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Sámi Re-Imaginings of Equality in/through Extracurricular Arts Education in Finland

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Abstract

The Indigenized arts-based inquiry reported in this article addresses matters of equality in Finland's extracurricular arts education system, as experienced by Indigenous Sámi artists, arts educators, scholars, and community leaders. Challenging national narratives of cultural homogeneity and egalitarianism, this research identifies aspects of this publicly-funded arts education system that function to create, or perpetuate inequality for Sámi learners. Employing narrative and joik as analysis approaches, we reflect upon these processes of exclusion in order to envision new possibilities for this national arts education system to not only accommodate Sámi learners, but to learn from and together with Indigenous arts, pedagogies, onto-epistemologies and ways of being to enhance equality for all.

Assimilation

*What does a Sami do
when he gets lost in the wild
he goes home*

*I'm home
and I'm still so far away
I hardly know my own sweetheart*

*if a Sami runs into a blizzard
he pulls his fur coat over his head
and disappears in snow*

*why am I transfixed
by everything I see
when I should just disappear*

Niillas Holmberg 2016

The idea that Finland owes its success in education, even in part, to cultural homogeneity (e.g. Sahlberg, 2015, p. 10) is one that is based on a limited perspective and understanding of Finnish society. The often-heard claim that educational change is needed to address Finland's fast diversifying cultural landscape (as resulting from recent immigration) largely negates the complex multicultural history of the small Nordic nation, erasing the minoritized societies that have long, or always, called Finland home. While it may be true that globalization, technological advances, and migration have intensified encounters with difference, this intensity is also the result of an increasing awareness and recognition of long-standing cultural diversity. The arts and arts education have been noted to be intricately related to the "making and remaking" of culture, and may be seen to hold "prospects for social transformation" (Gaztambide-Fernández, 2013, p. 639). Accordingly, they have important roles to play in recognizing and engaging with the diversity of Finnish society, moving beyond unquestioned assumptions of equality. In this article, we attend to matters of equality in Finland's publicly funded extracurricular arts education system, focusing on the experiences and perspectives of Indigenous communities - the Sámi. Through the stories of Sámi artists, arts educators, scholars, and community leaders, we identify a number of aspects of Finland's mainstream extracurricular arts education system that function to exclude or disadvantage the Sámi in relation to others. Through an arts-based analysis of these processes of exclusion, we ask: how might equality be enacted in, and through, Finland's Basic Education in the Arts system?

Educating the Sámi in Finland

The Sámi are recognized as the only Indigenous¹ people of Europe, with homelands (Sápmi) spanning across the imposed national borders of Sweden, Norway, Finland and Russia. The Sámi Homeland Region in Finland is comprised of three municipalities in the far north: *Eanodat* (Enontekiö), *Aanaar* (Inari) and *Ohcejohka* (Utsjoki), and one village in the southeast of Lapland, *Vuohčču* (Vuotso). There are approximately 8,000 - 10,000 Sámi people living in Finland, representing many diverse Sámi societies and comprising three linguistic groups: *Davvisámegiella* (Northern Sámi), *Anarâškielâ* (Inari Sámi) and *Nuõrttsää'mkiõll* (Skolt Sámi) (Stepien, Petrétei, & Koivurova, 2015).

Contemporary education in Finland has been said to be “rooted in complex contradictory legacies of Indigenous and cultural assimilation that entangle with the history of place, shaping everyday practices and experiences for Sámi people” (Huuki & Juutilainen, 2016, p. 7). This colonial legacy arguably began with attempts to Christianize Sápmi in the Middle Ages, with churches established in Sámi villages and multilingual priests sent to Sámi communities to educate and proselytize. These efforts intensified during the 17th Century, through the publication of educational materials in Sámi languages and founding of Catechist schools (Lindmark, 2014). Beyond the loss of many Sámi traditions and ways of life, this evangelism also threatened many traditional artforms, for instance, *joik*. Originally referring only to the Northern Sámi tradition, in English *joik* includes a number of vocal expressions, including Northern Sámi *luohti*, the Southern Sámi tradition of *vuolle*, the Aanaar Sámi tradition of *livđe* and the Skolt Sámi tradition of *leu'dd*. These traditions vary considerably from one another; for instance, whereas the traditional *joik* dialects of Northern Sámi are expressed through syllabalization rather than words, *leu'dd* “is a form of narrative art which expresses the oral history of the Sã'mmlaž [the traditional homelands of the Skolt Sámi]” (Jouste, 2009, pp. 244 – 245). *Joik* has been notoriously challenging for White scholars to comprehend, with western² art music translations easily obscuring its meanings and significance (Jouste, 2009; Ramnarine, 2009). Despite significant variations in style and purpose, *joik* has had strong associations with Shamanism (Ramnarine, 2009). This assumed connection was particularly damaging to the tradition in the hands of Christian missionaries who connected *joik* with “the devil himself,” resulting in intergenerational legacies of “shame... rage, anger, and rebellion” (Kraft, 2015, p. 235).

¹ The concept of Indigeneity, as used here, acknowledges the malleability and multiplicity of identities that such a politicized, analytical term encompasses; that ‘indigenism... is a process; a series of encounters; a structure of power; a set of relationships; a matter of becoming, in short, and not a fixed state of being.’ (de la Cadena & Starn, 2007, p. 11).

² In countering the ethnocentrism of much music education research, policy, and practice, the decision not to capitalize the west in this article is intentional.

In the 19th and 20th centuries, the Sámi were systematically excluded from nation-building projects during Finland's early years of independence (Lehtola, 2012), with the nation having been an integral part of the Swedish Empire (c. 1250 to 1809) and a Grand Duchy of Russia (1809 - 1917). The arts and education were both employed in the construction of nationhood through "an idealized image of the 'common folk'" (Ollila, 1998, p. 128) as "the bearers of... traditions attesting to the distinct character of the emergent Finnish nation" (Ramnarine, 2003, p. 3). The origins of mass education were thus rooted in singular notions of who comprised this highly constructed Finnish ideal. In line with the cultivation of a homogenous national identity, research and education defined the Sámi "as others, external, strange, exotic and an undeveloped, disappearing people" (Keskitalo, Sarivaara, Linkola, & Paksuniemi, 2018, pp. 24-25). One of the main social institutions in which the Sámi were disappeared was the post-World War II Finnish residential school system. In these schools, children were forced "to become 'proper' Finnish citizens in various ways, including a strict daily time schedule and Finnish language, food, symbols and clothing, which also entailed punishment for those who did not conform to the new identity" (Huuki & Juutilainen, 2016, p. 7; see also Keskitalo et al., 2018). Within a single generation, many young Sámi lost their native language and cultural ties to their families (Aikio-Puoskari & Pentikäinen, 2001). Although today Sámi youth learn in vastly improved settings from the assimilatory environments of their parents or grandparents, they continue to face challenges in revitalizing their languages, cultures, and epistemologies.

The Contemporary Basic Education in the Arts System and Equality

In contemporary Finland, children and young people have the opportunity to study the arts not only in schools, but also through Finland's Basic Education in the Arts (BEA) system: a national network of publicly funded arts schools offering extracurricular lessons in music, literary arts, dance, performing arts (circus and theatre) and visual arts (including architecture, audiovisual art, pictorial art, and arts and crafts). Attendance is subsidized through state and/or municipality funding, making these voluntary lessons affordable for a great number of Finnish families. Indeed, many aspects of this system reflect a principle of equality embedded in the Finnish education system, which was envisioned to offer high-quality teaching and support for all young people, regardless of race, gender, geographical location, or socio-economic background (Jakku-Sihvonen & Kuusela, 2002). For instance, public funding was secured already in the late 1960s (Heimonen, 2013), and BEA institutions continue to receive financial resources from the government according to population size and number of lessons taught. This means that most Finnish municipalities are able to provide BEA services, with 918 institutions serving approximately 82% of local government areas with an arts school, or branch office (Koramo, 2009). The criteria for acceptance into an art school varies from institution to institution, however it is mandated that equal standards should be applied to all applicants of any one study program. Similarly, once accepted, students all follow a National

Core Curriculum to ensure consistently high standards of teaching and learning regardless of which institution they attend. However, while these regulations and teaching provisions ensure that many children and young people in Finland have access to high quality arts education, they simultaneously exclude many others. For instance, establishing institutions and allocating resources on the grounds of population size and confirmed number of lessons has resulted in significant disparities with regards to the accessibility of arts education, with “big difference[s] in supply, demand, and accessibility... between provinces” (Etelä-Suomen aluehallintovirasto, 2014, p. 6). In 2012, it was found that 12% of young people living in the capital region (*Uusimaa*) were enrolled in BEA studies, and over 90% of these youth could access an arts institution or institutional branch within 10km of their homes. In contrast, whilst 9% of students living in the Sámi Homeland Region (of any ethnicity) were enrolled in BEA studies, many of these students had to travel over 30km for lessons (Etelä-Suomen aluehallintovirasto, 2014, pp. 41-50). Furthermore, what arts, or *whose* arts, can be studied in institutions varies significantly. For instance, it has been estimated that over 90% of all teaching in music institutions is based on western classical music (Pohjannoro & Pesonen, 2009).

Attempts to improve access and inclusion in the BEA system for minoritized groups have mainly focused on language of instruction. In Southern regions, it is possible to study in languages other than Finnish, with 60 institutions offering instruction in Swedish (a national language of Finland) and 10 institutions offering instruction in English (not an official language). Although the Sámi were granted the right to communicate in Sámi languages with government authorities in 1992, and Sámi language rights are granted for compulsory education, BEA does not currently offer any arts education in Sámi languages (despite possessing official language status in the Sámi Homeland Region, and official minority language status throughout the country) (Etelä-Suomen aluehallintovirasto, 2014, p. 27). Beyond teaching language, there are also no equivalent opportunities to study Sámi arts through Sámi pedagogies within the BEA system, or any other equally funded and government-supported means. As such, it has been argued that “this education system does not provide equal opportunities for different ethnic and language minorities to promote their own... traditions” (Moisala, 2010, p. 211).

Viewing Equality Through a Critical Sámi Studies Lens

In recent years, the Finnish education system has been internationally promoted and analyzed as “one of the models of educational excellence and equity today” (Sahlberg, 2015, p. 2). This narrative of Finnish education as a *public good* (p. 49) has been extended to extracurricular arts education, with funding structures and other initiatives (as described earlier) employed to promote the BEA system as one that is accessible and equitable for all. However, Sámi education researchers Pigga Keskitalo, Satu Uusiautti and Kaarina Määttä (2012) suggest that

national minorities do not necessarily experience this principle of equality as it has been intended. As a nation without a history of international conquest, and itself a pioneer in minority politics, the narrative of Finland as a colonial state has struggled to find legitimacy in contemporary scholarship and politics (Lehtola, 2015; Nyysönen, 2011). A postcolonial theoretical framework has been seen as largely irrelevant for research conducted on the Finnish context, largely due to the majority's assumption of equality and the promotion of preservation and development of Sámi culture through national egalitarian policies directed at Sámi artists and educators (Nyysönen, 2011). In 1935, it was stated that "there is no need to put the Sámi in an exceptional position in economic and social development" (*Lapin Taloudelliset olot ja Niiden Kehittäminen* as translated in Nyysönen, 2011), and although much has changed in the years since, this is a persistent perspective. As such, Nyysönen (2011) notes that "the democratic principle of equality is activated to curb Sámi group rights or to define them in a way that does not threaten national principles but which appears as partial from the perspective of the Sámi" (p. 90). Acknowledging that the cultural flows and blendings of a globalizing world hold implications for Sámi culture and identity (Seurujärvi-Kari, 2012), coloniality is here understood in terms of the assimilation, socialization, and integration of Indigenous peoples into mainstream populations, as,

the biopolitical and geopolitical management of people, land, flora and fauna within the 'domestic' borders of the imperial nation. This involves the use of particularized modes of control... [including] minoritizing [and] schooling... to ensure the ascendancy of a nation and its white³ elite (Tuck & Yang, 2012, pp. 4-5; see also Battiste, 2000)

In attending to the normalization of inequality in BEA, this research assumes a Critical Sámi Studies lens (Sarivaara & Keskitalo, 2016; Sarivaara, Uusiautti & Määttä, 2014). Critical Sámi Studies draws upon post-colonialism and Critical Theory in focusing upon Sámi self-determination in relation to the Nordic States (Sarivaara, Uusiautti & Määttä 2014, pp. 2-3). It is important to note that in adopting a Critical Sámi Studies lens, this research does not attempt to point the finger at certain individuals or institutions as colonizers and victimize others as colonized. As Leigh Patel (2016) claims, "the structure is far too pervasive and therefore is more aptly countered by attending to the ways that we come into relation through coloniality" (p. 8). In acknowledging that no one is exempt from coloniality "through its ongoing structure of people, land, and well-being," we attempt to move beyond dualisms in

³ As Tuck and Yang (2012) note, "In using terms as 'white'... we are acknowledging that whiteness extends beyond phenotype." (p. 5).

seeking alternative futurities wherein the BEA system might “identify and counter the genealogies of coloniality that continue to demand oppression” (Patel, 2016, p. 6).

Research Task and Process

The research task of this study was twofold: The first task was to identify processes of coloniality in Finland’s extracurricular arts education system, considering how these processes produce and maintain societal stratifications between what is framed as the *mainstream* and Finland’s Indigenous Sámi communities. Secondly, the research aimed to envision a more equitable BEA system that not only accommodates, but engages with and learns from, Sámi arts, pedagogies, onto-epistemologies and ways of being.

The study was initially conceived as a relatively White-traditional, single-researcher instrumental case study (Stake, 1995) by Alexis, a non-Indigenous, first-generation Australian living and working in Finland. Positioned as an outsider in relation to Sámi onto-epistemologies and experiences (Thomson, Miller & Cameron, 2016), she took opportunities to learn from others from the onset. Acknowledging that “Indigenous peoples’ interests, knowledge and experiences must be at the center of research methodologies and construction of knowledge about indigenous peoples” (Rigney, 1999, p. 119) and aiming towards culturally responsive research, the initial research plan was constructed in collaboration with Sámi scholars and education leaders. Positioning the Sámi participants as experts of their own lived experiences, Alexis met with twenty-eight Sámi artists, arts educators, scholars, and community leaders living and working in Sápmi, Oulu, or the Capital Region of Finland. Artists represented the fields of painting, sculpture, film and media, theatre, multimedia, and industrial arts, as well as traditional cultural expressions such as *duodji* (traditional artistic works with a basis in handicrafts) and *joik*. Scholars represented the fields of arts, education, history, archeology, and Indigenous studies; and community leaders included arts institution principals, regional festival organizers, government officials, and municipality policymakers.

The discussions between Alexis and the Sámi experts were unstructured, approximately one to two hours in duration, and were held during a six-month period in 2016. Eight of these discussions (both individual and group discussions of up to seven people) were more informal meetings aiming to establish open and trusting relationships and future collaborations, to identify additional contact persons, or to contextualize the preliminary findings of the study within broader Sámi epistemic, historical, and cultural contexts. Twelve of the discussions (in which fourteen participants took part) were more focused on Sámi access to and participation in Finnish arts education, and were audio recorded and transcribed. Subsequent meetings in person or online were arranged with six of the initial group of experts to clarify and deepen understandings, and a number of these individuals continue to engage in collaborative work with Alexis. Preliminary analyses involved the application of Braun and Clarke’s (2006) thematic analysis to discussion transcriptions, “identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns

(themes) within data” (p. 79). However, Alexis had significant ethical concerns with regard to “interpret[ing] various aspects of the research topic” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 79) in isolation from the communities from which these perspectives were taken (see also Smith, 1999).

Indigenizing Our Approach

In an attempt to reconsider the commitment to equity and social justice that underpins this work, Hildá, the second author of this article, a Northern Sámi joik and vocal artist, was invited to join the project as a salaried research partner. Alexis and Hildá worked through a “relational solidarity” and “deliberate commitment” (Gaztambide-Fernández, 2012, p.51) to being-in-relation (Patel, 2016) with one another. Aligning with Balto’s (1997) suggestion that storytelling serves a pedagogical purpose in Sámi communities, and in an attempt to retain the emotionality of experiences shared with Alexis, we selected narrative inquiry as an appropriate methodological approach. As a way to characterize, express, and make meaning from lived experience (Leavy, 2015), we followed Polkinghorne’s (1995) *narrative analysis* in the crafting of a composite character, *Áile*, in close collaboration with all research participants. As a composite voice, *Áile*’s narrative weaves together the narrative threads of each participant’s data (see Kallio, 2015), as a “fiction[al] form ... laid over a ‘fact-oriented’ research process” (Agar, 1990, p. 74). We use the term crafting here to deliberately emphasize that *Áile*’s story is inseparable from the research data, as it not only restories experiences or ideas, but incorporates many exact phrases of the Sámi experts themselves. As such, *Áile* is fictional only “in the sense that [she is] ‘something made’, ‘something fashioned’ ... not in that [she is] false, [or] unfactual” (Geertz, 1973, p. 15). The decision to write *Áile*’s narrative in the first person, from the perspective of an Indigenous “I,” was not taken lightly given the ethical problematics of a non-Indigenous researcher speaking for or speaking as a Sámi character. The negotiation of White and academic identities in relation to those one learns from, and together with, always takes place within a politicized, ethical quagmire and warrants significantly more discussion than can be included here. With regards to the voice used in the narrative construction, Alexis also engaged in considerable reflexive dialogue with the Sámi experts who participated in this research. All stated a preference for a first-person narration in order to retain a sense of the emotionality of their experiences. In addition, all participants in this study were given the opportunity to read and comment on a draft version of this article prior to submission. In the interests of transparency, the authors would like to note that one participant chose to withdraw consent at this stage, concerned that a research focus on power imbalance and inequality does not adequately acknowledge the advances in Sámi rights in recent decades. We believe this important to mention here in illustrating that Sámi experiences and perspectives of equality are by no means uniform and note that this participant’s stories are no longer included in *Áile*’s narrative.

Inspired by Indigenous methodologies (Kovach, 2015), the authors decided to explore the role that joik might play in sense-making and communication. According to Sámi tradition, the joiker does not joik about someone or something, as one might in song, but joiks the person or entity. As such, joik is a second name of sorts, and a means to establish solidarity and position oneself and others within Sámi communities. In this way, through what we term *joik-research*⁴, Hildá joiked the composite character of Áile through an Indigenized analysis approach involving a deep, and extended engagement of *being-with* (La Jevic & Springgay, 2008) the stories that had been shared in an embodied, reflective, holistic and Sámi way. In line with the crafting of a composite character, combining numerous narrative threads and the theoretical perspectives of Critical Sámi studies, Hildá felt it important that the joik was not overly simplistic or reminiscent of particular, identifiable joik dialects or geographical regions. Furthermore, dissonances and the inclusion of different joik timbres and techniques allude to the different opinions and stories shared in this research, emphasizing the inclusion of various Sámi voices as they also engage with processes of globalization and change. Áile thus represents no one person in particular, but neither is she wholly fictional. Her voice is a polyphonic tapestry of many.

Literature scholar Vuokko Hirvonen (2010) describes joik as a gift, not only in the sense that one receives such a gift “from the earth spirits or other natural spirits,” but also in that “you are not supposed to make a yoik for yourself: you must get it as a gift from someone else” (p. 94). Áile's joik thus represents a recognition of the gifts we as researchers received, through sharing in the perspectives and stories of Sámi artists, educators, and educational leaders. Given that the joik does not belong to the joiker, or either of the researchers, but Áile herself, her joik also illustrates an attempt to “give back” (Kuokkanen, 2008, p. 268). Whilst perhaps not easily accessible for western scholars, we don't believe that it needs to be. Thus, joik-research here reflects our ongoing “commitment and desire to ensure that academic knowledge, practices and research are no longer used as a tool of colonization and as a way of exploiting indigenous peoples” (Kuokkanen, 2008, p. 268).

Áile's Voice

Although Áile's joik is included here in a recorded form, joik is a living, evolving art that incorporates improvisational elements as it engages with different people, situations, and contexts. In order for Áile's story and her joik to live, grow, and develop as they normally would, the researchers have also sought opportunities to present this research in other ways,

⁴ We are continuing to reflect critically upon conjoining Indigenous and non-Indigenous concepts in the term *joik-research*. This may be as problematic as “putting the word *Indigenous* in front of a non-Indigenous concept” (Kovach 2015, p. 52). We are continuing to consider alternative terms that illustrate this process of *being-with* story, meaning-making, and communicative potential that this approach allows.

together with Sámi communities in Finland. In this way, it is hoped that the joik presented here is not simply a debriefing of the research, but a means for “the community to carry the conversation after the researcher has moved on” (Falconer, 2014, p. 16).



Audio File 1. Áile's Joik as crafted and performed by Hildá Länsman, 2017

Born and raised in a small village in Sápmi, Áile grew up in a bilingual household and speaks both the Sámi-language of her father’s family, and her mother’s Finnish tongue. She lives and works in Helsinki, over a thousand kilometers from home and far from the cultural cornerstones of traditional Sámi society. When asked about her work as a Sámi artist, she paused,

I don’t really consider myself as a Sámi artist, or maybe I also don’t want to identify myself as a Sámi artist, I don’t want to be labelled like that - it’s limiting.

Although no less significant, the limitations associated with how Áile experiences her Sáminess in, and through, arts and arts education are markedly different from the stigmatization of Sámi cultural traditions that have accompanied the Christianization of Sápmi, or the Finnish residential school system (see Nyssönen, 2011). Áile notes that on an interpersonal level, she has few conflicts with those she perceives as belonging to the *mainstream*, if any. However, on a broader, structural level, she describes a number of processes that reinforce hierarchical logics of inequality. In what follows, Áile reflects upon her own arts education, artistic work and teaching, guided by Niillas Holmberg’s (2016) poem, *Assimilation*, shared in the opening of this article.

What does a Sami do
when he gets lost in the wild
he goes home

I was one of the lucky few children in my village to receive formal music lessons. A small group of friends and I, both Sámi and Finnish kids, would pile into a car every second weekend, with our parents taking turns to drive us three hundred kilometers to the closest music school. With each kilometer we travelled south, I shed a layer of myself. By the time I walked through the music school doors I was able to completely envelop myself in this other world, a world where western classical music filled the halls, where teaching and learning

drew upon stories and histories that everyone else knew and believed in. I could almost be someone else—a normal Finnish child.

Learning classical music was easy, there were so many books, so many scores, so many recordings, so many teachers; it felt like everything was already existing—just waiting to be grabbed hold of. If young people want to access Sámi art, they make it themselves—there are so few recordings, television programs, or films. We have always been each other's teachers. I never questioned why these two musical worlds were so separate for me, why there was no one making Sámi music or joiking in the music school; it has never had any place in the mainstream. Once or twice a year, Sámi organizations arrange festivals or events where there are workshops for children and young people. These are wonderful occasions, and bring together communities from all over Finland to learn not only traditional Sámi arts, but everything from graffiti to ballet, arts that you don't see every day in the North. It was through those kinds of events that I formed rock bands with my friends, figuring out the chords to pop songs and translating the lyrics. The workshops that are offered for young Sámi easily spark a passion for the arts, but that's often where it ends. There is a hunger for art that is difficult to satisfy through a weekend workshop run only once or twice a year. It was all so different from the regular, progress-oriented teaching at the music school. I never saw any connection between what I learnt there on my instrument and what I composed and performed at home with my friends.

I'm home
and I'm still so far away
I hardly know my own sweetheart

Those songs we wrote were not only for ourselves. We really had the sense that we were writing Sámi culture. But those childhood bands were difficult to maintain, as most of us had to leave home at 16 to pursue further studies. I left to attend a music specialized school, but I found it harder than I expected. I shared a room with a young Finnish girl and her experience just seemed so different to mine. She attended the classes, met other students, visited the shops and cafes, and went to the many events that were taking place in the town with such ease. Just crossing the street was hard for me. I was not used to such a busy place, or being so far removed from my own culture. I had heard my grandfather's stories of feeling displaced, feeling ashamed of his Sáminess at boarding school or at church. My experiences were totally different. My Indigeneity was seen by others at the school as something special, something exotic and exciting. Everybody was always waiting that I would do something very Sámi, and I hardly knew what that might be. Teachers always asked me to joik as part of ensembles, instead of play my instrument like everyone else. They didn't know that joik is not a musical performance; it is not a solo instrument but a way to communicate and situate yourself and

others within our society. Who was I supposed to communicate with when nobody understood what I wanted to say? I wasn't quite sure whose society I was in, but with every joik I was asked to perform, I felt that I was situating myself further and further outside of it.

Whereas when I was younger, the worlds of classical music and the arts of my Sámi homeland seemed so far apart from one another, now their co-existence felt forced and unnatural. I was included only insofar as I performed the role of Pocahontas, with my Indigeneity defined for me and permanently on display. No one at the school could comprehend these feelings of ethnotrauma—the desire to escape yourself. I couldn't even explain how the rhythm of daily life could be so jarring for me—how both my identity as Sámi and the identity I was looking for as a *normal musician* felt heavier and heavier on my shoulders the longer I stayed.

I returned home after only a few months.

if a Sami runs into a blizzard
he pulls his fur coat over his head
and disappears in snow

The communities living in the North are so important. They nourish the connections we have to our roots. When I returned to Sápmi, I instantly felt at home. However, whilst being back in my homeland was comforting, I no longer had libraries of textbooks to rely upon, music teachers to turn to for advice, or even regular lessons. I soon left once again and felt more determined than ever to adapt, to learn, and to survive in pursuit of my educational and vocational dreams. I feel a bitterness about this balancing game we play within our own lives, but it's difficult to know where to direct these feelings of frustration. Young people like me who leave Sápmi risk losing our links to Sámi culture. There are so few support systems available within which you can affirm and legitimize your Sáminess—places where you can just be yourself. It is very easy to forget your identity or to live in a shallow reflection of Indigeneity, dressing up in gákti⁵, attending a Sámi band at a local club, and posting pictures on social media from Sámi festivals. This is an alluring mirage, an exotic performance of other people's ideas of what it means to be Indigenous without even realizing your own assimilation. On the other hand, if we don't leave Sápmi, there are limited options for making a living, getting an education, or following your dreams. It would be foolish to wait here for a Sámi film school, or an arts academy. Of course, leaving home is a wonderful opportunity to explore and engage with the wider world, but it can be difficult to maintain or develop that strong sense of cultural identity or security on your own.

⁵ Sámi traditional dress

Now that I have finished my studies and have had some success with my work, I often feel that I should be a much more aggressive, provocative artist than I am. I feel a lot of pressure to take advantage of the freedoms that artists often enjoy, to make demands for social justice and equality on behalf of the collective. The role of radical Sámi artist is a very seductive one. The more radical and political we are, the more the majority audience is clapping their hands. It can also fulfil many hopes and expectations from my own community—that I am doing Sámi art *for* Sámi people. But I just don't feel that kind of artist is me. Yet, neither am I completely comfortable making something of simple beauty, representing my Indigeneity as a mascot for inclusion and multicultural tolerance. Such art is always beautiful, tempered, and silent, but rarely opinionated, engaged, and living. These archetypes of Sámi radical or tourist attraction are often reflected in the expectations or judgements of mainstream audiences and also teachers, determining *whose* stories get told or valued. It sometimes feels easier to be rebellious, or to be an exotic aesthetic, than to delve into the stories that I really want to tell—about homosexuality, about family, about the land, about success, about my life here as a Sámi person.

These pressures from both outside and inside of our communities often lead me to question the art that I make, and I wonder if I'm doing *enough*. I ask myself if it is Sámi *enough*. If I am Sámi *enough*.

why am I transfixed
by everything I see
when I should just disappear

I worry that some Sámi children have no experience of our culture, or even worse, have negative experiences of our culture. Although it is more and more common for joik, for instance, to be aired on prime-time television, performed in church, or to be selected to represent Finland on the international stage, it is still a deeply wounded tradition. Many years ago, I decided to visit a few local primary schools to share a joik with the children for their spring celebrations. I was joiking in the playground with one group of kids when an older Sámi woman interrupted us. She took me aside and scolded me, telling me that I was sending these children to hell by joiking with them. Long associated with Indigenous religion, shamanic practices, and mythology, there are many people—both young and old—who still believe that joiking is sinful and should not be done. Reconciling one's culture with one's faith is often complex, and intergenerational pains run deep. It can be very difficult to shed these entrenched feelings of shame, fear, and anger that surround our own cultural traditions.

These early experiences compelled me to get my teaching qualifications, so that I could contribute to finding a different relationship for Sámi people and our traditions. Yet, it is a

long and slow process, not only in healing, but in learning, unlearning, and relearning how to do this. As a Sámi education student, the qualifications we earn in order to teach in schools have nothing to do with Sámi arts, culture, languages, or pedagogical approaches. In order to be included as *equals* in the mainstream education system we must silence our ancestral knowledge and forget what we know. In Finnish, I would say that it's *demokratiaa tasapäistämällä* [democratic levelling]—it looks like equality because everyone appears the same. It is okay if we wear gákti, or do our traditional arts, as long as the Sámi receive the same rights as everyone else. We can succeed as Sámi teachers as long as we conform to criteria designed by, and for, Finnish society. It is hard to embrace and learn from western culture or knowledge when your hands are so busy grasping at your own Indigeneity. How can we participate in this globalizing world as equals when our society is often not even acknowledged?

This entrenched inequality also frames how I approach my students as an educator. Of course, it is my hope that young Sámi will come here to study their own traditions, but I am not about to administer DNA tests to determine who should or who should not be here. I hope that through non-Sámi students learning our arts and culture they might also learn something of Sámi heritage and why it is important. I hope that they also learn something about themselves. This is how we change attitudes—how we counter coloniality. I often have non-Sámi students asking me to teach them duodji, to make gákti. At the beginning of our work together they always ask, “if we are learning to make this traditional dress, why can't we wear it?” Gákti is so much more than a piece of clothing. Through learning art in this simple way, they learn our stories, our beliefs, our values, our language, our worldview. I always respond, “by the end of the course, you will know why”.

... and they always do.

Opportunities for Equality in and through Basic Education in the Arts

Reflecting upon Áile's character and narrative, we argue that policy makers, administrators, and educators share the responsibility to identify, interrupt, and counter processes of social stratification and coloniality that require and perpetuate inequality within the context of extracurricular arts education in Finland. However, this is not necessarily a straightforward identification of cause and effect, allowing for prescriptive solutions. Here, we present three critical Sámi reconsiderations of teaching and learning in the arts that may serve as starting points in creating spaces and support frameworks for Sámi students, artists, and educators to maneuver their individual, complex, and multiple artistic and cultural identities within the BEA system. In addition, these reconsiderations open up new possibilities for BEA to actively engage with, and learn from, Indigenous artistic and educational onto-epistemologies and

practices. These three re-considerations include the Sámi gift philosophy of *Attáldat*; the acknowledgement and implications of *interconnectedness*; and the necessity of *learning-that-stirs*. Although the re-considerations outlined here are grounded in the “central Sami values... of interdependence and reciprocation” (Kuokkanen, 2005, p. 28), the opportunities they present for equality in arts education are relevant beyond the BEA system, teaching Sámi students, or Sámi content.

In many ways, the Basic Education in the Arts system is structured to identify and foster talent⁶ in young artists, particularly for teachers and students working in institutions with entrance examinations and with advanced streaming options, such as exists in music education. Whereas processes that progressively exclude more and more young people in the cultivation of future professionals have already been the subject of critique (e.g. Heimonen, 2014), a Sámi philosophy offers an alternate perspective on identifying and fostering such *gifts*. Kuokkanen (2005) has described the Sámi concept of *attáldat*, “a derivative of the Sámi verb to give, *addit*. Today, *attáldat* is usually defined as a skill or giftedness” (p. 24). Instead of these skills being employed in competition, Sámi understandings of *attáldat* are that these gifts “exist primarily to be shared with others” (Kuokkanen, 2005, p. 24). We can think, for example, of students vying for orchestra chairs, with rewards for the few at the exclusion of many. The concept of *attáldat* reconsiders a gift as something one possesses, to also something one gives. This underlies the enthusiasm and confidence that Áile described in young Sámi, as they assume ownership (although at times, this ownership is out of necessity) of the art they make and perform together at festivals and workshops. Art is a gift, to share with each other and the wider community. In this way, *attáldat* emphasizes the importance of recognizing and fostering individual interests and talents, but also “the significance of giving and sharing in order to sustain the needs of others” (p. 26).

Through a gift philosophy of *attáldat*, dualisms between mainstream and artistic or cultural Others are also replaced by a more complex view of *interconnected* individuals navigating and constructing living realities that are always changing. As such, essentialist notions of Finnishness or Indigeneity are troubled, necessitating active, deep engagement with difference, not as an obstacle to overcome but as an opportunity to learn. Inclusion is then not provisional, enacted according to the terms defined solely by those in power to do so, but an ongoing process of learning and understanding oneself and one’s artistic traditions as being-in-relation. As Patel (2016) explains, “learning is fundamentally about transformation. It is

⁶ Although not possible within the confines of this article, we agree that it is beneficial and indeed necessary for policymakers and educators to critically reflect on talent as a social construct in any given artistic and cultural context.

coming into being and constantly altering that being; it is a subjective and often messy act” (p. 76). Thus, such learning does not follow a straight path from ignorance to understanding, but takes place within a larger context of “bodies, emotions, place, time, sound, image, self-experience, history” with learning detouring “through memory, forgetting desire, fear, pleasure, surprise, rewriting” (Ellsworth, 2005, p. 55). In this sense, Sámi art is not something static, historical, or exotic that requires young people to perform predefined versions of Indigeneity. Neither can arts education—Indigenous or mainstream—meet students’ needs if it is not grounded in the social worlds and lives of those it is intended to serve. Thus, a focus on *interconnectedness* may better support both teachers and students through a pedagogy that prioritizes understanding, respect, “communality and co-operation” (Keskitalo, Uusiautti, and Määttä, 2012, p. 58) both within Indigenous groups, and between Sámi and non-Sámi communities. Furthermore, interconnectedness allows for teaching and learning to be intricately related to place (geographically, temporally, and spatially), providing opportunities to interrupt the universal truths, values, and placelessness of coloniality (Patel, 2016, p. 61).

Finally, as policy makers, community leaders, arts institutions, educators, and students engage in dialogue and practices rooted in Indigenous knowledge and ways of knowing, the hegemony of the mainstream is made ever more visible (Balto and Østmo, 2012). Whereas the processes that construe certain knowledge, values, and practices as normal or desirable all too easily pass by without critical reflection, Indigenous onto-epistemologies in BEA may hold the potential to highlight the artificiality of existing power structures that include some, and exclude others. A disturbance of one’s harmony through what Balto and Østmo (2012) term *learning that stirs*, allows for the status quo to be identified, and called into question. Such examination and construction of new knowledge allows for a reconsideration of the stasis of what is knowable, what is valued, and what is deemed successful (Balto & Østmo, 2012, p. 14). As such, comfort may well serve as an indicator of privilege—of inequality. If one is always teaching or learning within one’s own onto-epistemological (and artistic) comfort zones, it is likely that the perimeters of this comfort zone, which in turn construct what is legitimate educational content and pedagogical method, function to exclude those who understand and/or experience the world differently. Thus, significant learning—ethical learning—*requires* an element of discomfort.

If Finland’s Basic Education in the Arts system is to be not only guided by principles of equality, but actively engaged with its realization both within institutions and in broader society, it is necessary to interrogate who this arts education serves. In moving beyond a homogenized imaginary ideal of Finnish society and assumptions of already-achieved equality, we argue that an effective means to work towards positive change is for policy makers, institution leaders, educators and others to engage in respectful dialogue and learning with Sámi arts, pedagogies, knowledge, and ways of knowing. This is not necessarily a way to

learn *about* Indigenous Others and find ways to include them in the existing system. Rather, by learning *from* and *together with* others (and on *their* terms rather than the terms of the dominant culture), educational systems such as BEA may better identify the structures and processes that create, support, or maintain inequality and co-create alternatives. The methodological evolution of this study itself serves as one example of such onto-epistemological development, and one such attempt to counter the structures of coloniality that continue to shape how we think, act, teach, and learn. Whilst disrupting the legacies of coloniality and inequality within any education system surely places new demands upon teaching services and information distribution (Keskitalo, Uusiautti & Määttä, 2012), these demands can be met in the day to day practices of teaching and learning. Through embracing an openness and willingness to listen, seeking discomfiting opportunities for *learning that stirs*, and engaging in active conversations and relationships, new potentials may arise for those working within extracurricular arts education to learn, to learn differently, and to imagine otherwise.

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