural misunderstandings (Berg-Nordlie, Dankertsen and Winsvold 2022, 15). Moreover, Indigenous people researching Indigenous issues is essential for ensuring that Indigenous people can represent themselves and their knowledges on their own premises (see Smith 2021, 172).

Nonetheless, being an “outsider” may also generate several opportunities. My position as an outsider can make it easier for some of my interlocutors to be open, critical, and honest about their experiences of being Sámi (Berg-Nordlie, Dankertsen and Winsvold 2022, 15). Especially as many of my interlocutors do not participate in any (organized) Sámi community and are also at times ambivalent about their Sámi identity, they might find it easier to address such issues with a non-Sámi.

Anthropology at home

Despite my “outsider” position as a non-Sámi, my research may still, in any case, be described as “anthropology at home”. “Home” is here correlated with national borders: I grew up in Oslo, Norway, and Norwegian is my first language. This can entail both challenges and advantages.

The Norwegian language was the means of communication in the interviews. All my interlocutors speak the Norwegian language fluently, and one is also fluent in the Sámi language. Sharing a common first language may have been central in generating a sense of closeness and familiarity. In turn, this could help foster insightful conversations, enable me to capture nuances in their utterances, and ultimately provide me with a rich empirical material.

The above is also relevant to non-linguistic behaviour, as my interlocutors and I may share similar cultural codes. Additionally, having grown up in Oslo, I have an emic view of the city. This possibly provides me with a more nuanced and in-depth knowledge about the context of Oslo, which could also help establish a sense of familiarity between my interlocutors and myself.

Conducting anthropology at home, and gaining adequate analytical distance, may nonetheless pose certain challenges. One could be subjected to a form of “homeblindness”, i.e., insufficient

reflection on the anthropologist's own cultural background and position (Gullestad 1991; Eriksen 2009, 38). Additionally, one may note that the "insider" perspective is not static. As Marilyn Strathern observes, "the grounds of familiarity and distance are shifting ones" (1987, 16).

Although I conduct research at "home", familiarity is not always given; my position is differentiated from that of my interlocutors in various ways, one of them being my role as a researcher – resembling a form of *halfie* (Abu-Lughod 1991). In this regard, I have, for instance, made efforts not to assume that my interlocutors and I operate with equal terms, concepts, and categories (Gjerpe 2013, 13). What is more, despite having conducted anthropology at home, I have not been an anthropology student at home. Being a student of anthropology in Greece may have allowed me to maintain a certain analytical distance, as I could reflect on and draw inspiration from a quite different context. This could, perhaps, add nuance and enrichment to my "anthropology at home".

Methodological approach

This thesis explores how Sámi in Oslo experience, articulate, and renegotiate their Sámi identity. For this reason, it has been vital to gain access to the subjective experiences of my interlocutors, something that interviewing as a methodological approach had a particular opportunity to provide. As Sámi identity may be experienced as a rather personal and complex question for many of my interlocutors, it is possibly a topic they less easily discuss in their everyday life. In this regard, the interview setting may be particularly valuable (Staples and Smith 2015, 2). Additionally, as a non-Sámi and an "outsider", interviewing allowed me to learn about and access a setting that might otherwise be relatively inaccessible to me (Weiss 1994, 1; Fangen 2010, 172).

Interlocutors

The participants in this study⁷ were found primarily through my own personal network. I did not know any of my interlocutors beforehand, and we were often separated by more than one connecting link. Nevertheless, I experienced that having an intermediary link made it easier to gain people's trust (Weiss 1994, 34). Finding participants through my personal network also allowed me to connect with people "outside" of the Sámi community in Oslo, whom I would not have encountered if I had sought out a Sámi organization. Yet, this presented certain

⁷ See appendix for list of interlocutors.

challenges. Some were unsure whether they were suited for my research; “I am not a traditional Sámi”, I was told. As a result, I often found it necessary to clarify that I was looking for people with diverse connections to Sámi culture and identity.

Additionally, I contacted one participant through social media, who connected me to other participants – a form of snowball sampling (Weiss 1994, 34). Having experienced earlier in the research process that e-mails frequently received no response, I preferred using a more personal means of communication, such as Facebook.

A primary preoccupation of mine was to find people with diverse perspectives and experiences of being Sámi in Oslo. Therefore, I sought to locate people with various historical, linguistic, generational, regional, and cultural backgrounds – resembling, in this case, a form of purposive sampling (Fangen 2010, 55).

Interviews

I conducted semi-structured interviews, supported by an interview guide designed in advance. The purpose of the guide was to enable the collection of comparable data from all participants and to function both as a means of support and preparation for the interview (Weiss 1994, 49). In addition to some principal and common questions in all interviews, the guide was adjusted for each interlocutor when needed. The guide included topics such as family background, social environment, how the interviewees understood and experienced their ethnic identity, and their reflections on being Sámi in Oslo.

I found it important to create a comfortable and informal interview setting that could encourage an open and engaging conversation. Accordingly, the questions were formulated to allow the conversation to unfold as freely as possible. This approach gave me the opportunity to follow up with alternative questions and provided me with a great sense of flexibility, without being constrained by the guide. Moreover, since questions of identity can be especially personal for some, not the least when they concern painful experiences of loss and colonization in the past and present, I found it all the more important to establish a secure and comfortable environment.

The duration of each interview ranged from one and a half to two hours. Shorter interviews usually did not allow enough time to address central questions in depth, while I experienced that longer interviews could make the interviewee slightly tired. The choice of interview location was also thoroughly considered. If the interviewee had no preference, I suggested a café. I consciously chose the specific café and table, to ensure a spot where our conversation

would not be easily overheard while still being able to create an informal and comfortable atmosphere.

At the beginning of each interview, I asked my interlocutors if they were comfortable with the conversation being recorded, which they all were. A disadvantage associated with recording is that the interviewees might become overly preoccupied and fixated on what they say. However, the recorder was a great support in the sense that I could focus on the conversation rather than being too concerned with writing notes or remembering every detail of the conversation.

Following each interview, I made notes on the general atmosphere, central emotions expressed during the conversation and the feelings I was left with afterwards. This was a great help in terms of preserving essential details of the interview context that could be missed by the recorder. The transcription process allowed me to take notice of new aspects, gave rise to many analytical reflections, and became central in processing and analysing the empirical material (Fangen 2010, 180).

Finally, I also conducted one group interview, or focus group interview, with four of the participants. I did not know any of them beforehand, but the interviewees were all in varying degrees acquainted with each other. The group interview unfolded in a manner more characteristic of participant observation rather than a typical semi-structured interview. I let the conversation develop freely without disrupting the discussion, taking on an observing role. This allowed me to capture aspects that I experienced as more limited in a one-on-one interview. A challenge associated with the group interview was that it was more restricted in terms of how in-depth the conversation could be. Additionally, the interviewees may have refrained from elaborating on certain personal topics. Nonetheless, I will argue that, in any case, this form of interview allowed me to observe a discussion among Sámi that could, in other contexts, be quite limited for me as an “outsider”.

Methodological considerations

I will briefly discuss some possible limitations of the present study. The research relies primarily on interviews as a methodological approach. Given that observation can be as important as conversation, certain nuances may be lost (Eriksen 2013, 25). Nonetheless, as Katrine Fangen (2010, 176) notes, one does not necessarily learn *more* through observation, rather, one learns something *else*.

Moreover, the concepts I choose to focus on, have an impact on the nature of the data I gather (Eriksen 2010, 219). My focus on ethnicity shapes what I see and what I do not see. As Eriksen emphasizes, “In a sense, ethnicity is created by the analyst when he or she goes out into the world and raises questions about ethnicity” (2010, 21). Thus, it could be said that I had affected the data even prior to any interview taking place (Gjerpe 2013, 13). A counteractive supplement could be an additional focus on non-ethnic aspects (Eriksen 2010, 218). For instance, I could have focused on regional distinctions that may also be relevant to the experiences of being Sámi in Oslo, specifically the divide between northern and southern Norway (Dankertsen 2006, 99).⁸

The conceptual focus on ethnicity also influenced my interlocutors. I was told, “I started to think more about it when you contacted me,” and “I have not thought about this before”. In this sense, our encounter seems to have made my interlocutors more aware of their ethnic identity (even prior to the interview taking place), potentially rendering ethnicity a more relevant concept to them than it had been earlier. This underlines how the interview is not an isolated event but relates to and informs surrounding everyday social relations and life (Staples and Smith 2015, 7). Neither the researcher nor the interviewee leaves the interview unchanged or unaffected.

Additionally, the very term “identity” might pose some challenges. Identity is a concept that asks individuals to be able to demonstrate “who they are” in a coherent and fixed manner (Anthias 2008 cited in Notaras 2016, 15). This expectation does not always align with how individuals both understand and express their identity in their everyday life.

I recognize that my findings may not capture the full diversity of Sámi in Oslo. One may also add that I did not interview any Sámi who recently emigrated to Oslo. Nonetheless, my findings may still offer valuable insights into certain experiences of being “betwixt and between” the categories of “Sámi” and “Norwegian,” and “Indigenous” and “urban.”

Ethical considerations

Ethical considerations have been handled with particular care throughout the research process. This thesis follows ethical guidelines formulated by the European Commission (Iphofen 2021) and the Norwegian National Committee for Research Ethics in the Social Sciences and the

⁸ Identity constructions among people in Northern Norway are frequently formed in relation and contrast to Southern Norwegian culture (F. Eidheim 1993 cited in Olsen 2018, 213). In this respect, other boundaries can be more relevant than the ethnic ones, and people can find themselves on the same side of the boundary regardless of ethnic affiliation (Gaski 2008, 233).

Humanities (NESH 2022). Aside from general national guidelines, there are no specific rules for conducting research on Sámi issues or within Sámi communities (T.A. Olsen 2016, 28). Thus, perspectives on ethics from Indigenous scholars internationally, as well as Torjer A. Olsen's (2016) remarks on ethics in research related to Sámi issues, have been taken into consideration.

I have strived to conduct research on Sámi identity in a responsible and respectful manner, recognizing that responsibility and respect are central values in research into Indigenous issues (T.A. Olsen 2016, 25). I have attempted to provide adequate information to my interlocutors about my research, particularly to ensure that their participation is based on free and informed consent (Iphofen 2021, 30; NESH 2022, art. 15, 16). Thus, I have sought to communicate explicitly to my interlocutors what my research entails, for whom I am doing it, and for what reason (T.A. Olsen 2016, 39-40).

To maintain respect and responsibility in my research, I have sought to protect my interlocutors' identity and integrity through anonymization and confidential handling of the data (Iphofen 2021, 42; NESH 2022, art. 20, 21). I have used pseudonyms, anonymized the names of their hometowns, avoided specifying exact ages, and excluded information that could potentially be traced back to my interlocutors. This also entailed the responsible protection of data, transcribed material, and audio recordings from the interviews. The transcribed material has been anonymized and audio recordings have been deleted.

In a Sámi setting, one has emphasized the significance of research being grounded in Sámi perspectives, needs, and values (Drugge 2016, 9). In this regard, I have strived to decentre myself (T.A. Olsen 2017, 212): To reflect on my positionality, and emphasize and value the perspectives of my interlocutors.

Finally, I have found it highly important to reflect upon and be aware of the power asymmetry inherent in the relationship between my interlocutors and myself as a researcher (Iphofen 2021, 27). For this reason, I have aimed to be reflexive about what implications my research position may have had for the present research, e.g., for the questions I raise, what I define as a "problem" to study, the gathering of data, and the analysis of the empirical material. Despite efforts at decentring myself, I recognize that the interpretations of my interlocutors' utterances are, ultimately, my own. Knowledge is produced in the interplay between the researcher and the interviewee (Weiss 1994, 65), where I have been an active counterpart.

Chapter 3. Ethnic identity and urban indigeneity

Ethnicity

Identification

To explore how Sámi in Oslo experience, articulate, and renegotiate their Sámi identity, ethnicity and identity are central concepts. To follow Richard Jenkins (2008b, 5), identity is not a “thing” people “have”, so to speak, but something one *does*, it is a *process*, not a static property of individuals. By this means, identity is something people can navigate and negotiate, shaped by relations and context (Eriksen and Sajjad 2020, 102, 104). There are many dimensions to people’s identity, and they can be both ambiguous, inconsistent, and at times even contradictory (Jenkins 2008b, 13).

Particularly in an Indigenous setting, the term “identity” can give rise to misleading ideas of authenticity and purity (Dankertsen 2022, 108). Therefore, to emphasize the processual aspect of identity, the term *identification* (Jenkins 2008b, 5) will be used to refer to my interlocutors’ Sámi identity.

Central to individuals’ identification are the various collectivities within which people participate, albeit some become more deeply anchored in people’s sense of self than others (Eriksen 1997, 36, 40). In any case, all collectivities draw boundaries around them – identity both unites and divides (Eriksen 1997, 40). One such means of demarcating boundaries is ethnicity.

Ethnic boundaries

Fredrik Barth’s (1969) counterintuitive insight that ethnic differences are not the same as cultural differences, changed the paradigm of research on ethnicity. In his pivotal and much-cited book *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries*, Barth (1969, 15) suggests that the main focus of investigation should be the construction and maintenance of ethnic boundaries, rather than on “the cultural stuff”. He emphasizes that cultural traits defining group distinctiveness are not “objective” differences, but instead those perceived as important and made relevant in interactions between ethnic groups, with the maintenance of ethnic boundaries relying on making these perceived cultural differences continuously relevant (Barth 1969, 14; Eriksen and Sajjad 2020, 52). This means that ethnic boundaries can endure even when individuals change membership in ethnic groups, when the cultural stuff that represents the group changes, and

when goods and information flow across ethnic boundaries (Barth 1969, 9-10, 14). Ethnicity is, then, not a *property* of groups and individuals, but an aspect of the *relation* between them (Eriksen 2013, 139).

Barth (1969, 11) highlights that ethnic group membership relies both on ascription and self-ascription, with particular emphasis on the latter. Ethnicity makes a difference only when individuals themselves embrace, experience and act on it (Barth 1994, 13). Along these lines, cultural distinctiveness can become a resource that is undercommunicated or overcommunicated by the individual (Eriksen 2013, 141). In short, following Barth (1969), ethnic groups and identities are understood not as static and immutable; instead, as relational and processual, shaped by context and subject to ongoing negotiation.

In terms of ascription by others, one may add the power of others to define identities and groups. As Jenkins (2008a, 76) maintains, one must take into account both power and authority, and how diverse forms of domination and power dynamics contribute to the formation of ethnic and other identities. Identities are largely formed by social, cultural, and political forces, and especially states hold considerable power to shape the choices people can make and to decide the consequences of their choices (Danforth 2000, 87, 88). In sum, ethnicity can be understood as a continuous process of ethnic identification, which rests on processes of both internal and external definition (Jenkins 2008a, 15, 76).

Betwixt and between

The concept of boundaries does not always resonate with my interlocutors' experiences and ethnic identification. As Thomas Hylland Eriksen (2013, 141) emphasizes, it can often be more suitable to speak of grey areas rather than clearly delimited boundaries, where who and what is inside and outside the ethnic boundary is more diffuse; people can be neither-nor or both-and Sámi and Norwegian.

To be neither-nor or both-and could be described as a form of ethnic liminality (Eriksen 2023, 271). The concept of liminality, first introduced by Arnold van Gennep and later developed by Victor Turner (1967), concerns a transitional phase or an ambiguous state between one state and another. In the liminal period, to follow Victor Turner (1967, 97), the individual stands "betwixt and between" categories, a condition of ambiguity and paradox that confuses established classifications – the liminal is "neither this nor that, and yet is both" (Turner 1967, 99).

When applying the concept of liminality to ethnic identification, this is not to say that being neither-nor or both-and ethnic categories concerns a temporary “phase” in which the individual stands before achieving a “complete” ethnic identity. Rather, the term “betwixt and between” is here applied to refer to ethnic ambiguity and hybridity,⁹ and how ambiguous identities often become “structurally invisible” in terms of the recognized categories in society (Turner 1967, 95). That is, they fall between categories that seem “tidy on paper” (cf. Eriksen 2010, 77).

Liminality is not only associated with separation and fragmentation but also with reflection and growth; one is forced to reflect on the society one is part of and the forces that create and maintain them (Turner 1967, 99). As Turner writes, liminality has the possibility to “expose the basic building blocks of culture” (1967, 110).

In this sense, to be neither-nor or both-and could be experienced as both constraining and as forging a range of possibilities, depending on context and situation. Drawing on Barth’s term of the *entrepreneur*, Eriksen (2013, 142) highlights the possibility of describing people with neither-nor or both-and identifications, as ethnic entrepreneurs who see opportunities where others would see constraints. A more structure-oriented perspective such as the seminal work of Mary Douglas (1997), Eriksen (2013, 142) notes, could be employed to describe such identifications as perceived *ethnic anomalies* who do not fit into the established classification systems and become “matter out of place”. Both perspectives are useful to understand how my interlocutors experience, articulate, and renegotiate their Sámi identification.

The map and the terrain

Any study of ethnicity must, as argued, distinguish between dominant notions of ethnicity and culture and the ways people experience and articulate their ethnic identification in their everyday lives; one must keep the map and the terrain apart (Eriksen and Saggiad 2020, 97).

Along these lines, I draw inspiration from Gerd Baumann’s (1996) distinction between *dominant* and *demotic discourses* of ethnic groups and culture to distinguish between dominant notions of Sámi culture and identity found in institutional and political discourses and the ways my interlocutors, in their everyday lives, break with the dominant discourses¹⁰ and find alternative ways of articulating their Sámi identification.

⁹ It is important to note that Norwegian identities can be as much hybrid as Sámi identities. As Sissons (2005, 57) argues, hybridity has often been a term used for “others”, which in turn perpetuates the binary distinction between “Indigenous otherness” and the “post-settler self”.

¹⁰ I refer to both dominant and demotic discourses in plural, as this recognizes the co-existence of various discourses on both levels.

Based on his study of the multi-ethnic London suburb of Southall, Gerd Baumann (1996) illustrates how the dominant discourse, evident both in common-sense perceptions of ethnic groups and in policy frameworks, presents ethnic groups as “communities” and links them to reified¹¹ notions of culture (Baumann 1996, 17, 188). In everyday life, however, instead of seeing culture as a reified possession of ethnic groups, individuals actively renegotiate the meanings of culture and community, separating the two notions and reconsidering them in processes of making and remaking “social facts” (Baumann 1996, 189, 195). Baumann refers to this discourse as the demotic, a non-dominant and alternative discourse “about culture as a continuous process and community as a conscious creation” (1996, 34). The people of Southall navigate between the two, depending on context and purpose, demonstrating what Baumann (1996, 34-35) calls a dual discursive competence.

I draw inspiration from central aspects of Baumann’s use of the term demotic discourse that I find especially relevant to the ways my interlocutors articulate their Sámi identification in their everyday lives. My interlocutors’ alternative ways of articulating their Sámi identification arguably suggest that they also operate with another concept of culture than that found in the dominant discourses: Culture as a continuous and dynamic process that rests on personal agency, renegotiations of ethnic boundaries and redefinitions of what being Sámi means in different contexts (cf. Baumann 1996, 34; 2015, 222). In this view, I have chosen to describe this as a form of demotic discourse on Sámi ethnic identity and culture.

Decolonizing perspectives

To explore articulations of Sámi identities in Oslo, I also draw on decolonizing perspectives.¹² In the case of the Sámi, colonization was a gradual process: It is not a matter of who came first, but rather of historical presence (Berg-Nordlie, Dankertsen and Winsvold 2022, 8-9; T.A. Olsen 2022, 96). Following Patrick Wolfe (2006, 390), the colonization of Sápmi is understood as a *structure*, not as an event – a perspective that enables me to explore how colonial structures continue to affect Sámi people today. Wolfe (2006, 388) speaks of the settler colonial logic of elimination that seeks to eliminate the existence and presence of Indigenous people. This can

¹¹ Reification refers to the assumption that ethnic and cultural groups have persistent and enduring features (Anttonen 2003, 49).

¹² The term “decolonizing” has been preferred over “postcolonial”. Firstly, the term postcolonial can imply an “over, finished business” (Smith 2021, 27) and, thus, locate colonialism in the past. As Indigenous activist Bobby Sykes once expressed, “What? Post-colonialism? Have they left?” (Smith 2021, 27). Secondly, in the case of the Sámi, it is not possible to locate someone who *arrived*. As Astri Dankertsen formulates, “If, from a Sámi perspective, the colonizers neither arrived nor left, where is then the postcolonial?” (2016, 26).

take various forms, such as physical genocide, expropriation, marginalization, and assimilation by eradicating Indigenous culture and language.

Urban indigeneity

All over the world, Indigenous peoples are undergoing increased urbanization (Berg-Nordlie, Andersen and Dankertsen 2022, 1). Indeed, the Sámi population in the cities has grown in all the Scandinavian countries, including Norway (Nyseth and Pedersen 2014, 131).¹³ Yet, it is important to note that urban Indigenous life is not an occurrence of recent times, a prevalent assumption held in Western thought (Berg-Nordlie, Andersen and Dankertsen 2022, 4). In fact, there are several examples of Indigenous towns and cities pre-colonization, as well as early settlements of Indigenous peoples in cities established by the colonizers.

Such notions are connected to ideas of authenticity¹⁴ that have been central to colonial representations of Indigenous peoples found in Western philosophical traditions from the 17th century (Theodossopoulos 2013b, 342).¹⁵ Early European thought assumed that Indigenous identities and cultures were so inherently rooted in their ancestral lands, in rural areas, and in nature, that they were incapable of participating in the modern world and urban life, without losing their cultures and identities (Peters and Andersen 2013, 4, 5). Such notions have largely maintained their relevance.

In view of such notions, “urban” and “Indigenous” become incompatible concepts (Peters and Andersen 2013, 11). *Urban indigeneity* appears to be an inauthentic and anomalous condition (Sissons 2005, 39) – an “out-of-placeness” (Andersen and Peters 2013, 380).

Repressive authenticity

Ideas of authenticity that hold Indigenous people to *really* belong in rural areas and in closeness to nature (Sissons 2005, 39; Andersen and Peters 2013, 379-380), can be described as repressive demands for authenticity (Wolfe 1994, 111; Sissons 2005, 28). According to Jeffrey Sissons, repressive authenticity “operates primarily as a mechanism of exclusion; those who cannot be placed securely within one of two categories – ‘native’ or ‘settler’ – become people out of

¹³ The increase in the number of Sámi living in cities is both linked to urbanization and to revitalization of Sámi culture among the pre-existing Sámi population in the respective urban areas (Nyseth and Pedersen 2014, 131).

¹⁴ The concept of authenticity represents a measurement for how genuine objects, traditions, as well as social groups are understood to be (Theodossopoulos 2013a, 400).

¹⁵ Based on Western philosophical traditions from the 17th century, prevalent notions held that authenticity could be discovered in parts of the world “untouched by the superficial conventions of Western societies” and, thus, presented in contrast to modernity, where authenticity can either be found “deep in oneself” or among the “exotic Other” (Theodossopoulos 2013b, 342) – the pre-modern Noble Savage (Olsen 2018, 100).

place” (2005, 39). Repressive authenticity creates “excluded middles” (Wolfe 1994, 112): People who are impure and inauthentic, who do not fit in “the official scheme of things” and become, thus, “out of place” (Sissons 2005, 39). In this sense, repressive authenticity can also be associated with the assumption that one is either Sámi or Norwegian, one cannot be both.

Previous research

There has not been conducted extensive research on Sámi identities in Oslo; it seems to have constituted a *terra incognita* (cf. Olsen 2018, 30). Nonetheless, some studies can be mentioned, central to these being two master’s theses.

Astri Dankertsen (2006) demonstrates how the vast heterogeneity of Sámi people and their identities in Oslo makes room for diverse expressions of Sámi identity in the city. Sámi in Oslo are continuously engaged in processes of bridging the traditional and the modern, drawing on Sámi traditions and simultaneously innovating new cultural expressions. This also leads to tensions in terms of what it means to be Sámi today and of prevailing understandings of authenticity (Dankertsen 2006, 101). At the same time, Sámi in Oslo relate to a society, both locally and globally, where other aspects than ethnicity are of relevance.

Kajsa Kemi Gjerpe (2013), based on research in several cities in Norway, including Oslo, emphasizes how the association between indigeneity and rurality renders urban Sámi people “out of place”. On the one hand, by virtue of being Indigenous people in the city, they deviate from ideas of the “ordinary urban citizen” and consequently become “out of place” in the urban setting. On the other hand, they also become “out of place” in the Sámi category, as they do not fulfil the expectations associated with Sámi culture and an Indigenous rural way of life. Nevertheless, the urban space also facilitates various and creative cultural expressions.

In terms of urban Indigenous people in other parts of the world, Evelyn Peters and Chris Andersen (2013, 9), based on studies in Canada, the United States, Australia, and New Zealand, show the persistence and complexity of urban Indigenous life. Despite common assumptions that Indigenous cultures “die out” in urban locales – rooted in colonial representations of Indigenous peoples and cultures as “out of place” in the city context – the authors demonstrate that, on the contrary, “indigeneity survives, adapts and innovates in modern cities” (Peters and Andersen 2013, 2). These findings correlate with studies of urban Sámi identity in various Norwegian cities, as well as cities in other Nordic countries (see Nyseth and Pedersen 2014; Berg-Nordlie, Dankertsen and Winsvold 2022).

Chapter 4. From social stigma to Sámi spirit

Sometimes I think the talk about stereotypes is difficult, because they also convey such an important culture. Those identity markers are a very important part of people's everyday life and identity.

(Jenny, 40-50 years old)

The above dilemma expressed by one of my interlocutors, Jenny, can be associated with broader questions surrounding dominant views on Sámi ethnic identity. In the following section, I will discuss the emergence of a collective Sámi identity, where the post-war era played a formative role. This period saw two parallel developments: One that seemingly saw the disappearance of Sámi culture, and another that saw the first breakthrough of Sámi ethnopolitical organization.

“I was so happy that I could not speak any Sámi”

I was so happy that I could not speak any Sámi. I had just started school, and I was so relieved about something that I did *not* know.

(Astrid, 60-70 years old)

A historical turning point in Sámi history came after the Second World War (Bjørklund 2000, 6). In 1944, the German Army deployed a scorched-earth policy, burning down the areas of Northern Troms and Finnmark upon their retraction (Stordahl 1996, 50). A majority of the Sámi population resided in the burnt-down areas, and the destruction had vast consequences for Sámi culture.

The reconstruction of these areas led to the incorporation of the Sámi population into the wider Norwegian national community, also in a cultural sense (Bjørklund 2000, 15). The reconstruction followed standardized solutions imposed by Norwegian authorities, relying on Norwegian standards without consideration for the cultural and ethnic diversity in the region (Bjørklund 2000, 6).

Moreover, the 1950s and 1960s – a time characterized by prosperity, optimism, and modernization – brought about a thorough national standardization through the establishment of the Welfare State (Bjørklund 2000, 12). The Welfare State was based upon the principle of equality; all citizens were supposed to have the same access to societal resources and benefits (Bjørklund 2000, 9). This presupposed that all citizens shared the same cultural competence that the new Welfare society was built upon, i.e., Norwegian language, culture, and belonging (Bjørklund 2000, 14). There was not supposed to be a difference between rich and poor, nor between Sámi and Norwegian (Bjørklund 2000, 9) – resembling what has been referred to as *difference-blind rights* (Holtung 2009, 82).

Throughout these decades, it was clear to many Sámi that sufficient competence in Norwegian language and culture was an absolute necessity to partake in the national prosperity growth (Bjørklund 2000, 12). In this context, Sámi identity did not only appear completely irrelevant, but it also constituted a social stigma. As Eidheim (1969, 45) demonstrated in a local coastal community in the 1950s, it was believed that to successfully participate in the Norwegian welfare state, one had to become Norwegian.¹⁶

Additionally, the migration from rural areas to urban areas reinforced the Norwegianization process (Bjørklund 2000, 16).¹⁷ The postwar period was characterized by growing centralization and urbanization, both within the northern areas and towards southern cities, such as Oslo (Berg Nordlie and Andersen 2022, 75). In their new places of residence, many Sámi had left their Sámi past behind.

“Show your Sámi spirit!”

It was shouted out massively. Show your Sámi spirit! ČSV! ČSV!

(Olav, 70-80 years old)

I have raised the flag and shouted ČSV many times throughout my life.

(Maja, 70-80 years old)

In the same period, attempts to organize Sámi interests started gaining momentum (Gaski 2008, 220). The establishment of a Sámi committee in 1956, aimed at investigating matters regarding the Sámi, marked a distinct break with the previous climate of the Norwegianization policy (Bjørklund 2000, 17). In 1959, the committee proposed to the Norwegian government a series of measures to strengthen Sámi language and culture. In addition, Sámi matters were becoming a central point of interest to students and academics, both Sámi and non-Sámi (Bjørklund 2000, 24)¹⁸.

Sámi political emancipation reached a turning point in the 1970s and 1980s, especially as a result of the Alta case (see chapter 1) (Bjørklund 2000, 38). During this time, the definition of

¹⁶ During this period, there was a marked decline in people who identified themselves as Sámi. An illuminating example is the censuses from the municipality of Kvænangen on the coast of Finnmark. In 1930, 61% of the population stated that they were non-Norwegian, meaning Sámi or Kven, and in 1950, the percentage was 0 (Bjørklund 2000, 15).

¹⁷ Due to lacking data on the Sámi population, it is difficult to specify the trend of urbanization specifically among the Sámi (Berg-Nordlie and Andersen 2022, 77). Regarding the population of Northern Norway in general, the latter half of the 1900s witnessed a broad trend of urbanization as numerous rural inhabitants emigrated to urban areas in the region or moved to cities in the south (Berg-Nordlie and Andersen 2022, 75).

¹⁸ Already by 1948 a Sámi Association had been established in Oslo (Bjørklund 2000, 24).

the Sámi as an Indigenous people was first put on the agenda, and Sámi were active participants in the establishment of the World Council of Indigenous Peoples in 1975 (Bjørklund 2000, 26; Stordahl 1996, 94).

The Sámi movement concerned not only obtaining equality between Norwegians and Sámi, but also promoting a Sámi national community – the Sámi understood as *a people*, with their own language and history, divided by four nation-states (Bjørklund 2000, 25).

The years ahead saw a political and cultural bloom that was never seen before in Sámi history – a period also called “ČSV” (Bjørklund 2000, 28). “ČSV” – often referred to as meaning “show your Sámi spirit” – became like “Red Power” and “Black Power”, a term for those that sought to change the situation of the oppressed and for those that stood in confrontation with the Norwegian state (Stordahl 1996, 87).

A vital revitalization of Sámi culture emerged; old cultural traits were revived, while others were created (Bjørklund 2000, 29). A new wave of creative cultural expression was now in full blossom. Signs of Sáminess that previously had been stigmatized became a treasure and a capital – a richness from which one collected symbols in the process of ethnic revitalization (Stordahl 1996, 152). Young Sámi wanted to “take back” what they had lost (Stordahl 1996, 84). From being a stigmatized identity, leading many Sámi to change their ethnic identity from Sámi to Norwegian in a matter of twenty to thirty years, a reversal could now be witnessed: People were actively searching for their Sámi “roots” and ways of confirming their Sámi identity (Thuen 2002, 285), including many Sámi in the cities (Berg-Nordlie and Andersen 2022, 63). The Sámi ethnopolitical movement represented an alternative way of being Sámi – a new Sámi self-image was emerging.

Official Sáminess and its emblems

You have walked the path of accepting yourself as a Sámi, and then you meet someone who rejects you because you are not born in the mountains, you are not a reindeer herder, and you cannot speak the language. I still get the question, ‘are you a *real* Sámi?’.

(Marit, 60-70-years old)

In the process of creating a new Sámi self-image, cultural traits were used as a means of demarcating the new Sámi community and of articulating the *boundaries* of the Sámi ethnic group. Specifically, the Sámi movement drew on symbols that could both mark boundaries against Norwegian culture (externally) and simultaneously unify Sámi across internal differences (internally) (Olsen 2015, 336). In this way, Sámi culture was highlighted as distinct

from but equal to Norwegian culture and society – what Eidheim (1971, 74) calls processes of dichotomization and complementarization.

The traits that were based upon to demarcate a distinctive and visible Sámi culture vis-à-vis the Norwegian culture have, arguably, turned into *emblems* of Sámi culture. As Jean Briggs (1997, 228) writes, especially when our social worlds, our *houses*, are assumed to be under threat, these “traits” can become emblems. Cultural traits that are especially inclined to turn into emblems are, first, emotionally charged and, second, sites of confrontations (Briggs 1997, 228).

These traits were represented as common Sámi symbols but were, however, locally anchored (Olsen 1997, 232). The new Sámi collective identity drew its cultural and symbolic content from specific areas where Sámi culture appeared as most distinct from Norwegian culture (Olsen 1997, 233).¹⁹ Specifically, this was drawn from geographical areas and industries in the interior of Finnmark, where Sámi constituted, and still constitute, the majority. The coastal and fjord areas of Northern Norway, on the other hand, were culturally more heterogeneous and characterized to a greater extent by multilingual households and interethnic marriages (Olsen 2018, 11). It was also in these areas that the Norwegianization policy was more direct. Thus, Sámi on the coast did not possess the “exotic” features that could visibly differentiate them from the “modern Norwegian” (Olsen 2018, 14).

Processes such as the ones outlined above have resulted in the emergence of what Olsen (1997, 232) calls an *official Sáminess*, i.e., a dominant representation of Sámi culture and identity through specific traits, such as reindeer herding, *lavvu*,²⁰ *gákti*,²¹ and *joik*.²² This was not solely a consequence of the Sámi ethno-political movement but can also be found in dichotomous representations of Norwegian and Sámi culture that already existed in national institutions, such as the media, museums, school curricula, and the tourism industry (Olsen 2015, 336).²³

The downside to the new Sámi collective identity was that many people were not familiar with the traits highlighted as a Sámi cultural competence and, thus, felt that being Sámi was something they did not master (Stordahl 1996, 154). However, Olsen (1997, 340) emphasizes

¹⁹ Reindeer herding, for instance, is often understood to be the backbone of Sámi culture (Olsen 2004, 296), even though the reindeer herding Sámi have never surpassed more than 10% of the Sámi population (Bjørklund 2000, 6).

²⁰ Traditional Sámi dwelling.

²¹ *Gákti* is the Northern Sámi word for the traditional Sámi clothing, called *kofte* in Norwegian. In other Sámi languages, the *gákti* is called *gápptie*, *gapta*, *gaeptie*, *gáppte*, *máaccuh*, *mácēh*, or *máccak* (Idivuoma 2020).

²² Sámi folk music.

²³ It is important to note that the Sámi have been represented by non-Sámi people for centuries, often in stereotypical manners where one has emphasized the traits that are assumed as most different from the majority population (Andersen 2003, 251).

that the official Sáminess gave particularly people from “assimilated areas” directions in the construction of identity and, thereby, the opportunity to find ways of expressing that they are Sámi too.

The effort to make ethnic differences visible by emblematic symbols has legitimized political rights and a Sámi institution-building (Olsen 1997, 232). In order to be recognized by the Norwegian state as a distinct group with specific rights, it has been necessary to articulate and conceptualize a tradition and a culture within the Norwegian and Western political frameworks of ethnic groups and Indigenous people (Olsen 1997, 232-233). Thus, it was the international and Norwegian nation’s terms the Sámi had to engage with: Language (Norwegian-Sámi), national costume (bunad-gákti), folk music (stev-joik), and territory (Norway-Sápmi) (Stordahl 1996, 100). The creation of a Sámi flag, map, national hymns, and national commemoration days in the 1970s and 1980s makes further visible that the Sámi have engaged in and adjusted themselves to the language of nation-states and their symbolic practices (Eriksson 2002, 242). Hence, making ethnic boundaries visible may have been a necessary strategic use of essentialism in the process of gaining political rights (Spivak 1996, 214).

From no-man’s-land to Sápmi

Sápmi was one of the symbols, or emblems, the ethnopolitical movement utilized to create a Sámi nation and a collective Sámi identity, and to assert rights as an Indigenous people (Stordahl 1996, 89).²⁴ Sápmi, the Sámi place of origin, constitutes not only a geographical area but is also understood as the territorial anchoring of the Sámi nation as such, unifying a people separated by four nation-states (Eriksson 2002, 240). The notion of Sápmi can be said to embody the very idea of a common Sámi culture and history and, importantly, of the Sámi people’s rootedness in the specific lands the notion encompasses (Thuen 2002, 288).

A historical retrospection regarding the land of the Sámi might highlight how Sápmi could be described as an important emblem of Sámi culture. It has been argued that the image of Sápmi as a transnational entity can be traced to the 1900s, since it contrasts to the prior decentralized

²⁴ The territorialization of a Sámi land has, as argued, been significant for the preservation of Sámi culture (Thuen 2002, 288). For instance, it has played a central role in relation to protecting areas used as grazing lands for reindeer herding from encroachments. Additionally, with reference to Indigenous rights and the ILO Convention 169, the Norwegian state adopted the so-called Finnmark Act in 2005, transferring the land of Finnmark from the state-owned enterprise *Statsskog* to the people of Finnmark, who now collectively own the land of Finnmark through the Finnmark Estate (Gaski 2008, 224; Olsen 2010, 111). The Finnmark Act ensures specific rights to the people of Finnmark regardless of ethnic identification, with directorship shared between county municipalities and the Sámi Parliament (Olsen 2010, 111).

and scattered Sámi communities (Eriksson 2002, 239).²⁵ The 18th and 19th centuries marked a time of political disruptions and dramatic changes, as new borders were drawn between the emerging nation-states (Forrest 2002, 258). As a consequence, the Sámi had to declare in which state they would live, communities were dissolved, and the traditional pastoral nomadic practice of Sámi reindeer herders was significantly affected (Lehtola 2002, 191).²⁶

In addition, a prevalent assumption held by the various political entities that ruled over the lands inhabited by the Sámi through the centuries, was that the Sámi had no rightful claim to ownership of it (Forrest 2002, 255). The lands were, as it was assumed, a *no-man's-land*, *terra nullius*, and could thus be claimed. Indeed, no agreements were made with the Sámi when the land they inhabited was integrated into the Norwegian nation-state (Pedersen 2002, 177). Sámi's customary use of land and nomadic "wandering around" could hardly be considered ownership of land, according to Norwegian legal experts in the 1700s (Pedersen 2002, 172, 173). This closely resembles the legal theory of acquisition used in the settler colonies, such as when Great Britain proclaimed Australia a *terra nullius* (Pedersen 2002, 177).

Ancestral homeland, nature, and indigeneity

The connection to landscape and natural resources, and the continuous articulation and recreation of this connection, is understood as a central part of imagining the Sámi nation (Gaski 2008, 224). Such ideas of the Sámi homeland and territory can be associated with global notions about indigeneity (Gaski 2008, 227).

The emergence of a new Sámi self-image was also developed in dialogue with global discourses concerning Indigenous rights (Olsen 1997, 233). Thus, Sámi culture was not created solely as a distinct culture in relation to the Norwegian culture; it was also, to a significant extent, positioned within a different conceptual category – as *Indigenous* (Olsen 2004, 294).

The term "Indigenous" is often understood to indicate a particular relationship to a specific landscape, to nature, and a rural way of life (Gaski 2008, 227; Kraft 2009, 181). These ideas have also been translated into rights (Kraft 2009, 183).²⁷ Moreover, the term "Indigenous" is

²⁵ Following Theodossopoulos' (2013b, 348) line of thought, one could argue that the concept of Sápmi should not be understood as an "invented" in the sense of "made up" notion, but rather as a restructured notion in interplay with and adaptation to present contexts and needs.

²⁶ This also meant the abandonment of Sámi customary rights to seasonal crossing of the borders, which had been secured since 1751 through the so-called Lapp Codicil (Pedersen 2002, 168).

²⁷ For example, the ILO Convention 169 states that governments must "respect the special importance for the cultures and spiritual values of the peoples concerning their relationship with the lands or territories, or both as applicable, which they occupy or otherwise use, and in particular the collective aspects of this relationship" (Article 13, 1 cited in Kraft 2009, 183).

often represented in contrast to the “modern world,” where it is assumed that Norwegian society belongs (Olsen 2004, 294). Thus, the chosen traits of the Sámi movement also reproduced and facilitated the “traditional” Sámi versus the “modern” Norwegian (Stordahl 1996, 97).

Chapter 5. Articulations of Sámi identities in Oslo

Part I: “Sámi on paper”: The question of being Sámi enough

It is difficult for me to say something about how it is to be Sámi in Oslo because I do not really know how it is to authentically be a Sámi here. I am Norwegianized.

(Edda, 20-30 years old)

As the above quote indicates, the experience of being Sámi in Oslo is not only tied to what it means to be Sámi in the context of Oslo specifically, but it is also formed by prevalent ideas of what an “authentic” Sámi identity is. As a result, Edda, whose family members hid their Sámi affiliation for several decades, does not feel that she can tell me exactly how it is to be Sámi in Oslo; she is not authentic enough for that. To not feel “authentically Sámi” was a shared experience among many of my interlocutors, whether they were from so-called “assimilated” families or not. Therefore, in the following section, I will discuss how my interlocutors experience their ethnic identification in relation to dominant notions of who a Sámi *really* is.

“How Sámi do you feel today?”

While discussing the concept of a so-called “Sámi barometer”, Ella Marie Hætta Isaksen asks her co-host on the Sámi podcast *Gozuid Alde* (2022), Sajje Solbakk, “How Sámi do you feel today?” The two hosts, as well as their guest Agnete Saba, answer with a number from one to ten.

Sámi ethnic identity is perhaps not only a matter of *whether one is Sámi or not*, but also *how much Sámi one is*. The question of “how Sámi do you feel?” seems to constitute a measurable matter – one that can be expressed numerically on a scale of one to ten on a “barometer of Sáminess”. Additionally, as is possible to detect from the podcast discussion, Sámi ethnic identity, and the question of “how much” Sámi one feels, seems to be experienced not only as a static matter but as contextual, malleable, and dynamic (Barth, 1969); a question that can even be followed by a different answer today than tomorrow.

What is it then that positions people differently on this “barometer”? As with Indigenous identity in general, what specifically measures and determines who a Sámi is has no

straightforward answer (Weaver 2001, 240). Additionally, notions of an “authentic” Sámi identity cannot be understood as a singular matter but rather as a multidimensional, dynamic, and context-specific concept (Theodossopoulos 2013a, 402). The existence of various local discourses on Sáminess underlines the fact that Sápmi is a *plural* Sámi society (Thuen 2003, 280).

Nevertheless, scholars emphasize how dominant local and institutional notions on what Sámi identity is – *official Sáminess* – tend to form into a ranking of people according to their abilities to exhibit the criteria of an assumed “core” and “authentic” Sáminess (Olsen 2007, 93). In this respect, Sámi identity formations and navigations, and perhaps one’s position on the “Sámi barometer”, interact with dominant discourses on who a Sámi *really* is.

How can a mother give birth to one Norwegian and one Sámi?²⁸

In an attempt to answer the question in the above title, it could be said, to follow Loring M. Danforth (2000, 100), that this is possible due to the fact that identities are socially constructed – it is not something one is “born into”, determined by kinship, descent and “blood”; it is *socially created*.

Yet, it is within existing narratives and dominant discourses of who a Sámi is that Sámi identities are articulated (Dankertsen 2006, 28). Central to dominant discourses of what constitutes an Indigenous identity are the formal criteria for registration as Indigenous (Berg-Nordlie 2021, 451). Therefore, before I move further into the analysis, I will briefly discuss the implications of the Sámediggi Electoral Register (SER), for Sámi ethnic identification. In this discussion, I will also touch upon ideas of kinship and descent as criteria of Sámi identity.

In Norway, there is no official “Sámi registry”, but enrolment in the SER is often perceived as a formal registration (Berg-Nordlie 2021, 453). The criteria of enrolment are based on a subjective criterion, i.e., one must self-identify as Sámi, and an objective criterion concerning language (Bjørklund 2016, 12). The language criterion entails that either oneself or one’s parent, grandparent, or great-grandparent spoke Sámi at home.²⁹ Registration in the SER is often

²⁸ The title is inspired by Loring M. Danforth’s (2000) title, “‘How can a woman give birth to one Greek and one Macedonian?’ The construction of national identity among immigrants to Australia from Northern Greece”.

²⁹ An important motif of these rather wide criteria was to ensure popular support of the Sámi Parliament, and in this way enhance its legitimacy and self-determination (Gaski 2008, 221). In addition, one wished to enable the registration of many Sámi that, due to the assimilation policy, had grown up speaking Norwegian (Bjørklund 2016, 12).

understood as a confirmation of one's ethnic identity, and not solely a democratic resource (Bjørklund 2016, 13).

Ingrid, who is in the process of “taking back” and “reclaiming” the, until recently, well-hidden secret of her family's Sámi and Kven³⁰ identification of the past, is not able to register in the SER. This is something that makes her feel she is not Sámi enough in the eyes of others.

When I asked Ingrid who she believes can be considered Sámi, she told me, “I usually say that the Sámi electoral roll is a good point of departure, but this should not be based on rigid delineations.” When I asked her if she is enrolled herself, she told me she was not, “I am not allowed. I am not Sámi enough according to the Sámi Parliament. There is a gap of three generations and not two. And it would not be right for my mom to register because she does not feel Sámi.” I asked if that affected her in any way. “I carry it with me. It hurts a little. Why is my mom allowed to enrol, who does not feel Sámi, but I am not, just because of one generation gap?”.

Ingrid's account exemplifies the complexities that can emerge due to the flexibility provided by the SER to (re)define one's kinship affiliation in the framework of eight great-grandparents (Bjørklund 2016, 12). In areas where many Sámi “changed” identity to Norwegian in a matter of a few years, it is not uncommon that their descendants are now “rediscovering” their Sámi affiliation and thus redefining their kinship affiliation (Thuen 2003, 268). For some, self-ascription as Sámi is not self-evident, as for Ingrid's mother. For Ingrid, being Sámi is a meaningful part of who she feels she is. Different ethnic identifications among family members, such as Ingrid's family, has caused heightened disputes over what ethnicity they believe the family to be.

Almost all my interlocutors mentioned differing ethnic identifications within their families, both intergenerationally and among siblings. Especially in coastal parts of Northern Norway, intermarriages, multilingual households, and processes of assimilation have resulted in shifting ethnic identifications and fluid ethnic boundaries (Bjørklund 2016, 13). However, in many local communities in Northern Norway, the fact that a person's family has been Sámi does not necessarily categorize the person as Sámi; this is usually dependent on a personal statement from the individual (Olsen 2007, 82). As Bjørklund (2016, 13) notes, different ethnic

³⁰ Ethnic minority of Finnish-speaking ancestry in Northern Norway.

identifications among siblings in the same family demonstrate how such choices can be deeply personal, but they are as much telling of the scope of identity management that is available.

The way the individual experiences his or her ethnic identification seems to be significantly personal: A mother can give birth to one Norwegian and one Sámi. It appears to be difficult to lean solely on kinship and descent as criteria of Sámi ethnic identity. As Ingrid's frustration suggests, there is no common consensus on the question of how many generations one can go back to be considered a Sámi. This can also be exemplified by one of my interlocutors, Astrid, who grew up with a Sámi father but does not consider herself Sámi.

Nonetheless, ethnic group membership relies both on ascription and self-ascription (Barth 1969, 10; 1994, 12). With regard to ascription by others, registration in the SER and Sámi kinship affiliation is often not enough to be considered a Sámi (Thuen 2003, 270). According to Thuen (2002, 289), ascription as Sámi is associated with a public agreement that rests on criteria for belonging, both in terms of one's origin – that is, one's ancestors – and on a satisfactory ability to perform the specific criteria that signal the distinctiveness of Sámi culture. Thus, in addition to the subjective and objective criteria officially expressed through the SER, there is often, in practice, a demand for Sámi cultural competence (Thuen 2003, 270). This demand preoccupied all my interlocutors. It is to this that I will now turn.

“Sámi on paper”

While discussing with Emil, an Oslo-born 20–30-year-old man, whether he felt Sámi or not, he expressed, “I feel *something*. Not that I call myself... I would not call myself Sámi on paper. But I identify with the culture.” I asked him if he could elaborate. “To me, being Sámi is more about practicing the culture. Being concerned with the language, joik, have a gákti.”

To Emil, being Sámi is not only something one *is*, but also something one *does*; it is about “practicing the culture” (*å praktisere kulturen*). Emil seems to express the dominant view that Sámi ethnic identity rests largely on one's ability to perform cultural traits distinguished as Sámi cultural competence, e.g., to know the language, be concerned with joik, and have a gákti (Thuen 2003, 270). The inability to live up to such notions can bring about “identity tangles”, where the question concerned is not one of *to be* or *not to be* Sámi, but rather *how to be* (Paine 2003, 294). To Emil, the one who knows *how to be* is the “Sámi on paper”.

The “Sámi on paper” seems to mean a person whose Sámi identity is, in a symbolic sense, “officially” recognized, as if it were written and documented on an official sealed paper. This

is a recognition one obtains through demonstrating competence in “practicing the culture”. As Emil is himself not able to live up to these traits, he is unsure whether he can say he feels completely Sámi. In this sense, the “Sámi on paper” seems to denote someone he understands as *more* Sámi than himself: It is someone who manages to live up to dominant notions of an “authentic” Sámi identity and is, thus, closer to a “true” Sáminess. When Andersen (2003, 259) writes that the word “Sámi” is experienced by many Sámi as “occupied”, this is perhaps indicative of something similar. The “Sámi on paper” is the one who occupies the term “Sámi”, and Emil is left feeling *something*.

The emphasis on Sámi cultural competence as a decisive marker of Sámi identity can be found in dominant discourses of an official Sáminess (Olsen 1997). Traits such as Sámi language, joik, and *gákti* – *cultural stuff* – can be understood as prevalent *emblems* of Sámi culture that articulate and make visible clear boundaries vis-à-vis the Norwegian majority (Barth 1969; Briggs 1997). Thus, “practicing the culture” seems to become significant in one’s ability to be distinguished and confirmed by others as Sámi; to demonstrate *credibility* as Sámi, which, according to Thuen (2003, 236), rests on ideas of authenticity.

I asked Emil if he must practice the Norwegian culture as well. “No, to a much lesser degree. It is just the way I am made, the society I am made into. It comes more naturally for me to be Norwegian. The Sámi thing is something I must go in for.” The Norwegian identity seems to be the “natural state” of things for Emil. When Emil just “is”, he is Norwegian. He does not need to continuously *prove* his Norwegian identity or live up to criteria of an authentic Norwegianness to be considered Norwegian (Thuen 2003, 277). Ironically, this was precisely what his grandparents’ generation strove to prove a few decades prior.

In the following, I will analyse how Sámi in Oslo experience, articulate, and renegotiate their Sámi identification in view of the most central markers, or *emblems*, of Sáminess that were mentioned during our conversations. Two prevalent emblems were the Sámi language and the *gákti*. In addition, I will discuss the emblem of Sápmi, both as a term connoting to the geographical area of the traditional Sámi homeland, and also as a broader symbol encompassing ideas of rurality, nature, and a traditional Sámi way of life as indicators of Sámi culture and identity. Given the above, how do Sámi in Norway’s capital, Oslo, experience, articulate, and renegotiate their ethnic identification?

Language

“People spoke Sámi to me and expected that I was as much Sámi as before”

Harald, an 80–90-year-old man from a Sámi-dominated town in the interior of Finnmark, came to Oslo in his 20s, around the 1960s. He grew up as Sámi-speaking, but after moving to Oslo, he gradually started to forget the language. “I remember when visiting [hometown], I had difficulties adjusting myself. People spoke Sámi to me and expected that I was as much Sámi as before.”

Harald seems to associate Sámi identity closely with Sámi language competence. By virtue of losing the language, he appears to experience a significant loss of his identity as Sámi too. This underlines the significance of the Sámi language as an emblem of Sámi culture, where it at times may seem to become synonymous with being Sámi as such. In fact, the Sámi language is believed to be the strongest sign of Sámi affiliation and the most important criterion for Sámi cultural competence, both in the eyes of the Norwegian majority and among Sámi themselves (Thuen 2003, 270; Kuokkanen 2006, 2).

Harald tells me that his experience is common among many Sámi who moved to Oslo. As he expresses it, he has met many Sámi in Oslo that “grew up in Finnmark and moved down here and became Norwegianized”.

According to Harald, it seems that one does not only become *less* Sámi by losing the language, but one also becomes *more* Norwegian, that is, “Norwegianized”. Oslo represents a place where it is expected that one may become *too* Norwegian, and as a result, one’s Sámi identity “dies out”, not dissimilar to what some scholars posited about Indigenous people who move to majority-dominated cities (Ramirez 2007, 21). In this light, the categories “Sámi” and “Norwegian” appear as dichotomous and mutually exclusive, and language as a decisive element of distinction.

Emil, along similar lines, expresses that he would feel more like a “Sámi on paper” if he learned the language. A Sámi-speaking Sámi is understood by Emil as more *authentic* than himself. The level of authenticity of one’s Sámi identity becomes, in this sense, correlated with one’s linguistic level. The inability to live up to the linguistic criterion and thus not feeling Sámi enough has been documented by studies in both coastal communities and in the interior of Finnmark (see Johansen 2008; Andersen and Olsen 2018; Stenseth 2023). This seems not to be any less relevant in Oslo.

The criterion of linguistic competence must be understood within the historical framework of the Norwegianization policy, where individuals' language shift from Sámi to Norwegian was often seen as the most prevalent sign of change in ethnic identity (Andersen and Olsen 2018, 51). Thus, the language became a symbol of the people who represented the respective categories. Even though multilingual households were the norm rather than the exception (Andersen and Olsen 2018, 57), the articulation of Sámi culture in contrast and complementarity with Norwegian culture renders the language a prevalent emblem in the articulation of their ethnic boundaries. This becomes highly complex for people who, due to less Sámi-speaking knowledge, feel that they fall between the categories: They become "excluded middles" (Wolfe 1994, 112; Sissons 2005, 39).

Sámi language competence seems not only to be associated with speaking the language or not, but also with *how well* one speaks it. Ingrid, who grew up without speaking the language but is now trying to learn it, often finds herself refraining from using it as the demand for perfection can become too distressful. "It is fine to be corrected, but when I have been corrected it is often like, 'Ah, do you not even know that?' and then you fall into a pitiful position."

The demand for linguistic perfection that Ingrid encounters from other Sámi can be understood as efforts to maintain cultural purity as a reaction to the settler colonial attempts of eliminating Sámi culture in the past (Wolfe 2006), which led to the loss of the language in many areas and the continued threat of its eradication today. People with less Sámi-speaking competence become people who are continuously reminded, and continuously remind others, of the Norwegianization process (Andersen and Olsen 2018, 56). The Norwegian language becomes that which contaminates the cultural purity of Sámi ethnicity and threatens the survival of Sámi culture (cf. Eriksen 2014, 130). Thus, the Sámi language becomes simultaneously a symbol of loss and Norwegianization, and of Sáminess and belonging (Andersen and Olsen 2018, 54).

For Sámi of elder generations who lost the Sámi language as a result of being subjected to assimilation policies, this entails a painful doubleness. Maja, a 70–80-year-old woman who grew up in a Sámi dominated town was, at a young age, sent to a boarding school where speaking the Sámi language was prohibited. She has later tried to learn the Sámi language, but her lack of competence has become a "barrier" that she has frequently encountered throughout her life. "The Sáminess has always been with me, but there have also been some barriers there. One of these was the language," she says.

The continuous “language barriers” Maja meets can be understood as repressive demands for authenticity (Wolfe 1994), where Maja is asked to demonstrate competence in a language she was, due to colonial politics, forced to discard. On the one hand, Maja grew up as Sámi at a time when assimilationist and colonialist notions and policies portrayed such identities as inferior and, it could be said, as “matter out of place” (Douglas 1997). Today, although Sáminess continues to be an important part of her, she encounters “barriers” as she lacks Sámi language competence; an expression that could be suggestive of occasionally feeling “out of place” in the Sámi category. As a result of colonial policies, individuals such as Maja continue to encounter the “barriers” of the established ethnic classifications (Douglas 1997), both the barriers of the majority category and the ones of the Sámi category. In this sense, Maja’s story could be indicative of how colonial structures continue to affect Sámi people today.

In Finnmark I am Norwegian, in Oslo I am Sámi

In contrast to the assumption that living in Oslo can lead one to become “Norwegianized”, Emil expresses that he in fact feels *more* Sámi in Oslo: “When I have been visiting family in Finnmark and not been able to speak Sámi, I have felt less Sámi. In Oslo I feel a lot more like a Sámi. It is like the thing my friends from other countries tell me, in Morocco they are Norwegian, in Norway they are Moroccan”.

While Emil encounters the “language barrier” in Finnmark, in Oslo, his lack of Sámi-speaking competence is less relevant and, thus, it does not impede his possibility of being confirmed and ascribed by others as Sámi. This is a shared experience among Sámi who, in their hometowns in the interior of Finnmark, do not feel Sámi enough due to lacking Sámi-speaking competence, while outside of Sápmi they feel more like a “real” Sámi (Andersen and Olsen 2018, 57).

Emil’s account underlines how language as a criterion of Sámi identity is context-specific (Paine 2003, 314). Indeed, in Sámi local communities where many people do not speak the language, it is not assumed to be a decisive ethnic marker of Sámi identity (Paine 2003, 304). It cannot be used as a marker of distinction between Norwegian and Sámi culture, because the majority of the locals only speak Norwegian. This highlights the situational and relative character of ethnicity – it is the cultural traits that are considered important to the articulation and maintenance of the ethnic boundaries that are emphasized in social interaction (Barth 1969). Additionally, this is further indicative of the fact that Indigenous authenticities are context-specific; it is a processual and multidimensional concept, rather than singular, static, and immutable (Theodossopoulos 2013a, 2013b).

Gákti

Sámi passport and gákti in the closet

The Sámi traditional costume, gákti, is described as one of the most evident signs of Sáminess, more than any other external characteristic (Hovland 1996, 184). While the gákti used to be everyday clothing, it has become clothing worn on special occasions over the last decades (Hovland 1996, 182-183). I will now turn to Edda's story to exemplify the importance of the gákti as an emblem of Sámi culture.

Edda, a 20–30-year-old woman who grew up not far from Oslo, originates from an area of Northern Norway where the assimilation policy had been far more direct than in the interior of Finnmark. Growing up, Edda picked up on some signs that her family had ties to Sámi culture, but, apart from this, it was largely undercommunicated. However, Edda's grandmother started to open up the period before she passed away. This set Edda on a path of uncovering her family's history.

It was only a few years ago that Edda got a definitive confirmation that her family was indeed Sámi. One of the important turning points was an old picture she found of her grandaunt in a gákti. This picture was not only a turning point for Edda herself but led several family members to open up about their Sámi affiliation, including her grandaunt. Edda recalls the moment she and her grandaunt were looking at the picture together:

She looked carefully at the picture and even used a magnifying glass. She was completely quiet. Then she suddenly asked me, 'Do you see who it is?'. I was scared to say that I could see it was her, because I knew how shameful it was to them, so I said, 'I do not know.' She answered, 'It is me.' I could not believe it. She then told me she had stopped wearing it when being Sámi became political, she did not want that attention. But she has had it in her closet ever since, and brought it with her, held by it. So, now we have opened that door.

For the grandaunt, it seems that when being confronted with a picture of herself in a gákti, it was the ultimate evidence of their Sámi past that she could not deny any longer. Hiding the gákti and placing it in a closet can be understood as a literal and metaphorical way that Edda's grandaunt undercommunicated any Sámi ties to the outside world and, subsequently, closed the door on her Sámi identification. Accordingly, it appears that opening the closet door and bringing the gákti to the fore became a way of accepting and communicating openly her Sámi ties. By means of one's use of the gákti, then, it becomes a highly marked material expression of one's affiliation to Sámi culture.

Interestingly, Edda compares the gákti to a passport: “The gákti tells a lot about where you are from and which family you belong to. It is sort of a document of who you are. Like a passport.”

Edda’s description of the gákti as a passport can, on the one hand, be associated with the fact that its design indicates the wearer’s and their family’s origins (Dankertsen 2022, 123). However, her use of the term “passport” connotes, perhaps, something deeper: The gákti becomes a material manifestation of one’s membership and belonging to the Sámi “nation”. The gákti confirms the wearer as a complete member of the Sámi community (Hovland 1996, 186): One is confirmed by others as Sámi and is thus allowed to call oneself a Sámi.

Along similar lines, for Edda, getting a gákti for herself was the last step towards, as she describes it, “finding back” to the Sámi identity that her family had lost during the assimilation policy and ultimately, *becoming* Sámi: “To get a gákti is the last step. It is kind of the last confirmation. The last step of finding back. After you get the gákti, a whole new world of belonging opens up.”

For Edda, the gákti, as an emblem of Sáminess, becomes an important compass to navigate and find ways to articulate her Sámi identification. Thus, the official Sáminess and the emblems it is based upon, appear to provide an available framework within which Edda makes sense of her and her family’s past experiences and, ultimately, give her directions in forming and reorienting her own ethnic identification (Olsen 1997, 340). It gives her the opportunity to articulate that she is Sámi too.

Additionally, Edda’s emphasis on the gákti as being the “last step” indicates that there are previous steps to this process, i.e., not anyone can be a holder of a gákti. The gákti expresses outwardly that one has the right to be “inside” (Hovland 1996, 184). It establishes a right while it simultaneously communicates that one’s right to use it is already established. The exclusivity that being a wearer of a gákti seems to be associated with, may become quite intricate for individuals who do not feel Sámi enough to do so.

“Imposter syndrome”

Emil tells me that he would feel uncomfortable wearing the gákti, especially because of his lack of competence in the Sámi language. “I feel like I have to prove my identity. An imposter syndrome, you can say.”

Emil's use of the term "imposter syndrome" (*bedragersyndrom*) is an illuminating way of expressing how he does not feel that he has the right to wear it – he would be an "imposter", i.e., someone who is deceiving others into believing that he is something he in fact is not.

To Emil, his right to use the gákti seems to be dependent on his ability to *prove* that he is an authentic Sámi by exhibiting competence in the criteria posited by dominant discourses on Sáminess (Baumann 1996; Olsen 1997). Indeed, studies have shown how non-Sámi-speaking individuals have been met with criticism when wearing the traditional clothing, as they are not considered Sámi enough to do so (Hernes 2017, 64). Reactions such as this can be understood as efforts to maintain cultural purity in the Sámi category, where it is assumed that the survival of Sámi culture is ensured if one limits the use of the gákti to people evaluated as "authentic" Sámi (Hernes 2017, 64-65). The language reemerges as an important indicator of one's level of authenticity as a Sámi.

Interestingly, however, Edda, who pridefully wears her gákti, does not speak the language either. One could say that Edda is both drawing on the official Sáminess to articulate her Sámi identification and simultaneously posing a challenge to it. That is, she is challenging the notion that one needs to speak Sámi to be a rightful carrier of a gákti. Merely by virtue of wearing the gákti, Edda is arguably renegotiating the boundaries of the Sámi ethnic identity and resisting "categories of identity that are experienced as too narrow or exclusive" (Kramvig 2005, 46).

Sápmi

Indigenous peoples are often understood to be inherently rooted in their ancestral homelands (Peters and Andersen 2013, 7). To many urban Indigenous people, connections to their ancestral homelands continue to be important, whether these areas are in close or distant proximity to the place they currently live (Peters and Andersen 2013, 8).

The notion of Sápmi has been described as a prevalent emblem of Sámi culture (Gjerpe 2013, 46). There is often perceived to be a profound relationship between Sámi people and land (Gaski 2008, 224). Accordingly, Sámi identity becomes rooted in its ancestral homeland; it is rooted in Sápmi. Yet, the emphasis on Indigenous homelands as a primary and core aspect of Indigenous identities is fraught with problems (Peters and Andersen 2013, 8). As Thuen (2002, 288) argues, the question "who are the Sámi?" often relates to the question "where are the Sámi?".

Notions that assume Indigenous people to be rooted in their ancestral homeland become particularly challenging for many of my interlocutors. Some have lived in Oslo or areas outside

of Sápmi for several years, some even for several generations. For some, their connection to the Sámi homeland is irregular or sporadic. Others see their hometown within Sápmi as *less* Sámi than other areas. For many of my interlocutors, then, imagining the Sámi homeland as a core and primary aspect of their Sámi identification is not straightforward.

Sámi homeland, nature, and a rural way of life

Sámi ancestral homeland, nature, and a rural way of life were mentioned, explicitly and implicitly, as inherent aspects of Sámi culture during many of my conversations with Sámi in Oslo. Sometimes, these three aspects were spoken of as if they were one and the same thing. As Eriksson maintains, Sápmi is often conceptualized as an “organic unity between nature and man, land and culture” (2002, 240). In this respect, the connection to landscape and natural resources, and the continuous articulation and recreation of this connection, can be understood as a central part of imagining the Sámi nation (Gaski 2008, 224).

To Emil, “practicing the Sámi culture” is also about having a close relationship to nature: “I feel more like a Sámi in the woods. It is easier to lose your Sámi identity in the city because you are not as exposed to that identity as you are up there, where there are reindeer everywhere, and woods and nature. A big part of Sámi culture is nature.”

Emil’s close association between nature and Sámi culture reflects the belief that Sámi traditions are inherently connected to nature and the ecology (Kuokkanen 2000, 418; Dankertsen 2022, 112). Certainly, the protection and preservation of land and natural resources are often highlighted as prerequisites for the protection and preservation of Sámi culture (Gaski 2008, 224).

Ideas of Sámi culture as intimately connected to nature can become quite a complicated matter for people like Emil who live in the urban context of Oslo. Consequently, Emil seems to perceive urban life in Oslo as a challenge to his Sámi identification. “Up there”, in Sápmi, one is presumably continuously exposed to Sáminess, as there are “reindeer, woods, and nature” to be found. As these traits are understood to be inherent to Sámi culture (see official Sáminess in chapter 4), Emil appears to see them as holders of more genuine, core, and authentic manifestations of Sáminess. “Down here” in Oslo, on the other hand, urbanity poses a threat to the cultivation of Sámi identity, and Emil can therefore “lose” his Sáminess in such a context, that is, assimilate or be *Norwegianized*, as some would call it. In this sense, he seems to navigate his ethnic identification along a rural-urban divide, where Sáminess is assumed to be deeply intertwined with rurality (Berg-Nordlie, Dankertsen and Winsvold 2022, 246).

This resembles prevalent notions of indigeneity that hold Indigenous people and identities to *really* belong in rural areas, following a long tradition in European and colonial thought (Andersen and Peters 2013, 379-380). Consequently, in cities, Indigenous people are expected to eventually assimilate into the majority population. In view of this, Emil seems to perceive his urban daily life and his Sámi identification as more or less incompatible. His urban Sámi identity becomes an inauthentic and anomalous condition – an “out-of-placeness” (Sissons 2005, 39; Andersen and Peters 2013, 379). This highlights how the adoption and internalization of colonial representations by Indigenous people themselves can lead to repressive demands for authenticity (Wolfe 1994) that render Sámi identities in Oslo a perceived impossibility. This becomes particularly intricate for people like Emil, as he, in fact, has grown up in Oslo: He is “indigenous” to Oslo and Indigenous Sámi, it could be said.

Additionally, this seems not only to be associated with a nature/rural-urban divide but also with an Oslo-Sápmi divide. Emil seems to associate Sámi culture specifically with nature in Sápmi, “up there”. Thus, it is not nature as such, but nature specifically in the Sámi homeland that appears to hold the possibility for a true and authentic Sámi identity.

Despite the existence of urban settlements in Sápmi, the notion of Sápmi appears to be imagined in specific ways, largely in relation to nature, ecology, and rurality. This resembles colonial inventions that represent Indigenous ancestral homelands and landscapes as contrasts to urban settlements and urban living (Sissons 2005, 39; Peters and Andersen 2013, 8). Ultimately, this implies distinctions between Oslo and Sápmi, where the former represents the Norwegian majority and modernity, and the latter the Sámi community and tradition (Stordahl 1996, 97; Olsen 2004, 292). Within such dichotomous notions, the Sámi are seen as incapable of participating in the “modern” “Norwegian” world of Oslo without losing their cultures and identities (Peters and Andersen 2013, 5).

Core Sámi area

The Oslo-Sápmi divide was also associated with another divide: Between the coast and the interior of Finnmark, the so-called “core Sámi area”. As mentioned previously, it was not unusual for people to tell me that I had to visit Finnmark, often referring explicitly to Karasjok and Kautokeino in the interior of Finnmark, to learn more about Sámi culture and identity. It was thus implied that *real* Sámi culture and people with *authentic* Sámi identities could not be found readily in Oslo.

The term “core Sámi area” refers to a distinct Sámi region in the interior of Finnmark,³¹ proposed by the Sámi Committee in 1959, where special considerations were to be taken in terms of the preservation of Sámi culture and language (Andersen 2003, 248). A central argument for consolidating this distinct area was that, in the interior of Finnmark, the language was still used daily in most homes. Thus, it was in these areas that reforms regarding the preservation of Sámi culture and language were implemented and where Sámi institutions were established (Andersen 2003, 247).

My interlocutors’ places of origin are located both outside and within the Sámi “core area”. Ingrid’s hometown is a Norwegian-dominated town outside of the “core area”, where Sámi culture constitutes a distant past to many of the inhabitants. In the process of “taking back” her Sámi identification, Ingrid did not see her hometown as a source from which she could collect information and knowledge of Sámi culture, as this had largely been lost during the Norwegianization process. Rather, she referred to the so-called “archetypical Sámi” (*erkesame*) in the interior of Finnmark as such a source of knowledge: “In the interior of Finnmark, you know that you will find something that is really old and that has been taught from generation to generation.” The term she uses to describe herself is “new Sámi” (*nysame*).

Ingrid seems to regard Sámi culture in the interior of Finnmark as embodying a continuity with the past, as a solid and lasting essence that has not been disrupted by assimilation policies and Norwegianization (Gaski 2008, 229). Representatives of this “really old” culture, are the “archetypical Sámi”. The term could be understood as the ideal example of someone who represents *pure* Sámi culture. In this sense, the interior of Finnmark and the “archetypical Sámi” seem almost to be perceived as windows to the past, as holders of the “truth” and, thus, as sources of authentic Sámi culture. The “core Sámi area”, which was primarily suggested as an administrative unit for the implementation of specific policies, appears to be perceived as the only authentic Sámi area (Andersen 2003, 250).

Symbolic dividing lines between the interior and the coast subsequently render areas outside the Sámi core area a Sámi periphery, both in geographical and cultural sense (Gaski 2000, 49; Andersen 2003, 250). The “archetypical Sámi” come to represent authentic Sámi culture, while the coastal Sámi must revitalize their Sámi language and culture – a process by which they become “new Sámi” (Hovland 1996, 81; Andersen 2003, 250). The revitalization process that

³¹ Specifically, this concerned the municipalities of Kautokeino, Karasjok, and Polmak, as well as the municipalities of Nesseby, Tana, and Kistrand.

Ingrid is engaged in is carried out with traits and emblems from the interior of Finnmark as the scale of measurement.

Furthermore, when Ingrid talks of something “really old”, this does not omit adaptation to a modern way of life, such as the use of modern technology in reindeer herding. This is evident in Emil’s description of a trip he took in the Finnmark highland in the interior of Finnmark: “We were very deep in the Sámi culture. We met a couple of Sámi, we fished, got a lift from a Sámi on a four-wheeler, tasted reindeer omelette. It was really exciting”.

In the same breath, Emil talks of Sámi on four-wheelers, reindeer omelettes, and fishing as indications of being “deep in the Sámi culture”. The authenticity of the Sámi in the interior of Finnmark seems not to be threatened by the use of modern technology and cultural innovations – their culture is still assumed to be “really old” in comparison to other areas of Sápmi. In fact, the interior of Finnmark is a place of intense processes of cultural innovation (Stordahl 1996, 30), but it is still seen as more “authentically Sámi” than the coast. This underscores how the concept of authenticity is multidimensional, context-specific, and adaptable to change rather than singular and static (Theodossopoulos 2013a, 2013b).

Nevertheless, the idea that one can “find” authentic Sámi culture in the interior of Finnmark, endangers representing Sámi culture in reified and essentialist terms. Notions of the interior of Finnmark as a “core area” of Sáminess, where one can encounter “traditional” and “really old” Sámi ways of living, can reinforce depictions of Sámi culture as frozen in time and space (Kuokkanen 2000, 418). While Western cultures are presented as complex, heterogenous, with the possibility to change (Smith 2021, 84), Indigenous cultures are often denied such development and change (Kuokkanen 2000, 418). Manifestations of Sáminess other than the “archetypical Sámi” and the “core Sámi area” become its “outwashed” versions, whether along the coast and the fjords, or in the cities and in areas outside of Sápmi.

In sum, it seems that not only people but also places are understood as *more* Sámi than others. This can have important consequences for the preservation of Sámi culture in areas deemed not Sámi enough (Gaski 2000, 49).³² As it appears, places can also be positioned on a grading scale

³² As Lina Gaski (2000, 49) highlights, Sámi language education has been more difficult to obtain in schools of the Sámi periphery than the core areas of the interior of Finnmark, as these areas are perceived not Sámi enough. Similar notions can lead to the lack of governmental support for urban Indigenous communities, since they are deemed not “different enough” from the majority population to be granted such support (Andersen and Peters 2013, 380).

of more or less Sámi on a “Sámi barometer”. This can become particularly complicated for Sámi living not only outside of Sámi core areas, but also outside of Sápmi, such as in Oslo.

“A fish head as a gift to nature”

The assumed close connection between Sámi culture and nature was not only felt as constraining to my interlocutors – rendering their Sámi identities in Oslo an “out-of-placeness” – but was also a notion from which they could articulate and make sense of their Sámi identification. Edda made this evident when she mentioned her family’s particular relationship to nature as indisputable evidence of their Sámi background: “My dad’s uncle left a fish head as a gift to nature every time he went fishing. When you hear stories like that, you just know, because that is something you do only if you are Sámi.”

Edda perceives the habit of her dad’s uncle as a manifestation of a distinct Sámi relationship to nature. Specifically, practices such as gifting nature a fish head can be associated with the holistic and animistic Sámi worldview,³³ where the relationship between humans, animals, elements in nature, and spiritual beings are understood as mutually interdependent (Helander-Renvall 2010, 44).

The Sámi worldview and its specific relationship to nature is a common point of distinction between Norwegian and Sámi culture, where the latter is assumed as more natural and sacred (Gaski 2008, 227-228). This can be found in global discourses on indigeneity, which frequently involve expectations that Indigenous people stand out as a visible “otherness” to the colonizer, manifested in living in closeness to nature and being intimately connected to the ecology, such as animals, mountains, trees, and waters (Sissons 2005, 39). Thus, one could say that Edda sees the habit of her dad’s uncle as a practice that articulates visible Sámi ethnic boundaries vis-à-vis Norwegian culture, and therefore feels she can prove with certainty an affiliation to Sámi culture.

In this sense, the repressive demand for authenticity that the assumed close relationship between nature and Sámi culture can place on urban Sámi individuals, may also generate its own resistance (Wolfe 1994, 129). Global discourses on indigeneity and emblems of Sámi culture found in the dominant discourses of the official Sáminess can become important to how people find ways of articulating and orienting their Sámi identification, and make sense of their social

³³ The Sámi worldview (*noaidevuohta*) is commonly perceived as a combination between polytheism, animism and shamanism (Kraft 2015, 25). It constitutes a holistic worldview where the “material” and the “spiritual world” are understood as inherently connected and mutually interdependent, rather than distinct and separated (Helander-Renvall 2010, 46).

worlds and personal experiences (Olsen 1997, 340). Viewed in this light, it can constitute resistance against the colonial elimination of Sámi presence, as people can find ways of articulating their connections to Sámi culture that the assimilation policy tried to eliminate.

Furthermore, my interlocutors seemed to draw creatively on dominant discourses of Sámi culture and identity in their own ways. For instance, Emil found ways of articulating his Sámi identification in Oslo's nature: "I do not identify with the sporty Norwegian thing. To me, it is natural to go out in the woods with the clothes I wear daily and the gear I have, without having to buy fancy sports clothes or heart rate monitor watches. I have a Sámi knife. I like to have it by my heart, in a way."

Emil appears to find ways of articulating his Sámi identification particularly through his specific *way of being* in nature that he understands as Sámi. Although outdoor life is perceived as important to both Norwegian and Sámi culture (Olsen 2007, 94), it is frequently assumed to constitute two different forms of *use* of nature (Gaski 2008, 224).³⁴ In this case, Emil seems to articulate his Sámi identification along lines often found in global discourses of indigeneity: While he identifies with the "simplicity" of Sámi and Indigenous closeness to nature, he distances himself from the "sporty thing" and the "fancy" equipment of Norwegians, which presumably denotes a more superficial and alienated relationship to nature than the one assumed to be found in Sámi culture (Gaski 2008, 233).³⁵

Emil's reference to the Sámi knife can be understood within a similar framework. In the Sámi tradition,³⁶ the Sámi knife is not merely a tool, it is understood to provide protection against evil spirits (Melbø 2018, 544, 547).³⁷ The knife can thus be associated with the Sámi animistic and holistic worldview and, in this sense, articulates in itself a distinct Sámi culture vis-à-vis Norwegian culture. In this way, to Emil, the Sámi knife seems to symbolize something *more* than a mere object used for practical reasons; it is a way of establishing and articulating his connection to Sámi culture – an emotionally charged symbol that he keeps by his heart.

³⁴ This can be exemplified by the following formulation by the Sámi Parliament: "The Sami culture is closely related to nature, both spiritually and practically" (2002: 3) and "Still large parts of the Sami value foundations are attached to a life close to nature" (2002: 4) (cited in Gaski 2008, 224).

³⁵ Dichotomies such as Indigenous-nonindigenous, closeness to nature-alienation from nature, and traditional/authenticity-modern, are often found in Sámi political discourse (Gaski 2008, 233).

³⁶ The term "tradition" is not applied here as a given and fixed entity, but rather as a symbolic process through which individuals actively engage with symbols from the past, reinterpreting them creatively in the present (Helander-Renvall and Markkula 2017, 123).

³⁷ To many Sámi, the Sámi knife is still a central and significant tool in their daily life (Axell 2023, 79).

In sum, Emil finds ways of being Sámi outside of Sápmi while drawing on dominant notions of Sámi culture found in global discourses of indigeneity and the official Sáminess. Thus, it can be said that Emil exhibits a dual discursive competence; he navigates between dominant discourses on Sámi identity and his own perceptions, which we might, following Baumann (1996, 204; 2015, 214), call a demotic discourse. Along these lines, it could be said that Emil transgresses and disrupts the urban-rural divide, and the Oslo-Sápmi divide, while simultaneously drawing on dominant notions of authentic Sámi identity.

Part II: Being Sámi in Oslo

The local ecology of Oslo

The character of the local ecology and society of Oslo provides the meaningful context through which Sámi identities in Oslo are articulated (cf. Eidheim 1969, 65). Thus, to understand how Sámi in Oslo experience, articulate, and renegotiate their Sámi identification in the city, an outline of the local ecology of the city can be regarded as essential.

Despite Oslo being a majority-dominated city, there is a flourishing organization of Sámi Indigenous life in Oslo. This includes a Sámi kindergarten, a language center, the Sámi school of Oslo, the cultural center of the Oslo Sámi House, and various associations and organizations, as well as Oslo-oriented political parties (Berg-Nordlie, Andersen and Dankertsen 2022, 171, 172).³⁸

The Sámediggi Electoral Register (SER) has been used as an indicator of the number of Sámi who live in Oslo, due to a lack of better data (Berg-Nordlie and Andersen 2022, 78). In 2019, the estimated number of Sámi living in Oslo was 949 (Berg-Nordlie and Andersen 2022, 79).³⁹ Nonetheless, this cannot be regarded as a comprehensive record of the Oslo Sámi population. Indeed, most of my interlocutors are not registered in the SER and are, thus, not included in the SER-based statistics of the Sámi population of Oslo.

³⁸ While it has been common among many urban municipalities to not supply Indigenous peoples with Indigenous-oriented services – thus contributing to producing “Indigenous invisibility” in the city – the present millennium is characterized by increased commitment to and cooperation with the Sámi civil society among urban municipalities in Norway (Berg-Nordlie, Andersen and Dankertsen 2022, 173).

³⁹ From 1989 to 2017, the percentage of the SER Sámi who lived in areas outside of Sápmi, increased from 5.8 to 17 (Berg-Nordlie and Andersen 2022, 79).

Limits and possibilities in the capital

“Should I be normal, or should I be Sámi?”

To carry markers of Sámi affiliation in the city attracts attention, both negative and positive. I was told stories of people who were reluctant to wear the gákti on occasions when the attention was supposed to be on other people, such as baptisms and weddings. Despite being a positive form of attention, it can feel overwhelming, and even wrong, when the attention is meant to be on someone else. Other times, people have been reluctant to wear the gákti in fear of being subjected to racially motivated assaults, like slurs or mockery.⁴⁰ As Ingrid tells me, many Sámi in Oslo are “struggling in the tug-of-war between ‘should I be normal, or should I be Sámi?’”.

Ingrid’s formulation of a “tug-of-war” between being “normal” and being “Sámi” is an illuminating way of expressing the internal conflicts that being Indigenous in Oslo can entail. To follow Sara Ahmed (2012, 41), bodies that are “out of place” “stick out”. The discomfort that comes with “sticking out” (Ahmed 2012, 41) from that which is deemed as “normal” can become exhausting, even unbearable for some, and a challenge to their psychological health (Hansen and Skaar 2021, 41).

To “stick out” from Norwegianness confirms the Norwegianness of the space (cf. Ahmed 2012, 41). Despite the “normality” or “neutrality” that the public sphere of Oslo is seemingly characterized by, it is, arguably, the majority population’s culture and language that prevails (Berg-Nordlie, Andersen and Dankertsen 2022, 251). In this context, Sáminess becomes a non-neutral, non-normal, and “loud” category, while Norwegianness constitutes that which is everywhere but still unspoken and un-marked – “an absent centre against which others appear as points of deviation”, to borrow Sara Ahmed’s (2012, 35) formulation about whiteness. The choice of some Sámi not to be so “loud”, i.e., to blend in with the majority population and not disrupt the status quo, illustrates the power relations inherent in the way Sámi in Oslo navigate their ethnic identification.

This discomfort of “sticking out” was something Ingrid herself had experienced: “An old man told me that I do not belong here because I was wearing a scarf with Sámi patterns on.” By wearing a marker that signifies Sámi belonging, Ingrid seems to disrupt common conventions

⁴⁰ It is not uncommon to hear accounts of Sámi that have, when wearing the gákti, experienced non-Sámi people imitating joik as a form of ridicule and mockery.

of conduct in the public sphere of Oslo.⁴¹ Notions that see Sámi culture as incompatible with Norwegian culture deem Sáminess in Oslo a “matter out of place” that “does not belong here” – an *anomaly* that causes disorder and protest (Douglas 1997). Accordingly, the way the public sphere of Oslo is envisioned seems to generate mechanisms of exclusion and inclusion (Berg-Nordlie, Dankertsen and Winsvold 2022, 11).

Nevertheless, Ingrid tells me that she is in a more favorable position compared to other Sámi: “When I do not want to be so different, I can lean on the Norwegianness.” Likewise, Edda tells me, “I also have the privilege to be Norwegian.”

In a broader majority-dominated context, Ingrid and Edda can be understood as more empowered than other Sámi, as they share many of the cultural codes of the rest of the Norwegian majority, have social networks within the majority, and also have greater means to be heard in a political and state-controlled context (Berg-Nordlie, Dankertsen and Winsvold 2022, 7). Other Sámi can be more prone to be seen as “out of place” in Oslo, as it can be more difficult for them to “pass” as non-Sámi (Berg-Nordlie, Andersen and Dankertsen 2022, 151). They might speak Norwegian with an accent, have Sámi names, use traditional Sámi attire more regularly, or exhibit other traits that differentiate them more visibly from the Norwegian majority.⁴²

Ingrid and Edda can, to an extent, *choose* when and where they wish to enhance their Sámi identification and when and where to undercommunicate it. That is, they can “blend in” as only Norwegian and not “be so different”. In this sense, it could be said that Ingrid and Edda can use ethnic markers *strategically* as a resource, as ethnic entrepreneurs in the navigation of their ethnic identification in Oslo (Barth 1969; Eriksen 2013, 141) – reminiscent of what has been referred to as situational ethnicity (see Banks 1996, 13).

The scope of identity management that seems to be available to Ingrid and Edda can also be associated with central characteristics of the urban space of Oslo and the possibilities such a space engenders. Urban life is characterized by significant complexity, fluidity, and diversity, and the relationship between urban dwellers is often marked by partial identities, short-term

⁴¹ To this, one may add what Marianne Gullestad (2002, 46, 47) calls “imagined sameness”. The term refers to a prevalent logic in Norwegian society where the idea of equality is connected to ideas of sameness, leading to a pattern of social interaction where differences are frequently undercommunicated and similarities enhanced.

⁴² Phenotypical stereotypes of a “Sámi appearance” may also be one such trait (Berg-Nordlie, Andersen and Dankertsen 2022, 151). However, it has been argued that while some Sámi may be understood as “typically Sámi looking” in Northern Norway, in Oslo, they can be seen as majority Norwegians (Berg-Nordlie, Dankertsen and Winsvold 2022, 11).

relations, and fragmented knowledge of one another (Olsen 2018, 30). Such a setting, as Ulf Hannerz points out, “is an environment where there are many and varied ways of making oneself known to others” (1980, 232). Within this context, Sámi identity is one of many aspects of who my interlocutors are (Nyseth and Pedersen 2014, 144).⁴³ Thus, Ingrid and Edda can, to a certain degree, choose if and when to make ethnicity relevant in interaction with others (Olsen 2007, 82) – whether they should “lean on” the Norwegianness, the Sáminess, on both or, perhaps, on neither.

In Oslo, I could be Sámi

Marit and Anne grew up on the coast of Northern Norway in the 1950s and 1960s. In coastal local communities at this time, Sámi identity was highly stigmatized and therefore undercommunicated (Eidheim 1969). Ingrid and Edda, who belong to younger generations, are from areas with a similar history. Despite the generational differences among the four women, they all express analogous experiences of being Sámi in Oslo, whether this was in the 1980s or today.

Marit tells me, “When I was young and came to Oslo, there was an active and large Sámi community. It helped me to be openly Sámi. I could not do that in my hometown, because it was too shameful to be Sámi there.” Ingrid and Edda do not participate in any Sámi community in Oslo but have, nonetheless, similar experiences. As Ingrid said, “It is safe to take back an identity when you are 160 miles away from people who do not like it.”

The experiences of the four women are common among many Sámi in urban areas (Dankertsen 2022, 130). The racism in many local communities in Northern Norway has been described as a push factor driving urbanization towards areas like Oslo (Berg-Nordlie, Dankertsen and Winsvold 2022, 4). In this sense, the lack of knowledge and the often exotified view of Sámi culture that can be found among many Oslo dwellers may, ironically, provide a sense of freedom for many Sámi (Dankertsen 2022, 121, 131).

Additionally, the cultural diversity in Oslo was mentioned as an important characteristic of the city that makes possible an open expression of Sámi identity. As Edda says, “It is easier to be

⁴³ It is important to note that ethnicity is typically not enough to define a person’s social identity, neither in the city nor in rural areas (Eriksen and Sajjad 2020, 102). One may also add that ethnicity can mean different things to different people, and ethnicity can mean different things for the individual in different contexts (Paine 2003, 299).

Sámi here because it is not as big of a deal here. It is more normalized. It is just a part of the city.”

For Sámi individuals who grew up in regions where Sámi identity constituted a stigma, the culturally diverse environment of Oslo appears to offer greater tolerance and acceptance of various forms of identity expression. This allows them to express their Sámi identification in ways that they seem to experience as limited in their hometowns in Northern Norway. This is also observed among minorities in countries with pluralistic and multicultural ideologies, where their ethnic identity can be constructed more freely and self-consciously than in their countries of origin, where notions of purity and homogeneity prevail (Danforth 2000, 85-86, 88). In contexts where one is expected to exhibit a clearly delimited and defined ethnic identity, it can cause significant distress to feel torn between the available categories (Eriksen 2010, 75), something which a culturally diverse city such as Oslo seems to provide a way out from – multiple forms of identity expressions are “just a part of the city”.

A duality seems to be present in Sámi identity formations in Oslo. The ethnic purity promoted by dominant discourses on Sámi identity, found in both Norwegian institutional discourses and Sámi ethnopolitics, coexists with the pluralist and less constraining local discourses in cities such as Oslo, making way for more heterogeneous identity expressions.

Given the above, one could argue that what it is that makes it *easier* to be Sámi in Oslo is not only connected to higher tolerance for cultural difference(s) in the city, but also to the possibility of being confirmed and ascribed by others as Sámi. When one recalls Emil’s description of feeling Norwegian in Finnmark and Sámi in Oslo, Indigenous identities certainly do not seem incompatible with the urban context. On the contrary, the urban space appears to provide unique opportunities to cultivate and maintain one’s Indigenous identity in ways one cannot in certain rural areas of Sápmi. Paradoxically, for some Sámi, the urban context outside of the Sámi homeland is the place they can *be* Indigenous.

To this, one may add the nowadays widespread view within anthropology that ethnicity is not created in isolation but through contact (Barth 1969, 10). In light of this, urban Indigenous identities have not only rejected predictions that they would naturally “die out” or be “absorbed” by the majority culture (Sissons 2005, 28; Ramirez 2007, 21), but they can become even *more* relevant in the city context, with heightened contact across cultural and ethnic differences. Indeed, as the pivotal anthropological studies from the Copperbelt in today’s Zambia highlighted as early as the 1940s, despite the absence of ethnic- and tribal-based organization

in rural areas, urbanization led to a growing consciousness of ethnic identity through increased inter-ethnic contact in urban areas (Banks 1996, 29; Eriksen 2010, 27). From the Copperbelt to Sápmi, Indigenous and ethnic identities seem not to become any less relevant in urban contexts, such as in Oslo.

“Oslo Sámi”: Renegotiations of Sámi identity in Oslo

“Oslo Sámi”

The term Emil uses to describe himself is “Oslo Sámi”, as opposed to a “Sámi on paper”. “Who is an Oslo Sámi?” I asked. He was not completely sure, but suggested, “Someone who has grown up here and maybe does not know the language very well”.

On the one hand, it could be said that Emil uses the term “Oslo Sámi” to refer to someone who is *less* Sámi than the “Sámi on paper”. The term could describe someone who has grown up outside of the Sámi homeland and is not Sámi-speaking – two prevalent emblems of the assumed “authentic” Sámi identity.

However, one could also say that Emil is creating a *new* category of Sámi identity, demonstrating that it is possible to be both “indigenous” to Oslo and Indigenous Sámi. The Oslo Sámi stands in contrast to the dominant discourses’ representation of Sámi identity as inherently rooted in Sápmi and in rural areas. Thus, Emil seems to be engaged in making and remaking of the “social facts” found in dominant discourses (Baumann 1996, 189). Emil is arguably deconstructing old boundaries and purist notions of culture: He is manoeuvring with an alternative map and creating something *new* (Eriksen 1997, 50; Eriksen and Sajjad 2020, 43) – a *Third Space* between the categories (Bhabha 1994, 37). The notion of an authentic Sáminess as contrasted with an assumed Norwegian identity, and authentic indigeneity as contrasted with urban life, may seem tidy on paper, but the complexity of my interlocutors’ lives and experiences casts doubt on such dichotomies.

Given the above, “Sámi on paper” could also carry an additional meaning beyond that of an “authentic” Sámi identity. The expression “on paper” could also refer to something that appears one way in theory but may differ in reality. One could argue, then, that Emil’s creation of the new category of the “Oslo Sámi” implicitly posits that “Sámi on paper” is, indeed, just on paper. In the following, I will discuss some of the prevalent ways my interlocutors articulated their Sámi identification in Oslo.

Sámi spaces

When I asked my interlocutors in which ways they express their Sámi identification in Oslo, they usually answered by listing specific spaces of Sámi cultural life, such as the Oslo Sámi House, various Sámi associations they were members of, and places with frequent Sámi events, or specific dates, particularly the Sámi national day on the 6th of February. Other such arenas were non-physical spaces, such as social media forums. My interlocutors highlighted the vibrant and flourishing Sámi organization in Oslo as a key factor that makes it easier to maintain a Sámi identity compared to other cities, a point also noted in other studies (Dankertsen 2022, 140).

One such Sámi space that I visited, was the Oslo Sámi House, *Samisk Hus Oslo*. The House has largely functioned as a central meeting place for the Oslo Sámi community, regardless of what Sámi subgroup one belongs to, or one's political affiliation (Berg-Nordlie, Andersen and Dankertsen 2022, 172, 185). The House serves as an organizer and location for Sámi cultural events and has become an important and visible actor in the Indigenous Sámi life in Oslo (Berg-Nordlie, Andersen and Dankertsen 2022, 183, 185).

One of my interlocutors suggested showing me around the Sámi House, which I understood as an invitation to show me a "Sámi place" in Oslo. The House, which has moved to various locations since its establishment in 2004, is today visibly located in the city center. Above the entrance hangs a Sámi flag, and the interior can be described as a bright space decorated with various art pieces, some depicting central political happenings in Sámi history. In the main room hang banners used in the demonstrations of the Fosen case in 2023.⁴⁴

The spaces, or *native hubs*⁴⁵ (Ramirez 2007), that are built and organized as Sámi meeting places, constitute arenas where people can articulate their Sámi identification in a context usually dominated by Norwegian culture (Berg-Nordlie, Andersen and Dankertsen 2022, 154). The presence of these native hubs in Oslo, contests the idea that urban Sámi are "living in exiles without a culture" (Ramirez 2007, 1). On the contrary, indigeneity seems to persist, innovate, and thrive in the city (Peters and Andersen 2013, 2). What is more, the Fosen case demonstrates how Indigenous politics result from struggles found in both rural and urban areas, and how

⁴⁴ Demonstrations against the construction of wind turbines in the Fosen peninsula, which are located on grazing areas used by Sámi reindeer herders. In 2021, the Norwegian Supreme Court ruled that the construction of wind turbines in the Fosen peninsula constitutes a violation to the human rights of the Sámi (NIM 2023). The government's failure to follow up on the Supreme Court ruling, lead to a series of demonstrations in 2023.

⁴⁵ According to Renya Ramirez (2007, 2, 3), *native hubs* are gathering sites or centers of social networks, where urban Indigenous people come together. These hubs are both physical and virtual places that provide support for Indigenous people's identity, community, culture, and belonging outside their ancestral land (Ramirez 2007, 1, 3).

cities become vital spaces for Indigenous voices to be heard (Sissons 2005, 61). Urbanization, then, provides particular possibilities for Indigenous people to unite and organize politically (Ramirez 2007, 2). In this way, the native hubs in Oslo can help bridge the rural-urban divide and the Oslo-Sápmi divide.

However, arenas of Sámi organization in Oslo did not carry the same meaning for all my interlocutors. Some were reluctant to take part in them as they did not see these arenas as “typically Sámi” enough, while others felt that they themselves were not Sámi enough to do so. In addition, the politicization of Sámi ethnic identity found, for example, in ethnopolitical contexts (Thuen 2002, 286), can also be experienced by some Sámi in relation to the Sámi House. Despite its intention to function as a space independent of political affiliation, the political art pieces and demonstration banners on its walls may lead some to feel reluctant to take part in such arenas, for various reasons. For instance, I was told it was exhausting to always be expected to be in the front line of Sámi political issues.

This is indicative of conflicts that often take place in urban Indigenous spaces, where what it means to be Sámi is disputed and can become a means of exclusion and inclusion (Berg-Nordlie, Dankertsen and Winsvold 2022, 256). In short, the diversity of the Sámi population in Oslo can provide opportunities for various expressions of Sámi identification, but it can also lead to conflicts that undermine community-building among Sámi in the city (Dankertsen 2022, 114).

Additionally, my interlocutors seemed to encounter another challenge in terms of articulating and maintaining their Sámi identification in Oslo. Specifically, outside of these “Sámi spaces”, the quotidian is generally characterized by Norwegian culture. As Ingrid expresses: “To be Sámi in Oslo is a constant fight. It affects your identity. It is really difficult to learn the language here, and there is no arena to practice it either.”

As Ingrid’s frustration is indicative of, learning or maintaining the Sámi language is a challenging task since it is difficult to practice it in an environment dominated by another language. Following Kjell Olsen’s (2007) emphasis regarding the city of Alta,⁴⁶ one could argue that the local ecology of Oslo makes Sámi identity something reserved for specific arenas, considering that most spheres of daily life in Oslo belong to Norwegian culture. As there is no practical need for the language in one’s everyday life, maintaining the language seems to

⁴⁶ City in Finnmark, Northern Norway.

presuppose a conscious attempt (Olsen 2007, 94). Consequently, being Sámi in Oslo becomes “a constant fight”.

Given this, Olsen (2007, 83) argues that Sámi identity has become a private matter in a way that is quite different from what Harald Eidheim (1969) suggested in the 1960s. Rather than being an identity undercommunicated in certain social contexts due to the stigma attached to it, in urban settings today, Sámi identity is restricted to specific spaces (Olsen 2007, 83). Subsequently, Sámi identification has become a private matter, as it is up to the individual to maintain and cultivate it. This can lead to a personalization of Sámi identity, risking that Sámi identity solely becomes a “personal feeling” (Olsen 2007, 93).

In light of this, the dichotomy between Sámi and Norwegian culture does not appear to be dissolving but rather perpetuated: The two categories are still kept apart, but now in terms of distinct spheres (Olsen 2007, 76), both spatial (e.g. Sámi House), temporal (e.g. 6th of February), and virtual (social media). In this manner, the heterogeneity of Sámi identities in everyday life does not necessarily challenge the dichotomy between Sámi and Norwegian identity at a political and institutional level. Thus, the demotic discourse of Sámi ethnic identity and culture does not seem to fully dismantle the dominant discourses of clear boundaries and dichotomies (Baumann 1996, 190; 2015, 216).

Sápmi-caps and earrings

Although the quotidian in Oslo is largely characterized by Norwegian culture, my interlocutors seemed to find ways to articulate their Sámi identification outside of the “Sámi spaces”. Often, this entailed articulating their Sámi identification in more subtle ways, such as by the use of various accessories, e.g., purses, earrings, belts, and scarves with Sámi patterns and colours, or self-made clothing with Sámi symbols.

In their everyday lives in a majority-dominated city like Oslo, where Sámi do not differ much from the rest of the Norwegian majority, and Sámi culture is confined to specific spaces, they can use such subtle signs to communicate to others that they are Sámi in discreet ways (Dankertsen 2006, 29; 2022, 113). These signs are possibly directed particularly at other Sámi, who may recognize them more easily than non-Sámi people (Gjerpe 2013, 70; Nyseth and Pedersen 2014, 144-145). It can be a way of articulating one’s ethnic identity in a manner that does not draw too much attention, such as wearing the gákti might. Especially for those who see wearing the gákti as a drastic and perhaps unnatural choice, such subtle signs can become an alternative way of articulating their Sámi identification (Dankertsen 2006, 30).

By the use of these subtle symbols, my interlocutors are arguably renegotiating established categories and ethnic boundaries. Firstly, through innovative experimentation with old and new symbols, my interlocutors are creating new and alternative ways of articulating their Sámi identification (Nyseth and Pedersen 2014, 144). Sámi colours and patterns, and other Sámi symbols, can be understood as “old” or “traditional” symbols that are used in new ways and combinations, such as on hats, earrings, and self-made clothing. In this sense, they can draw on ethnic boundary markers found in the official Sáminess in their own ways and, ultimately, create an alternative Sáminess to which they can attach new symbols (Olsen 1997, 239).

Secondly, by the use of these forms and signs of Sáminess in the context of Oslo, my interlocutors appear to be renegotiating and challenging the notion that Sámi people solely belong to rural areas and a pre-modern past (Dankertsen 2022, 113). To wear traditional Sámi markers in Oslo is itself something that can be understood as untraditional, while at the same time the use of these symbols can be seen as traditional, reflecting a continuity with the past (Dankertsen 2006, 33). In this way, Sámi in Oslo demonstrate that they can be both “traditional” and “modern” at once, resisting the assumption that urban Indigenous people are “forever stuck in a liminal space not still traditional and also somehow not modern” (Ramirez 2007, 6). Thus, they are, it could be argued, engaged in bridging the assumed mutually exclusive categories of “Indigenous” and “urban”.

“You are everything all at once”

As demonstrated throughout this thesis, notions that hold the categories “Sámi” and “Norwegian”, and “Indigenous” and “urban”, to be mutually exclusive and dichotomous, deviate largely from the experiences of my interlocutors.

When discussing with my interlocutors how they experience and define their ethnic identification, their answers made this particularly evident. Edda says, “I do not think about it as different things. They are intertwined.” Jenny, a Norwegian woman married into a Sámi family expresses, from her point of view, “You are everything all at once. It is not different parts, either-or. You are Sámi. You are Norwegian. It is melted together.”

The descriptions of Edda and Jenny make evident that the narrow categories and either-or packages provided by dominant discourses (Barth 1994, 21; Baumann 1996), are incongruent with their experiences. They appear to articulate their ethnic identification as more hybrid and ambiguous than the vocabulary provided by the dominant discourses: Rather than being clear-cut and delineated, the categories are experienced in their daily lives as “melted together” and

“intertwined”. For Edda and Jenny, being Sámi and Norwegian is not compartmentalizable, divisible into “different parts”: There is not one “fundamental truth” or “essence” of one’s being that is either Norwegian or Sámi, which could provide an unambiguous answer to the question “but what do you really feel, deep down inside?” (Maalouf 2000, 2). It is not a question of “either-or” because “you are everything all at once”.

The ambiguity Edda and Jenny seem to insist on, is sometimes experienced as if one is positioned between categories. This is something Emil expresses explicitly: “For me, it is fine to stand between those cultures, then I get the best of both. I do not need to choose side. It is just a part of who I am.”

To Emil, it seems not to be problematic “to stand between those cultures”. He can arguably function as an ethnic entrepreneur and actively, reflexively, and strategically “get the best of both” (Barth 1969). Thus, despite the feeling of alienation and loss that can emerge from being “betwixt and between” established categories that seem “tidy on paper”, such as not feeling Sámi enough to be able to call oneself Sámi, it can also become a source of cultural creativity and innovation, of finding and creating new ways of articulating one’s Sámi identification that go beyond the ethnic boundaries of the dominant discourses (Dankertsen 2014, 63, 160). In this respect, Sámi identities are not understood as fixed, static, and immutable. Rather, to follow Harris, Carlson and Poata-Smith (2013, 5), they are *emergent* – always in flux, continuously evolving in dialogue with their surroundings.

One may also add that hybrid and ethnically ambiguous identities, a sort of “betwixt and between”, could have a particular opportunity, following Victor Turner’s line of thought, to “expose the basic building blocks of culture” (1967, 110). Indeed, my interlocutors’ experiences seem to contest the dichotomies of the dominant discourses (Baumann 1996; Olsen 2007, 89). As Edda says, “I use my bunad⁴⁷ as well as my gákti”. In this sense, they appear to invalidate ideas of authenticity and cultural purity and counter the notions that one cannot be both Sámi and Norwegian (Kramvig 2005, 60-61), and Indigenous and urban, for that matter (Peters and Andersen 2013; Berg-Nordlie, Dankertsen and Winsvold 2022).

Thus, by rejecting essentialist identities and renegotiating the clear-cut ethnic boundaries between them (Eriksen 1997, 50), my interlocutors can be said to be engaged in resistance

⁴⁷ Norwegian national costume.

against narrow and exclusive identity categories (Kramvig 2005, 46). To follow Eriksen, “the simplifications of identity politics are countered by the complexities of experience” (2010, 197).

At the same time, the dominant discourses also seem to provide a framework within which my interlocutors can make sense of their experiences and articulate their Sámi identification. In view of this, the official Sáminess is not solely repressive (Olsen 1997, 231), but could also function as a compass, for some as a site of safe return and a sense of home⁴⁸ (cf. Malkki 2015, 51), for others, as a way of finding one’s path in the articulation of a Sámi identity and belonging that they, or their past generations, might have lost.

When Edda says that, for “Norwegianized” Sámi, Sámi culture is “something that is forgotten, that you just have to remember again, in order to get it back”, it is the dominant discourses that she mostly must rely on, since Sámi culture constitutes largely something “forgotten” in her own family.

On the one hand, it is possible to interpret Edda’s formulation as referring to a reified Sámi culture: An “essence” or a “thing” essentially located “out there” that she must retrieve again and call back to memory. However, this can also be understood as a form of strategic essentialism (Spivak 1996, 214), that engages in processes of decolonization of the mind⁴⁹ through the act of “remembering again”. It is the collective Sámi identity forged by the ethno-political movement that has provided Edda with the content of this “thing” that she must “remember again”. In this sense, the dominant discourses have arguably provided her with a freedom to find a way back to Sáminess that colonialism tried to eliminate from her family’s present. Thus, Sámi can strategically call on repressive authenticity to resist further elimination of Sámi culture and identity (Wolfe 1994, 129) – to “remember again” what the assimilation policy drove many Sámi to forget.

Likewise, for “Oslo Sámi”, the dominant discourse can provide a “map” within which they can create new maps in the process of articulating an urban Sámi identity. As I have shown, old and new maps are used creatively – for example, old and new symbols are used in new ways and contexts – to make sense of their social worlds and to find ways to articulate that they, too, are Sámi. This, it could be said, constitutes a useful dual discursive competence: My interlocutors make judgements about when and how to engage in and navigate between dominant and

⁴⁸ I borrow Liisa Malkki’s (2015, 51) formulation regarding Finnishness.

⁴⁹ “Decolonizing the mind” refers to a form of resistance against colonization and was first formulated by Ngugi wa Thiong’o (cited in McLeod 2010, 26).

demotic discourses on Sámi ethnic identity, depending on context and purpose (Baumann 1999, 189, 204; 2015, 214).

Still, representations of Sámi culture and identities in line with dominant discourses on Sáminess can lead one to become trapped in essentialist categories (Gaski 2008, 228), or, to borrow Jeffrey Sissons' formulation, to be "caught in a binary not of their own making" (2005, 50). Articulations of Sámi identification based on a Norwegian-Sámi dichotomy can lead Sámi identity formations to increasingly rest on confirmation and ascription in relation to "Norwegian identity" (Stordahl 1996, 100). This arguably denies Indigenous peoples the opportunity to define their identities and cultures solely *on their own premises*. This can also be said in terms of an Indigenous-urban dichotomy: Presentations of indigeneity and rurality as inherently interconnected endangers portraying Oslo Sámi identity as a paradox (Peters and Andersen 2013, 11).

However, the dominant discourses that construct ethnicity as distinguishable by a reified culture are the currency and language within which Sámi as a minority must represent themselves and their identities, and claim and legitimate their rights (Baumann 1996, 192). Along similar lines, by reversing colonial notions, Indigenous people are now seen as "people of nature" who are keepers of ecological wisdom – a notion that international laws have translated into rights (Kraft 2009, 182, 183). Subsequently, legal documents do not solely deal with the rights of Indigenous peoples, they also define what Indigenous rights and identities "are" and "should be" (Kraft 2010, 57).

By this means, while Indigenous peoples have strategically represented themselves in terms of authenticity, which has secured a series of rights, they do not control the criteria of their authenticity themselves – this is confined by the settler-colonial power (Wolfe 1994, 129; Theodossopoulos 2013a, 401). In light of this, to follow Jenkins' (2008b, 79) formulation regarding the Mapuche,⁵⁰ it could be said that what it means to be Sámi is partly a result of what the Norwegian society has *made* it mean. The possibilities of articulating their Sámi identification, and of Sámi recognizing each other, in terms of their *own* categories and frameworks are impeded in a context where it is the Norwegian majority who sets the premises (Stordahl 1996, 100).

⁵⁰ Richard Jenkins writes, "what it means to be a 'Mapuche' is in part a consequence of what the Spanish or the Chileans have *made* it mean" (2008b, 79).

Yet, although Sámi in Oslo may find themselves “caught in a binary not of their own making” (Sissons 2005, 50), by insisting on ambiguity, they create new ways of understanding and articulating what it means to be an Indigenous person – what it means to be an “Oslo Sámi” (cf. Harris 2013, 22-23). In doing so, they continue resisting narrow identity categories, exposing how notions of Indigenous authenticity constitute “racism and primitivism in disguise” (Harris, Carlson and Smith 2013, 6). By finding their own ways to answer the question “How Sámi do you feel today?”, Sámi in Oslo are renegotiating and redefining what it means to be Sámi *on their own premises*.

Chapter 6. Concluding remarks: How Sámi do you feel today?

The present thesis has explored how Sámi in Oslo experience, articulate, and renegotiate their Sámi identity. While reading this study, one might ask, how can some Sámi associate Oslo with “Norwegianization”, while others with the possibility to *be* Sámi? This is a question that makes visible the diversity of Sámi histories and identities in Oslo, where Oslo as a city represents different meanings and provides different opportunities to different people. It is further indicative of how Sámi still navigate the repercussions and remnants of colonial notions and policies from the past, where some end up asking themselves, “Should I be normal, or should I be Sámi?”.

As highlighted in this thesis, experiences of being Sámi in Oslo are largely shaped by prevailing ideas of what an “authentic” Sámi identity is. Sámi are often expected to be visibly different and distinguishable from the Norwegian majority. Furthermore, Sámi culture and identities are frequently assumed to be rooted in the Sámi ancestral homeland and to be intimately connected to nature and a rural way of life. In this view, an Oslo Sámi identity seemingly becomes a paradox.

The people this study concerns, fall “betwixt and between” categories that seem “tidy on paper”. The dichotomous boundaries between “Sámi” and “Norwegian”, and “Indigenous” and “urban”, do not resonate with their lives and experiences; rather, they are “everything all at once”. However, the ambiguity of being “betwixt and between” find some Sámi wondering whether they are Sámi enough.

This thesis demonstrates how dominant notions of who a Sámi is can create both incentives and constraints for individuals' identity navigation. Depending on context and purpose, Sámi in Oslo navigate both dominant notions of Sámi culture and identity and create new and alternative ways of articulating their Sámi identification. Ultimately, by finding their own ways to answer the question "How Sámi do you feel today?" they are renegotiating what it means to be Sámi *on their own premises*.

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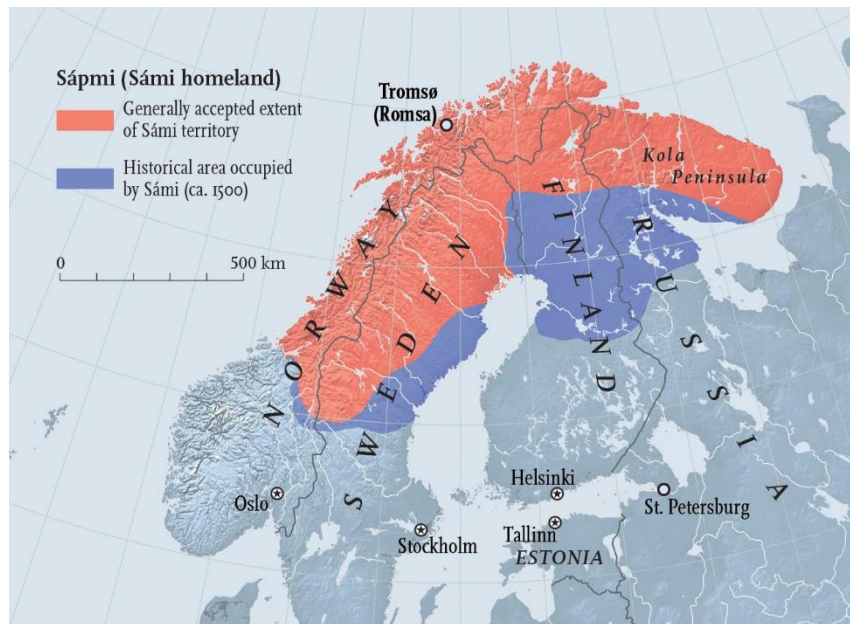
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Appendix

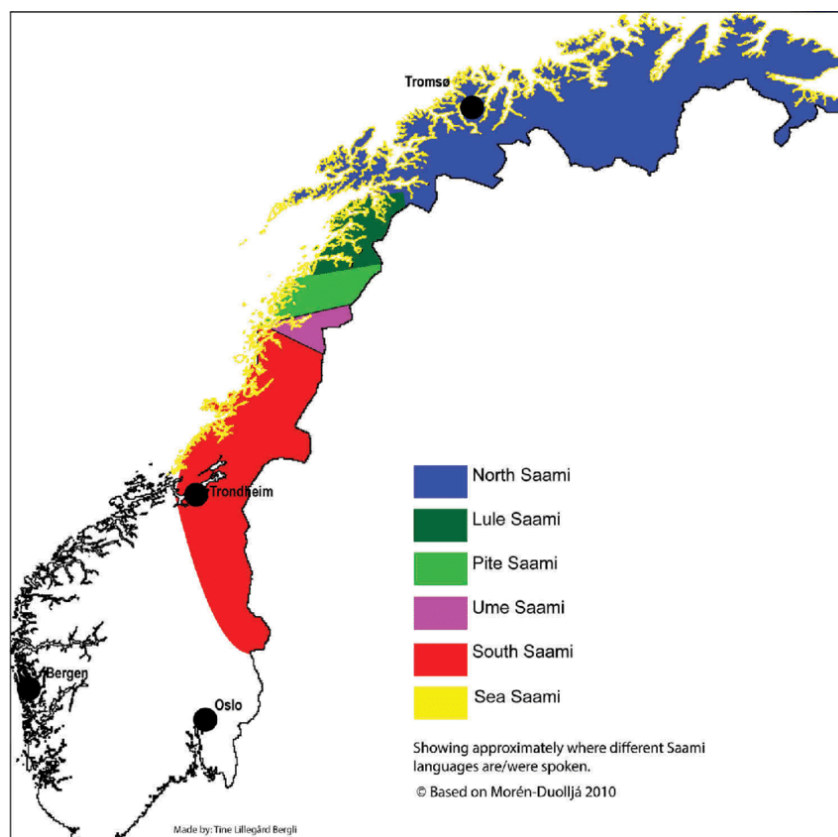
Interlocutors

Pseudonym	Gender	Age
Anne	Female	70-80
Astrid	Female	60-70
Edda	Female	20-30
Emil	Male	20-30
Harald	Male	80-90
Ingrid	Female	20-30
Jenny	Female	40-50
Maja	Female	70-80
Marit	Female	60-70
Olav	Male	70-80

Maps



Picture 1. The Sámi homeland, Sápmi (Nerberg 2023).



Picture 2. The Sámi languages (Langås-Larsen et al. 2017, 5).