



Sámi allaskuvla
Sámi University of Applied Sciences

Mus lea ollu muitalit, muhto dus nu unnán áigi

Life-stories told by elder Sámi women – A critical social analysis

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Master's Thesis in Indigenous Journalism

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Sámi Journalism with an Indigenous Perspective

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***“Luohtán ahte it bilit mu muitalusaid. Don fertet
bissut mu duohtavuodas, it ge lasihit maidige!”-***

*“I trust that you do not destroy my stories. Keep to
my truth and do not add anything more!”*

Anna Gudveig Mosebakken, born 1909



Anna Gudveig sitting behind her sister Máret. They are sitting by the river where they grew up.

Photo: Gunhild Anne and Alf Nystad

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Abstract

This thesis is about women's untold lifestories. Told by elder Sámi women who lived in two different countries, the Norwegian- and Finnish side of Sápmi. For more than twenty years ago I conducted twenty-seven elder women about their lives, including both good and bad days, and good and bad experiences. These women, they were old already then, so now, in year 2016, only three of twenty-seven informants are still alive. I conducted them to understand and learn more about our oral traditions, about the past that mobilizes the present time and gives us the reflection about the future generations in Sápmi. Usually the oral tradition is rich among the Sámi people, there are many good storytellers. So with this master thesis' I would like to find out more about; how come that elder women are so invisible with their stories and what are the stories we are losing, because we do not conduct them? I am following three historical periods, that will show the changes in local societies and how these changes are described and told by women born in the period of year 1895-1930.

Dá lea masterčáluš mas eallilan nissonolbmuid muitalusat leat vuodđun. 20 jagi dassái de bivden 27 nissonolbmo muitalit munnje sin eallimis ja vurkejin dáid muitalusaid dássáži. Jos eat beroš, eatge luoikka beljiid vuorraset olbmuide, de báhcet muitalusat muitalkeahhtá dahje čihkosii ja áiggi mielde de vajálduvvojit. Jearahaladettin 20 jagi dassái, de ledje dát nissonat agis 67 gitta 100 jagi rádjai. Golmmas leat ain eallimin. Mis lea rikkis muitalanárbi. Čeahpes máinnasteaddjit ja buorit muitalusat, nu ahte dáinna masterčállosiin čalmmustahtán nissonolbmuid muitalusaid ja vásáhusaid golmma áigodagas, dološ, dalá ja ođđa áiggis. Mihttun lea máhcahit muitalusaid fas midjiide, čájehit árvvu ja beroštumi, numo eamiálbmot filosofijias ja metodas vurdo. Munnje lea olbmuid muitalusaid čohkken sihke dehálaš ja mávssolaš.

Key Words: Women Stories, Elders, Untold, Memories, Traditional knowledge, Taboo, Traumas, Assimilation, The Change of Society, Feminism history, Sápmi, Indigenous

Terminology use:

Eallin – life

**Muitalit –
talk or tell**

**Birgen –
manage life**

**Oadjudit –
build trust**

**Birgehallat –
manage work,
life, people
and money**

JÁVOHUVVAN

–

SILENCED

**Ceavzit –
survive**

**Soabadit –
live in peace**

**Eallingeardi –
life cycle, lifetime**

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I. INTRODUCTION

It all started 22 years ago, in January 1994, when I went to visit an elder woman, Ánte Jon Mággá (88) at her place in Gámasmohkki in the Finnish side of Sápmi.¹ Then Gámasmohkki was a little traditional reindeer herder's village with more than 25 inhabitants, children, adults and elders. Now, in 2016, there are only about 10 people left, mostly adults and a few elders.

That cold, dark and long winter day in January 1994 Mággá talked about the contrasts of her life. She was explaining how she has managed and survived long cold winters in the tundra as a reindeer herder and she was describing in a beautiful way about the love of her adorable late husband, Mattus Niila. Later that day, in the evening, while she was sitting in her kitchen on a low chair by the warm wood oven, she started to talk. First a few words, then whole sentences and she was talking back in time – and I was there, a young journalist trying to listen, observe and understand her. Tears were falling down her cheeks and she was trying to let me understand her life, a long living life. It was this pain, a dramatic family story from August 1929, when her little brother was sent by force to an orphanage and later he was transported to a home for retarded children in South-Finland. The teachers said he was retarded, because little Jouni did not speak Finnish and the teachers did not understand his native language, Sámi. She explained why her family, her sisters, never accepted the loss of their brother. Before bedtime, she opened a new chapter of their family history, about a letter that changed her life in August 1969. A letter that changed their divided family.

"Mus lea nu ollu muitalit, muhto dus lea nu unnán áigi mu muitalusaide!" (I have so many stories to tell, but you do not have enough time to listen at them!)

Ánte Jon Mággá, 88 years' old

¹ Ánte Jon Mággá is her traditional sámi name, but her official registered name is Magga Mattus (born Helander)



This is the only picture of Maggas family, before their mother, Vulleš Elle passed away in 1920. Here is her father Ante Jovvna, her sisters Biggá, Káre, Áile and Elle and their close relatives, uncle, aunts and cousins. (Photo: private)

This sentence also changed my perspective and I started to ask myself: – *How come we do not pay attention to lived lives? Are we telling stories about elder women? Why? Why not? What will we lose if we do not collect them? What are the stories to be collected and who should do it?* I went back to Mággá and asked if she would like to share her story with me?

I am a Sámi speaking journalist and I have covered Sámi, National and Indigenous news and stories the last 30 years. I have also worked as a journalist, editor and project manager in several countries, including Norway, Sweden, Finland and Russia. As a female journalist, I have been questioning myself and other colleagues about the gender role in Sámi media, whose voices are heard and silenced, and who is talking on behalf of the Sámi people? My thesis is about the individual interviews and the insight they allow us into the lives of these women; and the society they lived in.

Research questions

Storytelling is a universal activity and may well be the oldest of the arts and is the unique oral tradition from the past that is delivered to the future (Cruikshank, 1990 p.ix), or the way the Sámi people explain: - *muitalan árbi doložis, man sirdá boahhtevuhtii* (Vuolab, 1995, p. 31). This thesis aims to investigate the life-stories, including the untold stories from elder women in the Sámi society, women born between 1895-1930 and the main research questions will therefore be the following:

The silenced group of elder Sámi women: What do their life stories add to our understanding of the strategies of Sámi women in seeking to sustain coherence in their lives at that time?

In seeking and finding answers to my main question, I will also have two additional research questions, which are the following: b) By using narrative methods, how can we better understand the lives of elder Sámi women who have lived their traditional lives? c) What is the gender role in Sámi societies and how has it affected the lives of Sámi women? This is also about what we can learn through these collected stories from elder women about the Sámi society in a period from 1895 to 1996? During a period of two years, from 1994 to 1996, I travelled in Sápmi and conducted interviews with Sámi women. I recorded and collected twenty-seven personal stories and the women were then between the ages of sixty-seven and 100 years old. I interviewed women from different areas; on the Norwegian- and Finnish sides of Sápmi. They lived in Sámi villages, by the coastal area, along the rivers and I also met women who were living in elder centres. Their life-stories are told in our native language, *sámegillii muitaluvvon*. This master's thesis is a combination of journalism, ethnography and history.

Why is it important to collect stories?

Eira and Magga emphasize the shared knowledge that is in the Indigenous communities, and how this knowledge has helped people in their society, out in nature and in daily life; and how this knowledge has also enabled them to manage and survive for thousands of years in the Arctic, and at the global level, in the areas where Indigenous people live (Magga et al., 2011a and 2011b and Eira 2012: 96). Krupnik (2010) argues that the Indigenous way of knowing about, or being able to do, was traditionally founded on careful attention to what was said, and

to the stories told by the elders or adults. Already from a young age, as children and later as young people they start to follow or accompany learned and experienced members of the community to observe and learn how they deal with practical problems and performed tasks (Krupnik, 2010 p: 351-352, Eira 2012, p.23). Sámi researcher Eira argues for the importance of gathering information and documenting traditional knowledge from the elders before it is too late. Eira has interviewed, collected and researched the Sámi silent language of snow and she was in a hurry to do it, before the monolingual elders pass away (Eira 2012, p.47).

According to this project, I also felt that the time was running out- that I had to do it, before it's too late. One of the foundational question is: *Through these stories we may have the possibility to understand the lives of other people, some of them we meet are strangers, others not, but with this project I am meeting elders belonging to my own tribe.* And from the ethnography perspective then the main question will be *"what are the cultural characteristics of this group of people?"* (Johansson, 2005 p. 24) As a journalist, I gained access to individuals life stories or their world, which is a world of long life living experiences. These stories can be divided into many different categories, like a subjective story, a biography aspect, cultural stories or collective stories from a group of people. Johansson calls it *livsberättelser: «som är mycket enkelt uttryckt, den berättelsesom en person berättar om sitt liv eller valda aspekter av sitt liv. Det kan være både kulturelle, kollektive og historier fra et selvbiografisk perspektiv»* (Johansson, 2005, p. 213 and 222-223).²

The marginalisation of the role of women in the research

Just like the research conducted by the Sámi themselves, it has traditionally been done by men. The earliest bibliographies of the Sámi contain hardly any Sámi researchers; they are not mentioning Sámi women researchers. Hirvonen questioned why women have been given such a small role in the research done on the Sámi? Until the last decades' studies of the Sámi have mainly been conducted, and the problematic determined, by outsiders, and often, from the point of view of their own needs. So, this means that in Sápmi half of the population have been almost excluded from the studies done by "others", both non-Sámi and by Sámi men (Hirvonen 2008, p, 39). As an example, from the feminist theory perspective Sámi women's

² My translation: The story a person is telling about his/her life or choosing aspects of their lives. It can be collective, culturally or historical stories from an autobiographical perspective.

use of religion and folklore, and their strong traditional knowledge is not respected or researched, but the male researchers have concluded their research about men, as the Sámi way of living, including language, culture, traditions and daily life. Johannes Schefferus wrote about the gender role in Sápmi in 1673 in this way: about the role of young women and then he was describing the girls' or women's work as this; to make clothes for the family and the others. – "*Lapparnas döttrar lära sy kläder, lappstöflar, skoor, handskar, muddar och renåkygh*" (Balto 1997, p 47-49, Schefferus 1956, s. 334). Like in many other Indigenous societies, also in the Sámi traditional society women and men were equal, characterized by symmetrical complementary tasks and roles. Bäckman, Kuokkanen, Joks and Eikjok mentioned about the changes in our society. Before the women were equal to men, especially in the hunting or reindeer herding society. Bäckman described this way the role of the women in the past: "*it is obvious that everyone, regardless of sex, shared their burdon of work*" (Bäckman, 1982, p. 148). Joks commented on how the genderrole changed in reindeer herding husbandry in Norway in 1978 when the new Reindeer Act excluded women from the siida-system. The womens' rights were not protected any longer and wives, daughters, sisters and mothers were registered and subordinated under men, the production unit leaders (Joks 2001 p.246, Henriksen 2001:37).³ Kuokkanen is also criticizing the debate and gender focus in the society, there is not enough focus on gender differences and womens position in the Sámi society (Kuokkanen, 2007 p. 22-23 and 29).

Presenting my informants and the context of this research

Some of the informants I met several times and others I met only once or twice. It is not possible to use all the interviews, so I have chosen the life-stories told by twelve women. The chosen categories are these: 1) The eldest informants; those who are monolingual and they have not been contacted or researched by any one before. They have lived a life in silence, carrying their taboos and emotions; 2) Geography; women from the Finnish and Norwegian side and they are representing the Sea Sámi area, river Sámi and reindeer herders, 3) Women with unique untold stories and their life-stories can also describe the changes of the society

³ According the New Act in 1978, the men became the owners of the license to work as herders. It means that each family had one license and the owner the man, he had his wife, children, sisters, female cousins and mother (usually widows) under him and he had the responsibility for the family herd.

and how the harsh assimilation have affected them. There has been a process to reveal the names of some of the informants. I have asked permission from their children or their grandchildren to publish the names of my informants, except for two of them, their stories being a maid can still have consequences for the local society.

Informant number and name	Personal information	Details
Informant 1 Ánte Jon Mággá	Born in 1909, married twice, not children	Reindeer herder from Finnish side
Informant 2 Ristenaš Risten	Born in 1895, married twice, mother	From the riverside, monolingual, Norway
Informant 3 Mikkol Elle	Born in 1896, married twice, mother and <i>eadnesiessá</i>	Reindeer herder, monolingual, Norway
Informant 4 Elen Kristine Olsen	Born in 1920, married, not children	Sea Sámi, lived in Gillevuodna, Norway
Informant 5 “Rávdná Márjá”	Born in 1921. Married and has children.	From the river-valley in Finland.
Informant 6 “Sofe”	Born in 1920. Sister to “Rávdná Márjá”. Married and has children.	From the river-valley in Finland.
Informant 7 Anna Gudveig	Born in 1909, married, mother	Unique storyteller, survived the war and Spanish flu, Kárašjohka, Norway
Informant 8 Elise Hansen	Unmarried, three children	From the river valley, Fanasgieddi, Norway
Informant 9 Nanna Persen	Born 1909, married, mother, 10 children, medicinewoman	From the Sea Sámi area, Leavdnjavuodna, Norway
Informant 10 Lemet Ánne	Born in 1926, married, two children (hers)	Educated, politician. Guovdageidnu, Norway
Informant 11 Jordamor Sára	Born in 1925, married, not children	Midwife educated, politician and the first radio voice, Guovdageidnu, Norway
Informant 12 Maria Anna Valkeapää Eira	Born in 1922, married, not children	Reindeer herder, lived in Kalaallit Nunaat, Guovdageidnu; Norway

There has not been that many projects like this in Sápmi where sensitive, private and very personal stories are collected. The challenge was this: 1) How to get women to talk? 2) What happened with them? 3) What are the challenges with the topics relating to taboos and internal private issues like violence or abuse? 4) The ethical part: this was always included in our

conversations, about providing anonymity or not. It was a learning process for both parts, for me and for the women who were telling their stories. In one way, they felt safe, because I promised them not to tell the stories before 2016. Some of the women asked me not to publish their stories, before their children had passed away, so the family members will not suffer because of what has happened in the past with their grandparents or greatgrandparents. This anonymity is important, because we live in small societies, where people can find out easily who has been contacted or who has been telling about their secrets (Moring, 2015). I am also naming my informants, telling who they are and showing pictures of them. This is a way to honour them, because they have opened and given their personal stories to me. According to Joks this is one of the solutions in methodology, using their full names, because their stories do have a historical and narrative value. Joks calls this “å ikke svekke historiene”, not to weaken the stories (Joks, 2015 p. 75-78). Chilisa argues and is referring to Wilson, about the importance of using and revealing the names. The ethics involved in an Indigenous research paradigm sometimes differ from the dominant academic way of doing things. (Chilisa, 2012, p. 121). Later I will describe how I involved families to get access using names.



A group of Sámi women outside the local shop in Guovdageaidnu, early 1960s. Injuna Injir, Inger Anne Gaup in front with her three children. Standing on right side, Jordamor Sárá or Sara Klemetsen Hætta, one of my informants. (Photo: private)

*“Daid mu bávččas osiid birra, eai hal olbmot daid birra nu jearahala mus, in ge mun bajidan jiena muitaladdat daid birra. Lean gierddahallan jávohisvuodas”.*⁴

This is the way Ánte Jon Mággá (88) is explaining to me, why she never talks about her life, about her sorrow, pain, struggles and the consequences of harsh assimilation. According to her there is an undefined silence about the topics regarding women and women's issues. She calls it *“the inside pain”* – *bávččas* and being silenced – *jávohisvuohhta* has consequences for women. *“Nissonolbmuid áššiid ja bargguid birra, eat mii daid hála! Gos bat dan birra gullá?”* - here she describes like this; *women's issues and women's work, we do not talk about it. Where should we hear about it?* Hirvonen writes that Sámi feminist research is a new phenomenon. At present, only a few articles and master's theses that deal with the gender system of Sámi society have appeared. Recently, more attention has been paid to the lack of Women's Studies and women's perspective on Sámi society (Hirvonen, 2008, p. 40). Stordahl and Hirvonen write about the importance and the need to bring the feminist perspective into Sámi Studies, and that there is a discussion about the importance of gender and women voices (Hirvonen, 2008, p. 44 and Stordahl, 1990, p.101-105). So, my purpose with this thesis is to let elder women talk and explore how we can understand the meaning of their stories. These women who have seen enormous changes in Sámi society, from traditional livelihood to being assimilated as part of a political process called *dáruiduhttin* – the Norwegianisation, and they are also the ones who have experienced how it was to leave the traditional livelihood in the *lávvu*, *darfegoahti* or *goahti* and move into houses.⁵ We will not find any diaries written by these women, because almost all of them did not know how to write. These women are brought up to be silenced. Not talk about the pain, failure, life challenges or about the traumas they have experienced. Some of my informants are also talking about how the *Læstadianism movement* and Christianity introduced a hierarchical understanding and value, that women often felt lower self-esteem. In the local society, the women did not have any voice at the church meetings. As one of them explained; she wanted to wear her beautiful silver brooch and she also wanted to buy a new silverbelt to her *gákti*, but she could not do it. According to her this would upset the local society and it would be categorized as a sin. They

⁴ My translation: I do not talk about the pain and people neither ask about it. I have not spoken load about these topics. I have suffered in silence and accepted they way life has developed.

⁵ Goahti, *lávvu* and *darfegoahti* are Sámi housing traditions, it can be a mobile tent or a turf -hut

were told not to wear silver and not to put any make-up on and they accepted the pietistic lifestyle.

“Dál lea áigi muitalit dán birra. Mun lean boaris ja jos in muital, de ii dieđe oktage. Báhcá dušše mu duohkai- It is time to talk about it now. I am old and if I do not tell or talk about it, then no one knows about it. It remains only with me”

These words belong to my eldest informat, born in 1895. Ristenaš Risten understands about responsibility to deliver her private personal story. She said it was challenging to find the right time and moment to start telling her stories. According to McAdams, individual differences in life stories are just as rich and interesting as individual differences in any other aspect of human individuality and the stories are not really simple, like fairy-tale-type narratives. They can be complicated” (McAdams, 2001, p. 117 and 2015). In my Master’s thesis my aim is to give a better understanding and also to document how these long lived lives have been for Sámi women. These collected stories may hopefully give Sámi research a new dimension by demonstrating that conducting research with elders and women is valuable for the future generations. This is also part of a documentary journalism genre: to see these stories in a wider perspective and in a context, that will show how their narratives can describe or explain the female society in Sápmi.

Learned early to listen and not ask questions

My interest in stories came early. I grew up in a little village where we had many elders who were good storytellers. They were telling us stories and fairytales and it was part of our childhood. Sometimes the stories were so scary that we did not dare to go home alone, the elders had to follow us through the dark forest, so we could run home as fast as we could. We did not have any street lights, only candles and oil lamps burning in the main rooms. I enjoyed listening to the stories, the conversations about our daily life, about our relatives, about death, birth and the daily struggles. We also learned that we should not ask or comment, only listen and think, especially if there were topics about other people and their daily struggles. We did know the difference between *máinnas* and *muitalus* – fiction and truth (Hirvonen, 1999). *Máinnas* was a pleasure and *muitalus* was the scary dangerous stories. Storytelling was an important part of my childhood, and this is still an important part of the Sámi culture. The stories have been passed through generations and is an important way to share knowledge, historical events, myths and legends, as well to entertain.

2. KEY WORDS IN THE FIELD OF STUDY

The Sámi People

My people, *sápmelaččat*, are the Indigenous people of the northern part of the Scandinavian Peninsula and large parts of the Kola Peninsula and live in Sweden, Norway, Finland and Russia.⁶ We are reindeer herders, Sea Sámi, River Sámi, Urban Sámi, “Nine to four” Sámi who work in institutions, municipalities, factories, private and official work places; and we are also fighters to vitalize and revitalize our languages and culture and in our daily vocabulary: we have *sámi vuoigatvuodát* and *ceavzin*, Sámi rights and survival. The Sámi have never been a homogenous group; a total of nine Sámi languages are spoken by our people. (Gáldu, 2016). There is no reliable information as to how many Sámi people there are; it is, however estimated that they number between 90,000 – 100,000. The majority, around 40-50 000 live in Norway and nearly 20,000 live in Sweden. In Finland there are registered around 8,000 and in Russia close to 2,000. The historical process of more than 150 years of assimilation makes it difficult to give exact numbers for the Sámi population today. Since the Second World War, in Norway, the policy is not to register information on citizens’ ethnicity, the concept of “race” became strongly discredited due to wartime circumstances. (Pettersen, 2015, p. 12-13). There is not a definition of a Sámi, but to be eligible to vote or be elected to the Sámi Parliaments a person needs to be included in the Sámi census or the Sámi electoral registers in Norway, Sweden or in Finland. In Norway, according to the Sámi Act from 1987, – “all persons who make a declaration to the effect that they consider themselves to be Sámi, and who either a) have Sámi as their domestic language, or b) have or have had a parent, grandparent or great-grandparent with Sámi as his or her domestic language, or c) are the child of a person who is or has been registered in the Sámi electoral register.”

Politically, the Sámi people are represented by three Sámi parliaments – *Sámedikkiit golmma riikkas*, one in Norway, one in Sweden and one in Finland, whereas on the Russian side they are organized into NGOs.⁷ In the year 2000, the three Sámi parliaments established a joint

⁶ The Sámi people call themselves as *sápmelaččat*, *sámit*, *sábme* or *saemie*.

⁷ My translation: The Sámi Parliaments in Norway, Sweden and Finland are making decisions according Sámi people, Sámi rights and Sámi livelihood, including school and language issues. All three Parliaments have their own president and board

council of representatives called the Sámi Parliamentary Council. The Sámi people also have their own non-governmental (NGO) organization called *Sámiráđđi* – The Saami Council. *Sámiráđđi* aims to pursue the promotion of Sámi rights and interests in the four countries having a Sámi population, to consolidate the feeling of affinity among the Sámi people, to attain recognition for the Sámi as one nation and to promote economic, social and cultural rights of the Sámi in the legislation of the four states. This is the only umbrella organization where all the Sámi have an equal voice at the meetings. The *Sámiráđđi* can report directly to the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII). One of the issues that has been debated at international level is about the violence and alcoholism among Sámi women in the Russian side and about the endangered language situation for the whole of Sápmi. The Sámi society also has modern institutions, like the Sámi Radios and TV, the Sámi University, Theatre, Museums, Art Galleries and the Sámi National Centre for Mental Health.

3. SÁMI FEMINISM: A Historical Perspective

First, I would like to refer to the past, to Sámi spirituality and to our old Sámi religion. The myth of strong women, is a powerful female legacy that had a central role in our old religion: it was centered around the female deity Máttaráhkká (Ancestral Mother) and her three daughters Sáráhkká, Juksáhkká and Uksáhkká. Still today when a child is born, it is told that Sáráhkká is the creator of the bodies of babies and Uksáhkká is living under the main doors and is protecting all children. Juksáhkká has the power to change the gender of the fetus (Kuokkanen, 2006, p.263). According to our tradition, the women still have the central place in a traditional tent *lávvu* or *goahti*. She is sitting innermost and has control over the fire, food and people and she has an eyecontact with the door. The guests can never sit innermost, they are placed on each side of the door. If a foreinger by mistake is taking the innermost place, then she/he is asked to move.

If we go back into the history of the Sámi people to look for the first story that is written about a Sámi woman, it is from the Viking period (c.800-1066). A young Sámi woman called *Muohtaráfi* (860-932) or Snæfríður Svásadottir married the King of Norway, Harald Hårfagre, also known as Harald Fairhair. He was the first king and reigned from c.872 to 930. This special love story is written in the Old Norse kings' sagas named *Heimskringla* and is written by the poet and historian Snorre Sturlasson (1178-1241): better known as the Snorre saga. The king came to Svásas place and immediately fell in love with *Muohtaráfi*. Since this was a

special royal marriage, it was very quiet among the Sámi until 1380. Then a South Sámi woman, called Margrehtá challenged the Archbishop in Uppsala in South Sweden. Margrehtá claimed that she had special spiritual qualities and she could convert Sámi people, so that they became Christians. She supported the priests that were converting the Sámi from our Nature religion to Christianity (Solbakk, 2016 p. 7-9 and 17). In November 1852 in Guovdageaidnu, a group of 35 Sámi (men, women and children) rebelled against the Norwegians, the upperclass, like the Priest, Merchant and District Sheriff. Sámi killed the Sheriff and the Merchant. The Sámi did not accept that they were forced to convert and they tried to stop the illegal alcohol distribution. Four of them were sentenced to death, including a young woman, Ellen Skum (25 year). Two were beheaded and Elle Skum was not executed (Zorgdrager, 1989, p. 314-322).

In April 1911, in Guovdageaidnu, the first woman was elected as vice-mayor in Norway, in April 1911, two years before women's suffrage. A young teacher Átte Káre or Karen Olsen, made history. Átte Káre got 41 votes and the male mayor who was elected, got 43 votes (Morgenbladet 05.05.1911 and www.arkivverket.no).⁸

At the same time, a south Sámi woman, Elsa Laula Renberg (1877-1931), started to organize the Sámi people (Johansen 2015 p. 126-128). The first Sámi cross-border conference was held in 1917 in Tråante or Trondheim in Norway and about 150 Sámi came to this first meeting, forty of them were women. These women, reindeer herders, young people and adults, came from the whole South Sámi area and from the Swedish and Norwegian sides. When Renberg sent out the invitation, she mentioned that women must attend – *“Ikke en eneste kvinde bør savnes i vaar forening”* (Johansen 2015 p.126).⁹ To compare the Tråante gathering with the Norwegian Constitutional Assembly (Riksforsamlingen) that was held in Eidsvoll in 1814, then there were only men. Norwegian women were not allowed to be at the Riksforsamlingen.

Elsa Laula Renberg was also the chair of the first women's organization called *Brurskanken Samiske kvinneforening*. Renberg had a clear message to Sámi women, about the need and importance to organize themselves and she also actively promoted Sámi land rights and

⁸ Arkivverket, <http://www.arkivverket.no/var/arkivverket/storage/images/media/satoe-bilder/kommunevalget-i-kautokeino-1911/126660-1-nor-NO/Kommunevalget-i-Kautokeino-1911.jpg>

⁹ My translation: Not a single woman shall be unaccounted for in our organization.

livelihoods, and advocated the education of women. She wrote a pamphlet with the title “Life or Death”- to encourage the Sámi to claim their rights to land. (Kuokkanen 2007: p 76)

Elsa Laula Renberg was a representative of modern times and, in many ways, a special woman of advanced ideas in the Sámi community of those days but also in the dominant society. She was an agent of change whose goal, was to guarantee the Sámi influence in state politics and the same civil rights enjoyed by other subjects. (Hirvonen 1999, p. 75)

After the 1920s the women’s organizations did not exist any longer. It might be because of the distances among the Sámi people and that the Sámi were divided into four countries. The Second World War had dramatic consequences for the people in the North.



1940: Children from Bissejohka, the village by the coast, where my mother grew up. From left; Elida, Anna, Susanne, Magda, Ågot, Signe, Sigrid, Kari, Agnes and Elna. Photo: Ukjent / Porsanger museum

But the Sámi women did not gather again until the 1970s. It was a period when women at the global level were organizing themselves, and when the International Women's Year (IWY) was the name given to 1975 by the United Nations. The first women's seminar was organized and held in Kiruna in Sweden in 1975, forty women from three countries participated and they had two main issues: 1) the situation for the Sámi women in their society; 2) the situation for reindeer herder women. Women felt that they had been pushed to the margins of reindeer herding for several decades and that the government's policies in the three countries were making women invisible in their daily livelihood: in a siida system, the reindeer herder women have always played a prominent role (Joks 2001).¹⁰ In many cases, these policies have erased women traditionally held rights of reindeer ownership. Since 1978 when the new Reindeer Act came, then women who owned their own animals were registered under their husbands', brothers' or father's name. They lost their membership in the organizational unit for reindeer herding. (Sárá, 1990–91 and 2002, Joks, 2001, Kuokkanen, 2009, p.501). This has been debated since then, and women are still now fighting for gender equality.

Sámi women also played a central role in the Alta river conflict on the Norwegian side in the late 1970s and early 80s. One of them was my aunt or muottá Máret Sára. This conflict culminated in demonstrations, a hunger strike, the bombing of a bridge; and the office of the Norwegian prime minister was occupied by fourteen Sámi mothers in 1981. Two Sámi Mothers, Ellen Marit Gaup Dunfjeld and Inger Anne Sara Gaup, went to Rome to petition the Pope and told about the serious situation for the Sámi people and their land rights (NRK). Kuokkanen writes about gender politics during this conflict: namely that women received less attention than the male activists. (Kuokkanen, 2007, p. 76).

¹⁰ My translation: Siida is the meaning of a society, family-based, where a group of people are living together and herding the animals. You can have a small siida with only few herders or you can have a large siida with many members like grandparents, parents, children, brothers, sisters, son-in-law, daughter-in-law and cousins and sometimes second-cousins.



Right after the Alta-demonstrations, in 1985, nearly 100 women attended at *Sámiráđđi* seminar. There they required annual conferences for women and also that priority must be given to women or gender research projects. Women decided to organize themselves and establish an organization named *Sáráhkká*- and this organization managed to organize women from the whole of Sápmi, including the Russian side.¹¹ The Sámi women also have their own organization called *SNF-Sámi NissonForum*, and this forum is working with women's issues for the whole of Sápmi. They are following up on

women's rights, gender issues and traditional rights for families and children, and SNF is also attending Indigenous meetings and conferences at the global level. Stordahl is writing about the fact that the Sámi women activists are still fighting for their economic rights; especially in reindeer herding husbandry, and that they are also fighting for their land rights in Sápmi. She also notes that they also address issues like how to maintain the language, to keep and develop the cultural heritage and how to motivate women to take education and be part of the leadership. The mental health situation among the Sámi youth, with high rates of suicide in some reindeer areas, also concern the women's organisations and women at the local level are now actively working with these difficult issues (Sára 1988, Stordahl 1996, p.96-98, 1998, Silviken, 2011, p. 10-14).

Women invisible and forgotten women's erasure from history

There are few female researchers that have spent years in Indigenous societies to document the lives of the elder women. Julie Cruikshank, professor of anthropology was working closely with the elders and was recording their life stories.¹² She is a non-Indigenous researcher, but with a long-term collaborative working relationship, she could get unique stories from women who were born around the turn of the century, 1890-1905. She needed to learn before she could begin to ask intelligent questions: "*The past, therefore is not only*

¹¹ My translation: *Sáráhkká* is the female God, creator of the bodies of babies.

¹² Cruikshank lived for 14 years together with native people in Yukon area in North-Canada.

mobilized in the present but also reflects for the future” (Cruikshank, 1990 p. x and 17 and 2000, p. 26- 27)

Cruikshank describes her eager need to document elder women in this way – “*unexplored or silenced stories and experiences bring about a better understanding of history and allow individuals and groups to pass on knowledge to the younger generations and ideally establish an effective cross-cultural dialogue from which a more equitable future can be built*” (Cruikshank, 2005). There is also an emergency, to conduct stories from the elders, before they pass away. Like in Australia, the stories told by elder women about «The Stolen Generation» or in Canada about “Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women”.

Moving to the Pacific area, to the Islanders. The Indigenous way of thinking about the past, present and the future. In the Hawai’ian indigenous culture, the past is referred to as *the time in front or before*, while the future is the *time which comes after the behind*. (past in front and future behind).¹³ The Hawai’ian past is about generativity, not about recurrence. According Kame’eleihiwa it is about how we define the past, – in their culture past is not a ruin, a heap of broken scraps, but rich in glory and knowledge (Clifford, 2013, p. 24-25, quoting Kame’eleihiwa, 1992; p 22-23).

While the Sámi in general are portrayed as "others" in research, Sámi women have been marginalized in multiple ways, and often rendered invisible along with their stories. Sámi society has, for the most part, been analyzed through the activities of men. Women have been almost totally left out. Many of the collected stories, films, documentaries or research are made by men about men. Kuokkanen is writing about these choices and women are often forgotten or not chosen – *badjelgehččcojuvvon* in the research field. The stories are about men, heroes out in the wilderness and hunting and fishing is more valuable and exciting than the women’s stories (Kuokkanen, 2009, p. 71, Hirvonen, 1999, p.32-33). Trinh T. Min-ha has a focus on gender politics, and she directs her critique at “white men” and racist patriarchy, when she states that anthropology, as a Western science of man, studies men as the human species (Hirvonen p. 37). When the famous Lappologist and folklorist, J.K. Qvigstad, collected 800 Sámi tales and stories during 1927- 29, he used more than 100 informants. Only

¹³ Hawai’I; *Ka wa mamua* the past is referred to the time in front or before, while *Ka wa Mahope* is the time which comes after or behind. (Kame’eleihiwa, 1992; p 22-23).

thirteen of them were women (Hirvonen, 2008, p.34).¹⁴ Historically, the women in Sámi society were regarded as equal to men. Women were independent and had power, and had also control over certain domains, particularly in the home and with family issues. In some cases, women were also in charge of family economics (Solem 1970 p. 64-71). In Nuortalaš or in Skolt Sámi society (Finland and Russia), the women for example, traditionally owned everything that they prepared and made, including clothing for their husbands. Women and men also managed their own loans. Samuli Paulaharju described in this way the economic roles in a Skolt Sámi family system and how a wife explains their economy, that his dept (loan) belongs to Evvan she she will not pay it:

"Toht lii Evvan vielki, mon ton im maavse!" (Paulaharju 1921 p. 167, Solem 1970 p 66).

This is also about how Indigenous knowledge is presented in accounts of the Sámi as people, with their wisdom and knowledge, traditional behaviours and language. We must maintain a critical awareness of the patriarchal and ethnocentric biases that researchers bring to their accounts of Indigenous peoples. Elina Helander, Sámi researcher, argues that the Sámi people have the right to their knowledge, even though the Western science and society doesn't acknowledge or accept it. (Helander and Kailo 1999).¹⁵ We might note that some of the patriarchal and other biases of Western society are to be found inscribed in the professional training of some Sámi journalists and researchers. The strong bonds of Indigenous identity have not proven a certain barrier to the hegemonic cultural and epistemological assumptions of non-Indigenous cultures.

¹⁴ J.K. Qvigstad Lappiske eventyr og sagn I- IV-, including also J.K. Qvigstad and his collection of Sámi folklore, 1976

¹⁵ Helander, E ja K Kailo (1999) Nomadic Circle of Life, Elämisen nomadinen kehä. Keskustelu saamelaisesta tietö- ja kulttuurijärjestelmästä. Teoksessa Ei alkua ei loppua. Saamelaiden puheenvuoro. Toim. E Helander ja K Kailo. Like, Helsinki. p. 213-38.

Lack of research about violence

“Mun lean dál boaresolmmoš ja buot mu mánát dihtet ahte mo sin áhčči, mu isit, mu buđehuštii. Mii eat leat goassige hállán dán birra, ii sániin ge namuhuvvon, ahte mo mun lean gillán!”¹⁶

This is told by one of the elders. She, lets call her “Márga”: she is sitting in her room at the elder centre and is describing how she has accepted that her husband was violent. Her situation has never been a topic in their home, even though their children (now adults) do know how she was beaten up. At the age of eighty-seven, it is the first time she is talking about this to a stranger (read; me). Only her sister and her children knows about it, but they have not tried to solve it or help her. But she is also commenting that some of her neighbours or close relatives might have known about it, but no one has ever asked or talked about it. She never asked for divorce, but accepted the situation as it turned out for her. She is sitting on her chair, blind- caused by her husband. “Go mu isit jámii, in ganjaldan hávdadusas” – when “Márga” husband passed away, their adult children were upset, because she did not show any sorrow at the funeral. Today we know that every second Sámi woman, 49%, has been exposed to violence (called any lifetime experience of violence). We also know now that every fifth Sámi woman, 22%, has been sexually abused. These are the new results published last year, in 2015, by UiT, The Arctic University of Norway, in Tromsø in Norway.¹⁷ SAMINOR-2 did a population-based survey study on health and living conditions in multi-ethnic areas with 11,000 participants, both Sámi and non-Sámi populations were included in this study. 2,197 were Sámi respondents (Eriksen, Hansen, Javo and Schei, 2015, p.588-596). There is, and has been, a huge lack of research done about violence in Sámi societies and Kuokkanen calls it “a striking absence of scholarship”, statistics or reports on violence against Sámi women (Kuokkanen, 2014 p. 271-288- e-book).¹⁸ According to Kuokkanen, for Sámi leadership and the political institutions, including all three Sámi Parliaments, violence against women is not considered a priority. Kuokkanen mentions how the Norwegian Sámi

¹⁶ My translation: I am an old woman now and all my children know how their father, my husband, has been beating me up. We have never talked about it, not one word about how I have suffered.

¹⁷ <http://sjp.sagepub.com/content/43/6/588#aff-1>

¹⁸ <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/14616742.2014.901816>

Parliament has a plan for equality and gender – and one of the priority areas is the prevention of violence in local communities, however, she calls it vague and brief. Roy Henriksen is mentioning the triple burden many Indigenous women are facing: 1) they are the most vulnerable among indigenous people; 2) face double discrimination on the basis of their gender for being women and for their ethnicity for being indigenous and 3) the triple burden in many parts of the world, is that indigenous women are also poor (Roy Henriksen, 2005 p.7). Indigenous women live in different countries all around the world and in differing circumstances. The challenges and barriers are varying from country to country and even from community to community. The issue of the reality of violence against Indigenous women, from within and outside of their communities, and its neglect in journalistic reports, has a long history and constitutes part of the framing taken-for-granted normality of the world reflected in my interview data.

Why women do not talk or tell about themselves?

According to Sámi psychologist, Anne Lene Turi Dimpas, there has been, and still is a culture of silence among the Sámi people. They do not talk about individual, family or collective problems that they are facing. This is part of the culture, including the daily life. Turi Dimpas does mention how the intense pain of the harsh assimilation policy is affecting people, they are silenced about traumas and taboos. In Sámi language, we say *jávohisvuohta* – being silenced. A person or a group that is silenced, we call it *jávohuvvan*.

“Not talking was also in one way to survive. Many people are closing their doors and they do not include or invite their relatives or neighbours for conversations. Their individual problems had to be solved by themselves and this is the collective sorrow that we have to deal with” (Turi Dimpas, 2016 personal interview).

According to her there are different worldviews between Sámi and non-Sámi societies regarding how to solve life problems and difficult situations. In Western society, you have to talk openly and then the life gets better. In Sápmi it is opposite, do not talk about it, because then it might get worse. Forget about your problems and move on, is one of the ways to solve problems. Turi Dimpas makes a comparison between the western and Indigenous epistemologies.

Western or Majority society	Sámi society
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Talk about your problems and life gets better • Take control of your thoughts • A problem needs to be solved • Change is possible • I have the responsibility to solve my problems • Individual problems 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Don't talk, it gets worse. Forget and move on • The will of God or meet one's destiny • Accept and live with that • Life is predetermined • Someone else, an outsider, must take away the problems • Individual and collective problems

Dimpas, 2016, Tromsø University

Turi Dimpas is describing this way *jávohisvuohta* “*árbevirolaš eallimis, masa lea ávkin hupmat dáid birra, galge han dušše birget ja borrat? Olmmoš ii daga jos ii oainne ávkki das*”. In the old days, they did not talk about their problems. At that time the focus was to have enough food on the table, and that they managed to finish their seasonal work, like cutting hay, moving animals, picking berries, smoking meat and fish or making clothes before the long dark winter (Turi Dimpas, 2016- personal interview). “The will of God” or *Ipmila oaidnu* and *Ipmila dáhttu* – my informants are mentioning it, especially when they are talking about the difficult topics.¹⁹ The society did not accept divorces and the women had to accept the way life had turned out for them. Sámi artist Mari Boine, she has written a song to her mother called “*Thou shalt not*”. This song is about how her mother accepted the rules from her husband (their father), who was a powerful and strict preacher. She never dressed herself up with silks, with colourful weaves and she never did wear silver. It was a huge sin to shine. Mari’s mother did not dare to defend when he called his daughters wanton-girls, because they did listen at music and danced; “*If you were still here, my mother/ I would adorn you/ I would bring you gold and silver/ if you were still here, my mother/ I would adorn you, emboss you, embrace you.*” As I have mentioned earlier, the Læstadianism, an evangelical, revivalist movement had strong effect in Sámi society. Kuokkanen calls it “*certain concepts of female piety and humility in addition to common Christian dualistic notions of women as either good or evil*” (Kuokkanen 2013 p.440).

¹⁹ My translation: *Ipmila oaidnu* means that God has seen it and *Ipmila dáhttu* is the same as the willingness of God.

A PhD thesis confirms that the Sámi do not talk about personal problems, health, disease and illness, and that these topics were approached in silent and indirect ways; and there were strong norms of coping and not showing weakness. To talk about it was like opening the whole chapter of your life (Bongo 2012 p. 68-69). So, that is the reason why this new study on health and living conditions was shocking news for the Sámi society. It is in the context of this historical development that the significance of the narratives, and experiences, of the women recorded in this research must be understood.

4. THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE FOR THIS RESEARCH PROJECT

“Olmmoš lea máinnastemiin ja háleštemiin sirdán ođđa bulvii hutkáivuodas ja vásáhusaidis bokte čoggon viisodagas. Eatnigiella lea olmmošvuoda áiti” (Vuolab 1995:24).²⁰

It is a common view among the Indigenous peoples that through stories and storytelling you can tell and explain who “we” are. *“Oral traditions have been and remain the memory of a people encompassing all aspects of life regarding what is important within a culture”* (Kuokkanen 2009:60). To understand the people, to understand their stories and to catch the untold message “between the lines” then knowledge of the languages is important. As a Sámi myself, I would never speak Norwegian or Finnish with the elders, it would be a disrespect. But the key element is still how the researcher is getting the information and from which perspective the elders are researched *giella lea dehálaš oassi álgoálbmogiid perspektiivva ovddideamis, akademijjas ja muđui servodagas, muhto oaidninsadji ja lahkaneapmi, maid dutki vállje, lea liikká deháleamos* (Keskitalo, 1994 p.8-9, Fredriksen, 2015, p.69).²¹

²⁰ My translation: Peoples have by storytelling and conversations delivered their knowledge from generation to generation. The collected wisdom is given to the new and younger generation and the main key is to deliver wisdom in mothertongue.

²¹ My translation: The language knowledge is one of the most important parts of developing Indigenous perspective in the academy and in the society. But also, the researchers perspective and the way they are choosing has the same value.

Storytelling as a lifelong friend

The Sámi author and storyteller, Kerttu Vuolab, explains how her ancestors and family have through storytelling and conversations delivered their wisdom and knowledge from one generation to another. Thus, the wisdom they have gained or learned through a long life passes on in a natural way to the next generation (Vuolab, 1995, p.33) Vuolab describes storytelling is like a friend, teacher and entertainment. She writes about how the stories were passed through the daily work, when people were milking cows, shearing sheep, working out in the fields, fishing, picking berries, making food, cleaning the houses, taking in the hay or slaughtering animals (Vuolab 1995:34). Kuokkanen points to the meaning of such stories and the value of knowledge from the elder's perspective, their «*máilbmeoaidnu*” – what are their opinions, their thoughts and how they solve their internal issues. How are they comparing our life with the majority society (Kuokkanen 2009:60)? In Indigenous societies, oral communicatin is greatly valued: the oral traditions or narrative stories include the use of storytelling, the meaning of traditional songs, dance, art, handicraft making, and giving instructions and directions for the younger generations. The stories are part of the daily life. Female lawyer and scholar of the Nlaka'pamux Nation tribe, Ardith Walkem, reminds us of the power of stories. She is also reminding us about the role of the elders, how they are using stories and storytelling to change the society and the people that are living there, or who are going to make decisions. Stories are also an important part of healing; and in many ways, it can be a pleasure to listen to a good story, how we can be connected to our internal society, but also to understand the outside world, the stories about others (Walkem 1993:31). Author and former teacher and rektor Čoarddá Jomnna or Jon Eldar Einejord from the Márkosámi area in the Norwegian side, writes that still among the Sámi the oral tradition has more value, or is more important, than the written word (Einejord 1987:145).²² Later in this thesis I will describe more about the learning skills among the Sámi elders and how they have managed to communicate without knowing how to write or read in their own mother-tongue. Two of the women I met could not write at all, but they knew how to write the traditional way, called *muorranamat*, to use special letters as initials, to describe who they are and which family or *siida* they belong to.²³ The use *muorranamat*, then you can see who the person is, a female or

²² Jon Elder Einejord, he was my language teacher for three years at Sámi joatkkaskuvla, Kárašjohka (high school).

²³ My translation: The letters Sámi people used when they were marking their belongings. It could be equipment like *giisá*, *riskut*, *vázzinsoabbi*, *gáffegievdni*- traditional skills and also animals, reindeer, were marked with *muorrabustávat*.

a male, who is her/his father or mother and the surname. I will later describe the use of *muorranamat*, but here is an example of a signature from one of my informants:

EMAS

Ellen Mikkelsdatter Sara, born 1896.

The collective reservoir of shared knowledge

Kerttu Vuolab who has written many books for children, and novels, sees the value of stories and says that “we still have a very rich oral storytelling tradition and this is still connecting the generations” (Vuolab, 1995:27):

“Muitalusat leat dihtoláhkai dego gođus, laktit olbmuid muitalusaid oktii, eatnit, áhčit, áhkut, ádját ja máttarváhnemat jotket buolvvas bulvii muitalemiin, duháhiid jagi muitalusaiquin (Kerttu Vuolab 2016, personal interview)²⁴

Thus, this thesis builds upon a long-established respect for and appreciation of storytelling as a valued and important element in cultural transmission, and a critically collective reservoir of significant shared knowledge. Story telling is not merely a repository of history; but is also a contemporary building block of shared identities. An example from the Sámi perspective is about how our people are still yoiking the traditional yoiks or *luođit* about our ancestors, grandparents and parents. Some families are making personal yoiks for their children very early.²⁵ It is called a special gift and it will cheer up the child, if someone starts to yoik her or him. We are also yoiking about our ancestral land, rivers, lakes, mountains, animals and even mosquitos. It is an art form with which to remember other people. “*Some are remembered with hate, some with love and others with sorrow*” (Turi, 1987 p. 163-165). Two sisters mentioned *searválagaid ovttastit* (being together) and the moments they remember as good peaceful moments from the past, are those when they were yoiking together, elders, adults and youth. According to these two sisters, it did not happen that often (read; secret

²⁴ My translation: Storytelling is like knitting. Bringing together mothers, fathers, grandmothers, grandfathers and great grandparents that will deliver stories for the future generations.

²⁵ My translation: Juoigat, luohiti and luodit is the Sámi way of singing- yoiking.

moments) that they had *luohtebottut* (moments of yoiking), because *luohti* and *juoigan* was forbidden and it was a huge sin according the Church, but their relatives did it. They have only seen few times their father sitting by the river, by the fire and these were the most powerful moments. As an example, explained by one of my informants about layers of stories, or understand the message of a *luohti*, they could hear by sound, how the person's mood was (happy/unhappy) while she/he was walking along the riverside to their house: – “*Go olmmoš bođii juoigga birra niittu, de sáhtiimet gullat makkár mielas son lea, buori- vai heajos mielas- ja nu mii ráhkkaneimmet dasa*”. As this old woman explained, that she could hear the sound, catch the words and in my modern life – I would say *read between the lines*, understand the codes of the messages.

Life stories, what is that? From personal narrative to social history

“Moai han čohkkájetne nu guhká go aste. Mun čilgen. Geahččalan muitit... muittašit ja de muitalit dutnje mu eallima birra.. nu mo... mun lean vásihan iežan beivviid. In dieđe man ollu áddešeaččat das go don han it leat eallán dološáiggi... ja in dieđe.. jáhkežat go mu muitalusaide, muhto mun muitalan ja čilgen dutnje maid lean vásihan doložis dálážii”

This is one of the conversations I had with an elder woman (born 1909) in Kárášjohka, my informant #7 Anna Gudveig Mosebakken. In the beginning of our conversation, she was asking for enough time to talk, she asked that I not rush with the recording and not to collect stories in a rushed way. She was explaining to me about how our conversations will develop; she will try to remember, to memorialize or recall her life and then try to tell it, as it has been. Atkinsons definition of life-story is: “*The story a person chooses to tell about the life he or she has lived, told as completely and honestlty as possible. What is remembered of it, and what the teller wants to know of it, usually is a result of a guided interview by another*” (Atkinson, 1998, p.8)

Specifically, life stories bring the human and the subjective into the historical context. It is about inding meaning in the context of a life (High, 2009 a). To speak of any historical event is to speak of the multiplicity of experiences lived and relived in daily life. In other words, oral history is an intersubjective engagement between the past and the present, between the narrator and the historian and between memory and identity. Such oral narratives tell less

about “what” happened and more about how an event has shaped and changed an individual’s life, state of being, material conditions, values and ideology; and his/ her social relations. Because oral history is centered on the individual and his/ her place in history it is also about knowledge and authority in the term of who owns the past and whose knowledge counts (Cruikshank 1999). This is a concern that is reflected in my concern to reflect a sensitivity to Indigenous methodology in my research approach. [Which I develop more fully in the section on Methodology].

Anna Gudveig also had her doubts about me, if I could understand her, because I have not lived a long life. She was also comparing our lives and used the description “rivguluuvvan” –I was behaving / pretending as a Norwegian, that’s the way she explained my situation.²⁶ I had left our traditional area for a while to take an education in the southern part and I also lived abroad. I had to explain to her why I do not make traditional handicrafts *duodji* and how come that I have chosen journalism as my daily bread or main income and this elder woman continued this way:

*“In lean gal vaikko geasa miehtat muitalit iežan birra, muhto go don nu čábbát ja vuohkkasit jearat, de luohttán ahte it bilit mu muitalusaid. Don maid fertet bissut mu duohtavuodas!”*²⁷

This is what I call the negotiation time, about if she is willing to tell her life story to me or not. It is her own decision; I will not force her. We are sitting in her kitchen and I am her guest. I came to her home to ask for personal stories and this is about trust, will she accept me or not. Anna Gudveig was also mentioning the ethical part of collecting stories from other people and she asked me not to *destroy* her story. I must keep to the truth and not add any untrue or misunderstood stories.

“Mun muitalan dutnje dan maid mun muittán ja lean vásihan. Muhto dát leat mu muittut ja earát soitet earálahkai muitalit min eallima birra. In sáhte earáid ovddas hállat, in ge muitit mo sii elle, muhto hálán dušše iežan ovddas!”

²⁶ My translation: Our term for non-Sámi is rivgu (female) and dáža or láddelaš (male). I will use these words rivgu and dáža to explain non-Sámi. Rivguluuvvan means that I pretend like a Norwegian.

²⁷ My translation: I would not tell my story to some random people. But you asked in a kind and in a beautiful way if I would like to share my story. This is about trust and now I trust you. Do not destroy my story! You must keep in to my truth and not add anything that is not part of my story.

Here Anna Gudveig is very clear about how she will define life-stories and how she is memorizing it. She explained -that these are her memories and the others might have other kinds of stories from the same events. The material gathered through the interviews found in this text may be seen as fragments of a life-story. They are stories that have a narrative coherence in themselves; but are themselves part of the larger biographic narrative of these older women. Through contextualizing these interviews in relation to the periods in which these lives were lived we may be better able to understand something of the existential world in which these narratives were experienced, constructed and consolidated. Autobiographical reasoning is the activity of creating relations between different part of one's past, present and future life and one's personality and development. It embeds personal memories in a culturally, temporally, casually, and thematically coherent life story.²⁸

In this account, we see that Anna Gudveig has anticipated much of the concerns of Indigenous methodology. She is concerned about whether I have the personal existential experience to be able to comprehend the essence of her narrative. She is concerned to have control over the relationship between researchers and researched, and she is explicit in addressing the core issue of trust. Thus, in developing the relationship with my elder women the control of the methodology came not only from the external ethical and methodological rigours of academe, which in any case came twenty year later, but were in fact embedded in the initial negotiations of gaining access.

5. METHODOLOGY

When I was doing the interviews more than twenty year ago, then I did not know that this material would be used in a Master's thesis. At the early stage, I could feel that some of the women would not talk in the beginning and some of them just commented "*eallin lea buorre*" life is good and they have lived a life as they had expected. "*Unnán muiltit*" - not much to tell or talk about, was also some of the answers I got during the early stage. I knew there were stories to be collected, so I used the process called *oadjudit* and my literature then was not in books, but I integrated and included our traditional knowledge to develop a project together with them.²⁹ I explained in an honest way, tried to have a respectful representation

²⁸ Habermas T. (2010) Autobiographical reasoning: Arguing and Narrating from a Biographical Perspective p. 1-3

²⁹ My translation: Oadjudit is a way to build a trust and understand between people/ peoples

and told these women, why their stories can help us in the future. I argued that my daughters and all the other young girls that are growing up, will in the future like to read stories about them, about their lives. Those who are untold and unwritten. I had in mind professor Ole Henrik Maggas speech at *Sámediggi* – Sámi Parliament, that elders are as important as libraries, he was referring to the African perspective.³⁰ It was a way which methods can help to build respectful relationships and a way for a researcher to relate in a respectful way with participants involved in the research and build a form of relationship (Chilisa, 2012 p118).

I have been working as a journalist since I was 14 years old and now I am 54. When I have worked for so long time, then I am familiar with how our first conversations will begin. Among my people, especially elders, it is important to tell who I am, what family or clan I belong to and about my husband's family. By showing respect to the elders, it is a must to implement these to our conversations, if we are related or not, or if we have common relatives. Especially the elder women are good to know details about our *sohka/sogat* – the clans "*hálddašit bures sohkavuogádaga dieđuid*"- and they have full control about who is related to who and how our boundaries have been the last 100 years (Balto, 1997, p.45).

Kovach is describing it as – *researcher preparing its research*. Kovach is using the Canadian aboriginal framework with "Nêhiyaw Kiskêyihtamowin" epistemology how the researcher will gather knowledge from Indigenous society (truth and trust) and then give it back to the society where it belongs and benefits the community in some manner (Kovach 2009 p 44-45). I have tried to follow our "undefined" internal ethics and agreements, as Anna Gudveig (86) suggested twenty years ago: – "*do not destroy my story and do not add anything that is not true*"!

Important to have written agreements

The ethical part was difficult. Quite early in the project I realized that collecting life-stories was not easy. This is about trust and how to protect confidential stories. Before I started with this huge project, I had a meeting with a lawyer about how to protect the material I am gathering, because some of the women might have stories that must be handled confidentially.

³⁰ Speech at Sámediggi, 1994. Professor Ole Henrik Magga was the first elected Sámi president and he was also the first elected chair of The United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII).

The lawyer helped me to make a contract in our own language and that both parts should sign these two papers, one for me and the second contract for the other part, including that if there are sensitive information- then I can't release them before their children have passed away.

The challenge of ethics is also how to protect the women who have told me about life-stories where they do not talk about the traumas in their lives. For example, one of the women was telling me about the newborn baby they found under a stone, a baby that was set out to die; but they managed to rescue the baby. I have promised her that I will not publish where it happened and in what period. The reason is that Sápmi is small and there are people who know about this newborn baby that was set out to die and that child is now an elder person. Another topic is also about the taboos about domestic violence in homes and how women are suffering in their marriages. Even twenty years ago, the profound ethical issues involved in carrying out my intended project were very apparent. As an example, I can't describe or tell how one of my informants was injured after her husband attacked her. She wants to protect her grandchildren, so I am not allowed to describe how it happened and about the dramatic consequences for her. When she heard about our agreement, then she could talk about it. I have also some other stories that I can't publish yet, because the children are still living.

The learning journey

After twenty years, this has also been a learning journey for me, because almost all the women that I interviewed have passed away. I can't go back to them and question again or ask for further comments about what they have told me.

I visited my informants in their homes. It was easier for me to drive to them, because many of the women lived in little villages outside the centres. Most of the women did not have driving licences. I knew that the most powerful conversations and the best interviews, those are in their private homes. They could sit by their kitchen table and remember back in time and talk. Sometimes I also sat on the floor together with them, while they were sewing or weaving. I remember one of them, she took me to the smallest room in her house. She locked the front door and the door to this little room. Then she started to tell about how she lost thousands of animals. They were stolen from her and she told that it was her closest relatives who did that.

She sat there, sewing a huge furcoat –*beaska* and telling how her role changed, from being a wealthy woman to end up with only few animals.

When I was visiting the women, then I was not an ordinary guest. I tried to help them. I could wash their dishes, go out and get some firewood or make dinner together with them. It helped, because I was not only taking stories from them, but I was also a friend, a young friend. Four of my informants lived at the elder centres and we had our conversations in their rooms.

This is the way I worked when I was gathering stories

Saunders, et al. (2012) delimits this analytical process with two approaches: inductive or deductive. In this project, a deductive approach was chosen, my research is based on various theoretical contributions and builds upon data collection with them. My contribution will be to provide a view of how women's lives have been and how they reflect Sámi society. There is an urgent need to produce research the lives of Sámi women and key life events.

An interview can be defined as an academic conversation between two or more persons with a certain structure and purpose. There is a clear purpose for the interview, and the interview most suitable as a method of data collection when the aim is to bring out opinions and experiences (Saunders et. al, 2012). An interview may have different data structures and can distinguished between three different interview forms: unstructured, semi-structured, and structured (Thagaard, 2013). For this study, I have chosen to implement a combination of semi-structured and unstructured interviews. I've pre-selected some topics that would be the focus during the interview. This will form the overall structure of the interview, and in this way, it will share some features with a semi-structured interview. On the other hand, it will be up to the informants to decide what they want to talk about, and questions will be shaped accordingly. I have not pre-determined any questions, but questions come up that feel natural to take up in relation to the theme. My experience as a journalist means that I am used to this interview form and how interviewers should ask questions. By designing the interviews in this way, I could get the conversation to flow naturally and ask questions that are relevant. This provides a better opportunity to build trust between me, the interviewer, and my informants. Informal conversation was also an important door opener. I spent time preparing my informants for the interviews. I visited them and had casual conversations without recording the interviews. It was considered essential that the informants had a trusting relationship with

me and that they felt a sense of security when sharing information. Thus, I have spent time building a relationship with informants. This is considered a very important part of the interviews and for the stories I was told by informants (Brinkmann & Tang Gard, 2012 p. 26-28). I used my network as a journalist to find interviewees. Through conversations with various people in the Sámi community, I have heard descriptions of various women who should be interviewed. That way, my network has been central for gaining information and acceptance among the interviewees. In selecting the sample, I took advantage of the snowball effect. Saunders, et.al (2012) describes the snowball selection as contacting someone who you believe has knowledge and insight about a topic; this person then can lead to the right population and informants. In this way, one informant could open the opportunity to interview several informants.

One of the challenges of doing snowball selection is that the selection is limited to the same environment and network (Thaagard, 2013). I did not consider this problematic since my subject matter makes it so clear what population is relevant for the research. The aim of this study is not to generalize the findings to other Sámi women. The aim is to give a picture of how the lives of informants has been, thus describe how lives of Indigenous women can be. I used my personal background in how to conduct the interviews.

The reliability of data is the degree to which one can trust the empirical data, ie, the data collected (Johannessen et.al, 2005). This quality criteria is based upon how data is selected, collected, and processed. I have chosen to explain thoroughly why this study has been done and its purpose. In this way, I will describe the selection of data, and the data that has been used in the study. Moreover, I described how the interviews have been conducted. In the interview process, I have been conscious of the ways that the setting can have an effect on the information informants provided. Thus, for example, I carefully selected where the interviews would take place, and I also took into account the wishes that the informants had. I have chosen to take footage of all interviews to ensure that interviews are quoted correctly and that there are no changes in the information that informants provided. I have subsequently transcribed all the interviews and this transcription is a direct representation of the conversation between me and the informants. In this way, the information will be minimally affected and it will ensure the reliability of data.

Working as “insider” or “outsider” conducting stories

As a Sámi journalist, I am used to hearing this: *“how can we trust you, because you are an insider?”* This is the way I am questioned by non-Indigenous editors and journalists, because they do not believe that I can tell the news or the story from the “right” perspective, the objective and true news. Still in year 2016, I experience that there are doubts about my background, knowledge, and integrity. They are so used to assuming that their perspective, their outsider point of view, will be the best way to tell the stories. Once I was pitching a documentary for a Norwegian TV station and the editor asked me: *“how can we believe that your documentary will have the objective quality that is needed, because with your Sámi background – you do not have enough distance to the Sámi society?”* That time I managed to answer in a good way and the TV station ordered a documentary from me and later this documentary was sold to many countries. But I have also been asked to leave TV project, because I am questioning about their knowledge and about an Indigenous perspective. Once I was told, that I am too close to the Sámi people. On the other hand, Alam is reminding us how “minority ethnic” researchers do experience the ethnic and racial framing of his/her work and about themselves, in this Alam writes: *“how my work is read cannot naively be disassociated from the possible readings others will make of the linkage between my identity and my analysis. In being explicit in relation to my insider status, I am acknowledging the experiential sensibilities that are brought into my research”* (Husband & Alam 2015 p. 96-102).

There is always the epic-emic debate going on which raises the question of we are to close and not being objective enough. As Pedersen and Stordahl are commenting, there are phenomena that can only be understood by an insider: *“what is left is the argument that is a necessity for research and researchers to have a Sámi perspective, first hand knowledge and closeness to our culture and society, either you are Sámi or not, there are no between alternatives* (Stordahl, 2008, p. 259-260, Pedersen 1990).

Indigenous Methodology

As Smith is reflecting about doing research in Indigenous communities she comments that: *“The word itself, research, is probably one of the dirtiest words in the Indigenous world’s vocabulary”* (Smith, 2012, p.3). According to her, it stirs up silence and it conjures up bad memories. The process of hundreds of years of colonization and assimilation has destroyed and weakened many Indigenous societies and communities. The traditional knowledge,

including our way of thinking has been reduced systematically – and positioned as not having the same value as the Western epistemology and paradigms. Under this paradigm, the colonisers, the adventurers, travellers, including *vierrásat* – *foreigner*– *researchers* and journalists researched and told stories about the Indigenous other through their “neutral” and “objective” gaze. Smith describes this as a research done by imperial eyes. – *Dá lea min árbi* this is our own inheritance and how we are theorizing our own knowledge traditions (Kuokkanen, 2009 p.) As an example, Kuokkanen is using how Tlingit elder Austin Hammon says; “*That those who are coming and asking where is your history then he is answering, we are clothing our own history*”. And a good reminder of our way of storytelling are the rock carvings in Indigenous territories, like in Áltá in Sápmi, in Botswana or in Australia. Gaski writes about how the Indigenous methodology is inspired by the development within postcolonial and decolonizing studies, and places Indigenous peoples at the centre, while simultaneously seeking to Indigenize the academia (Gaski, 2009 p.113). Many of the Indigenous researchers are using the example of how our educational institution and our researchers can be part of making our own methodology- the Indigenous ways of knowing within the academy. It is from within this commitment to Indigenous research that the data collected twenty years ago, is now approached with a heightened sensitivity that might not have been available at the time.

Gaski mentions the important premise for Indigenous research, and the right to represent oneself. When the languages, knowledge, values and worldviews were not taken seriously because of the attitudes of colonialism, then there is next step. It means one must prove in practice how to apply Indigenous peoples’ traditional knowledge: How can it be rendered accessible and usable in an ethical and culturally responsible way (Gaski, 2009, 116-18).³¹ The language use is important, and how to “give back” research to the community. The researchers must also be aware of how to make sure that the researchers have asked the permission to do the research, and have clarified who owns the published research (Kuokkanen, 2009, 139-144). The people who are researched or filmed will never be able to control the product or influence the result, because the non-Indigenous researchers do not come back and ask if they have misunderstood anything (Kovach 2009, p 35-36). These historical realities and current ethical challenges inform the research reported below.

³¹ <http://www.alternative.ac.nz/author/harald-gaski>

Now when I am reflecting on my fieldwork and how the interviews happened over a longer period and how I have stored and not published any of the stories of my collection. I have concluded: 1) I did not know then how I was working, but now I do understand that I was working according our “unwritten” understanding; 2) Additionally, I now know that this project had a undefined goal of working within an Indigenous paradigm. It means letting the voices, the stories and knowledge of elder Indigenous interviewees to be presented in this thesis. During writing this master thesis I have contacted children, brothers or grandchildren to ask promision to use their mothers, sisters or grandmother’s names. I want to be sure that the families are included to this process, especially because there are many personal stories. I have also informed them about the stories that will be published in this thesis. They have all agreed. I have only anonymized two of my informants, because of their role as maids, working almost as slaves for close relatives. I want to protect the little society and the families.

Indigenous Journalism

“Guokte sáni” álgoálbmot” ja “journalistihkka”. Vuosttaš sáni čujuha munnje dan ahte lea álgoálbmogiidda gullevašvuohta ja čanastupmi. Dat mañit sáni ges čilge dan maid buohkat ipmirdit, namalassii fága sisdoallu. Muhto deháleamos vuolggasadji lea journalisttaid čanastupmi dahje čanastumit álgoálbmogiidda dahje iežas álbmogii”

Nils Johan Heatta, 29.06.16

These words are said by former editor at NRK Sápmi, Nils Johan Heatta, director and editor for NRK Sápmi for thirty years.³² According to Heatta the role of media has huge impact in our society. When he was asked to describe Indigenous Journalism, he started with these two words – “álgoálbmot” (Indigenous) and – “journalistihkka” (journalism), but these two words also have huge requirements and contrasts. To put these two words together “Indigenous Journalism”, then it describes that Indigenous media workers or Indigenous media institutions are working with journalism. Heatta emphasizes the word, journalism, and how this can combine and strengthen the knowledge and language among Indigenous peoples. Knowledge about culture, livelihood and habits, and how to tell news from another perspective, those are the stronger part of Indigenous Journalism. On the opposite side, the journalists can be too close to the society and this is one of the debates when media has the

³² NRK Sápmi is a division of Norwegian Broadcasting Corporation and has almost 100 employees.

watchdog role and to develop investigative journalism – *nagodit beaktilvuodain gozihit servodaga*. Heatta argues that it is difficult and impossible for a non-Indigenous journalist to work with Indigenous journalism and be a part of a society if they do not speak the native language. It will take years before they will learn and understand the codes in a society, – “*journalista ferte gamus dovdet servodaga árvvuid*”.

Show respect, while you are working with Indigenous Peoples

The experience of reporting on Indigenous people raises valuable insights into any process of recording Indigenous experience. Indigenous journalist Duncan McCue (2015), from the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC), is asking this: – “*Why can't a journalist come to a community and take stories from Indigenous People?*”. McCue argues that journalists must think deeply about how their story will benefit the community: its about giving back, instead of taking stories. When he is covering stories, he is also asking if the people are willing to share their stories with him and he notes that a journalist also must accept if the people or the tribe will not tell their story, or that they are not ready or prepared enough to get it published. McCue puts it this way: “*act with respect, even when you have a deadline hanging over you*”. Kovach calls this the part of research preparation, that you know the purpose of getting the story and about how to behave when entering a society with different habits and culture, including how you as a researcher and journalist are giving back and benefiting the community. (Kovach 2009, p. 44-45, 48). According to McCue, and also Heatta, many Indigenous societies are misused by journalists:

There's a long history of non-Aboriginal people coming to Aboriginal communities, asking about people's lives, requesting their stories, then LEAVING. Those visitors interpreted what they saw and heard — in books, reports, studies, films, or photos. Aboriginal people had little say in how those stories were told; in many cases, the story never even made it back to them.

www.riic.ca

McCue reminds us that it is important to avoid the 4Ds, like drumming, dancing, drunk or dead: the media must give the Indigenous people the voice and knowledge. He asks the journalists to find the rich resources of stories, including positive humorous stories, and to not victimize them, as in the stereotypes we find in the mainstream press (McCue, 2015). Heatta calls this the tendency to generalise and stigmatise the Sámi people as a collective group, not paying attention to the fact that there are individual actions. According Heatta and Mather it

is important that Native or Indigenous journalists are teaching the mainstream press how to cover Indigenous areas. Maori-TV in Aotearoa, is now offering this kind of a course for the mainstream press (Heatta, 2016 and Jim Mather, 2015). These considerations, derived from a cumulative critique of non-Indigenous media, and from the emergent domain of Indigenous media practice, carry significant resonance with the challenges that are inherent in this research.

Elder women invisible in media

Mággás advice: “Mus lea nu ollu muitalit, muhto dus lea nu unnán áigi mu muitalusaide!”

This is how our first conversation developed with Mággá and it took an unexpected turn, she said that I do not have time for her stories. Often among journalists, there is a lack of time and a deadline is hanging over your head, while you are collecting the news or stories. McCue has made a reporter’s checklist what he has called “*Indian Time*”, to set in extra time:

“It’s not easy to explain what Indian Time is. It’s more complicated than assuming everything will be late (though, that’s often a safe bet). I’ve heard Indian Time described as “the time it takes for moss to grow on a stone,” or as one elder put it “the time it takes to do things in a good way.” (riic.ca).

To manage this women-project collecting stories, I gave up my professional work for several years and travelled around as freelancer to talk with elder women. The editor of Ávvir (sámi newspaper), Kari L. Hermansen, explains honestly, that they do not have enough time to make interviews with the elders, they are not putting in «extra sámi» time, because they are few with many deadlines. “*Our journalists do not have enough time to visit them in their homes, and we can’t do telephone interviews with the elders*”, says Hermansen. Also, the former editor of Oddasat, the pan-Sámi TV news, Rávdná Buljo Gaup at NRK Sápmi is aware of the situation and something should be done, before the storytellers or traditional experts passes away. The annual statistics for 2014 does show that there are few elder women interviewed in Oddasat, 19 women or 2,09%. In 2015, the number of women did increase a little bit. Then 38 elder women older than 60 were interviewed and the percent then is 2,8%.

The first memories and the picture she is carrying from her childhood

My oldest informant, #2 Ristenaš Risten or Joffel Risten, is almost 100 years old, when she is asked to think back in time, back to her childhood. This was in 1995 and she was born in 1895. I spent days with her at the elder centre in Deatnu, on the Norwegian side. In one way, I am also challenging her to talk or tell about stories from childhood. She is asked to find pictures and memories that she has stored for many years. She starts to describe who her parents are, which family *sohka* they belong to and that her father was married twice.³³ Father, Biret Ovlá, was old and mother, Juhkanaš Risten, was young. I am asking her to have flashback to this period 1903- 1917. Then she is describing their home, their little cold house by the river Deatnu, a home with parents and twelve children from both marriages; and according to her they had a very cold old house with two floors.



At that time, they did not have electricity, only an oven and a little oil lamp. The children had to sleep in the second floor and they had only reindeer skin under them and a sheep skin to cover them – *“mis lei dološ vistti ja doppe lei lokta, min mánáid oad̄ihedje lovttas. Go manaimet nohkkat, mis lei geasge duollji lovttas man alde ođiimet. Roavgu vel lei mis buohkain”*. She remembers all the work they had to do at home: for example the children were cutting wood from October to April. They went together to the forest to cut trees and her brothers had to stand daily outside cutting wood – *“mii gesiimet muoraid meahcis oktoberis gitta april mánnui. Muorra galggai leat ollu”*. Here she is describing how much they had to work and how the children were from an early age included in work, so that the families would survive during the cold winters. *Birgen* is the strategy she is talking about, to manage the life. They all had to work hard, so the family – *birgehallá*, enough food, clothes, wood and a health. To survive, manage the difficulties and co-operating so the daily work will be done as planned.

³³ My translation: *Sohka* is the definition of the whole huge family or what we call -the family clan system and *bearaš* is the closest family, children, parents and grandparents including uncles and aunts.

The stories came while we were working

Their mother was always busy, sewing leather clothes for her children and stepchildren, so that they will manage the cold winters and that they have good clothes when they are walking to school or working outside. Their mother, Juhkanaš Risten, used to gather her daughters around the warm oven in the kitchen. They were sitting on the floor and their mother was teaching how to cut reindeer skin, how to use *áibmi* and *suotna* and she used to tell stories from the past, about her childhood, about relatives or about working skills.³⁴ Sometimes the other women nearby also came to their place, sitting in the kitchen and they were sharing knowledge and the conversations could last for hours, as we call it- together in *searvelatnja*.

Sámi researcher Sara is describing *searvelatnja* – the the traditional learning arena, where skills, knowledge and values are transferred in a reciprocal learning processes and the holistic transformation of success (Balto&Kuhmunen 2014 p. 74-75). This is an arena where youth, adults and elders are gathered and during these moments or conversations you can observe who has the voice to talk and who is silent. Thus, learning traditional Sámi skills was embedded in a narrative about the young girl’s specific family history. This was an acquisition of skills embedded in a collective history. This is also one of the moments when storytelling is like a friend, teacher and entertainment (Vuolab 1995:34). When Risten got older she started to work together with her female relatives, they were knitting and sewing and according to her, these moments were and still are valuable memories “*duddjodettiin ohppen ja oahppásmuvven*” during her work she got to know her aunts and their life-stories. Her female relatives also taught her how to work with animals. She did not see much of their father; he was always working outside “*áhčči barggai ijat beivviid*”.

Her parents were good teachers. Storytelling was part of it, guiding the children so they know how to behave in nature and with the animals. In the wood forest, they were aware of the *people* who lived under the ground, “*ulddat*” and “*gufihttarat*” and the adults told the children to give a piece of bread or just a little piece of meat to *ulddaide*.³⁵ *Gudnejahttit luonddu lei*

³⁴ Áibmi- skin needle

³⁴ Suotna- dried sinew of reindeer

³⁵ My translation: Ulldat and gufihttarat – the people who live beyond the ground. According to our stories they have the most beautiful reindeer and their children are always wearing colourful clothes. We always ask for promission to sleep on their ground. If we do not do it, they will disturbe us during nighttime.

dehálaš. The first slice of salmon or reindeer meat was given to the sacred stone, called *Sieidi*, it will bring hunting and fishing luck to them. Risten remembers when her mother used to tell stories about *čáhcerávga* and what happens if a child comes too close to the river. Then the *čáhceravga* will take the child and she will disappear for ever. This is the way Magga and Eira also are emphasizing the shared knowledge that is in Indigenous communities and how this knowledge has helped people in their society, out in nature, during daily life and how to survive outside (Magga, 2011 and Eira, 2012 p. 96). As Risten is telling, it happened that children did freeze to death, and how her parents were telling the children why it is important to have good clothes and never walk alone along the river during winter time.

She came as Risten and out she went as Kristine

When Risten was eight years old, in 1903, she was asked to go to school. It was only a walking distance from their home to the village called Buolbmát, where the school building was. In the classroom, the Norwegian teacher asked her name and she told him that she is Risten. The teacher did not accept her given name and gave her a new Norwegian name, Kristine Olsen Erke. Risten did not understand what the teacher was saying, but the older children helped her: translating the message from him at school you are Kristine:

“Go mun bohten skuvlii, de oahpaheaddji jearrá mii mu namma lea. Mun vástidan ahte lean Risten. Son ii dohkkehan mu nama ja logai ahte dás rájes leat don Kristine Olsen Erke”.



She did not learn much from the school, the language gap was a huge challenge. She did not understand the teachers and the teachers did not understand the children. The instruction from Norwegian authorities from 1898 to forbid Sámi and Kven languages affected the children in a very negative way; and even more so when one of the

school directors wrote that *“the Lappish tribe are so degenerated that there is little hope of any change for the better for them”* (Solbakk, 1997 p. 149 and Minde, 2005 p. 12). Risten used

to wake up at five in the morning to do homework. She wanted to be a good pupil and she tried to learn something at school. She used to sit in their kitchen, trying to understand the Norwegian texts – “*eat mii lihkká oahppan dárogiela. Goittotge galggaimet máhttit nuppe beaivái. Diibmu viđas iđđes fertejin lihkkat, vai máhtan lohkat!*”. Now when she is 100 years old, she says that she prefers writing in Sámi and does not read any Norwegian texts.

The example provided by Risten’s account offers us some insight into the necessary sensitivity we should have to the context in which experiences take place and memories are laid down. When given the gift of access later recalled memories to the listener is necessarily challenged to address whether they have an adequate capacity to historicise the particularity of this individual’s personal narrative.

6. THREE HISTORICAL PERIODS IN SÁPMI

The reason why I have chosen these three different periods, 1910-1920, 1940-50 and 1970-80 is because the collected stories from the elder women also include these periods. During the first period, there was a process of harsh assimilation and Sámi children were not allowed to speak their native language at school. After the Second World War, traditional customs and spirituality undergo changes, yoiking is forbidden, the traditional life is changing and Sámi are taking on new foreign habits. During the 1970s the local societies are facing the reality that young women are leaving traditional areas, “becoming a man’s world” becomes a new expression in Sápmi. The women are organizing themselves and new women organisations are established. During this period the Sámi people are also getting many new official institutions. The events described by the women I spoke with took place within a specific historical and territorial context. While all attempts to periodise history contain a degree of arbitrary boundary making, it is never-the-less important to provide some account of the framing environment in which these women made their lives.

The history 1910-1920

To understand and to know more about the lives of my oldest informants, it is important to describe how Sápmi has been, and what the decisions that influenced or changed their lives are. The women I interviewed twenty years ago, talked openly and, described their memories

of their lives during different historical periods in Sápmi. They spoke of how they managed to survive and how they were forced to accept the changes in their lives and in their societies. They also talked about the dramatic changes over the past fifty years. From their childhoods as members of poor, politically unorganized communities to the new welfare system and Sámi nation building with three Sámi Parliaments. Some of the women talked about dramatic and difficult changes in their lives; they could be personal, familial, societal, political, or about conflicts as their lives changed. I will first start with a period at the beginning of twentieth century, when the Sámi society underwent huge changes: the dramatic consequences of assimilation. Some of the women I have been interviewing, were already born during that period, and the policies of assimilation affected many of them.



Two of my eldest informants, #2 Ristenaš Risten and #3 Mikkol Elle were little girls, when there came an instruction in the year 1898 from the Norwegian national authorities, that Sámi and Kven languages should not be used at schools: and the use of both languages was forbidden until 1959.³⁶ These two languages could only be used if it was strictly necessary, –

³⁶ My translation: The Kven is the Norwegian name for the Finnish settlers in Northern Norway and their descendants. Originally they came from the area around the Gulf of Bothnia, on the Swedish and Finnish side (Kemi lappmark and Tornedalen) . They migrated from early 1800-Century to the coastal areas in Finnmark and Troms in North Norway.

“as an aid to explain what is incomprehensible to the children” (Solbakk, 1997, p. 149, Minde, 2005 p. 9). This instruction or directive even required Norwegian teachers to check that their Sámi and Kven pupils did not speak these two languages when they had breaks at school.

Instruks fra 1898:

Angaaende brugen av lappisk og kvensk som hjælpesprog ved undervisningen i folkeskolen, hvor dette af kirke departementet er tilladt i henhold til landsskolelovens §73, 2. Led.³⁷

A priest based in Finnmark, *Nils A. Aall*, wrote a letter in 1896 to school director Peter J.B. Coucheron in Tromsø that the Norwegian school system should never accept any Sámi as teachers, because they are not qualified and do not have the discipline to work as teachers (Solbakk, 2000 p.499).

“Little hope for the future of the Lapps”

The Norwegian Parliament had created a special fund called *Finnfondet* (Lapp Fund) and the main purpose of this was to promote the teaching of Norwegian and to norwegianise the children. With this Lapp Fund, they built Boarding schools in Finnmark County in North-Norway: altogether fifty-one boarding schools. The authorities preferred Norwegian teachers to work in Sámi and in Kven areas. The Sámi children felt it was a worthless of time being at school, as one of the children described in 1917: – “*My soul was damaged. These are the most barren and fruitless of my learning years. They were wasted, so to speak, and a wasted childhood can never be made good*” (Minde 2009 p. 5 and 23).

One of the school directors in Finnmark, Chr.Brygfjeld, rejected all the Sámi demands and according to him the assimilation of the Sámi was an indisputable civilizing task for the Norwegian state, because of Norwegian racial superiority:

“The Lapps have had neither the ability nor the will to use their language as written language. (...) The few individuals who are left of the original Lappish tribe are now so degenerated that there is little hope of any change for the better for them. They are hopeless and belong to Finnmark’s most backward and wretched population, and

³⁷ My translation: Directive from 1898, This instruction stated that all Sámi and Kven children had to learn to speak, write and read Norwegian – and they should not speak their mother tongue at all. (Instruks fra nasjonale myndigheter, facsimile Sámi historjá 2 p. 149, Aage Solbakk)

provide the biggest contingent from these areas to our lunatic asylums and schools for the mentally retarded”

(Quoted from Minde, 2005 p. 11-12, Eriksen and Niemi 1980:258)

The people in Sápmi are poor in that period. Along the coast of North-Norway the Sámi people are living in traditional homes called *darfegoahti* and some of them are also living in little houses with two or three rooms. Big families are living together, six to ten children, parents, grandparents, uncles and aunts. A Sámi word that describes the living condition then: “*lotnolas birgen*” it means that these people are combining reindeer herding, fishing in the fjords, lakes and rivers, picking berries, some have a few cows, sheep and some goats. Women were making Sámi handicrafts for themselves but also selling it to the people living along the coast (Bjørklund, 1985, p 195- 199). So when these parents sent their children to school, they did not see them for many months.

Three women who protected the Sámi way of living

Sápmi 1915: An old blind Sámi woman, Natalie Sava Romanoff, is mentioned in letters written to the Anatomic Institute in Oslo. A Norwegian researcher had arrived in a Skolt Sámi area in Njävddam in Finnmark County. His main duty is to dig up skulls for research. The Sámi already then called this grave looting and Natalie Sava Romanoff was putting a spell on him, because he had not asked permission to take skulls from them. Dr. Johan Brun paid 5 kroner for each skeleton and took with him ninety-four skeletons, and put them in a sack for doing research. “*Unohis vearrivuohta sápmelaččaid ektui*” – not acceptable towards the Sámi, was her reaction and the Skolt Sámi still calls this graverobbery.³⁸ At the same time by the coast another woman, is mentioned in the first novel written in the Sámi language. Skoalpa-Mággá is her name, a sea Sámi from Návuohtna in Troms. She is a well-known medicine woman. Bjørklund is writing about how the Sámi prefer to go to their “own” doctors, instead of going to a doctor with a medical education. Her way of treating people was also reported to the authorities in Oslo, that people were dying instead of getting medical treatment. There were two reasons why the Sámi did not want to go to a doctor, they could not afford it and

³⁸ (<https://www.nrk.no/troms/samiske-skjelett-returneres-1.7573034>) film <https://www.nrk.no/troms/samiske-skjelett-returneres-1.7573034>)

they did not speak the same language as the doctor. (Bjørklund 1985, p. 258- 260).

In the southern part of Sápmi a woman fought for the Sámi Rights, called the land ownership. She is also asking for better education and writing skills for the Sámi and how they can survive under the pressure of harsh assimilation. Her name is Elsa Laula Renberg (1877-1931), a midwife, reindeer herder, author, feminist and the first political female activist, who was fighting for the political rights of Sámi people. She is now called the – “*Mother of the*



Elsa Laula Renberg, Tråante 1917.

Sámi National Day”, because she managed to arrange the first Nordic Sámi meeting in Tråante or Trondheim, in Norway, from February 6 to February 9, 1917.

As the leader of the women’s organization called *Brurskanken Samiske Kvindeforening*, she decided to organize and invite Sámi people to a meeting. With her strong position, she managed to invite approximately 150 people to this conference, forty of them were women, mostly reindeer herder women from the South Sámi area.³⁹ Elsa Laula Renberg was elected as chair of the meeting and her dream was to change the power structure of society so that the Sámi could survive (Hirvonen 1998, p.70 -76, Johansen, 2015, p.118 -126). In Sápmi there are official

flagdays, the date when Elsa was born and the day she gathered the Sámi people together (also in Chapter 3 about Elsa Laula Renberg).

In this first period we see the existence of brutal forms of assimilation under a state sponsored policy of Norwegianisation. This had a dramatic impact upon Sámi family life and upon the

³⁹ My translation: «Brurskanken Samiske Kvindeforening», was established in 1910. The purpose of the association was to help ensure the establishment of a school for Sámi children in Nordland, and to educate the Sami.

viability of a self-sustaining Sámi culture and society. It disrupted the integrity of Sámi family life and ripped children from their families; with consequent trauma for children and parents. Yet at the same time we find evidence of women being resistant to these forces.

The untold stories, the stories they do not talk about

What is a life narrative? Why tell these untold stories? Romero and Stewart are actually asking: what is the story behind the story? What is the big story that we tell ourselves or to other people (Romero&Stewart 1999, p. xi). How to clear space for women to recount their lives in a way that had not been heard before, to get the stories from outside of our culture's called "master narratives". The meaning of it is - the stories that are so familiar that they seem inevitable and obvious in their meaning, even when they happen to us. According them these are the stories we were taught and teach ourselves about who does what and why. We are also comparing our lives to the stories we are getting- the way others interpret and understand our lives and reflect them back to us (Romero&Stewart 1999, p. xiv). They are dividing their collection of untold stories to three different parts – *breaking silence – talking back* and *voicing complexity*.

Motherhood is one of the examples of *breaking silence*, because every potential mother wants to fulfill their role. In 1998 there was a featured story in the USA about "Baby business" and "Millions of Americans are infertile" and these feature stories at national level never included African American women, Native women, or women of colour. The main stories were told by the white middle-class couples and their struggles. Ceballo decided to cover it in a different way, to get the silenced group of people to talk. She chose to write about two middle aged African American women, their struggle to get pregnant and their thoughts, including their stories about why they might be infertile, because their silence and emotional isolation was not covered. So consequently, this master narrative ignores and silences the voices of women who do not fit within this domain. It is this hegemonic perspective of infertility and the internalization of racist assumptions about reproduction that contribute to African American women's desire to cloak their infertility in secrecy (Romero&Stewart 1999, p. 3-18).

“In mun šaddan eadnin, vaikko nu háliidin mándáid. Ii boahtan ja álggos lávii nu váivi go buohkat han nu vurdet, goas de, goas munnos isidin maid manná ja bearaš!”⁴⁰

Five of my informants were infertile. As one of them is explaining, that she wanted to have children. She was a young wife and the other women, her close relatives, used to comment or ask about her choices. She did not know how to answer back, because she never went to a doctor to check, what was wrong with them. Informant #11 Lemet Sára, Sara K. Hætta, worked as midwife for forty-two years in Guovdgeaidnu, but according to her, they never had topics about infertility- and nor did she bring it up as a topic at the health centre. She also accepted her personal situation, she was married and could not get children and describes it this way: – “*Sápmelaš nissonolbmot, don dieđát sii eai muital balljo maidige. Eai ge huma maidige diekkáriid birra, eai dávddaid birra ge*”.⁴¹

Talking back

In the *Talking back* category Mary Romero is covering a story about Olivia – and the author is asking if she is one of the Smiths’ family or just the Mexican maid’s daughter? Just briefly about Olivia and her mother Carmen; they had a live-in arrangement with the Smith’s family. The maid and her daughter lived in a room inside the kitchen and there they stayed until Olivia graduated from college. When Olivia is *talking back* about her life as a maid’s daughter when instead of good payment to her mother, the family offered Olivia the same private school as their children. She was also included when the family was doing annual shopping, like for school clothes, birthdays and for Christmas; and she was also part of club dinners and activities. Constructing Olivia’s life, the family said she was one of them and Olivia knew they were not. As a Mexican maid’s daughter, immigrant daughter, serving a white upper-middle-class family in California, she had the opportunity to develop double consciousness. As Du Bois is writing: “It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul

⁴⁰ My translation: I really wanted to have children, but I never had the chance to be a mother. In the beginning of our marriage it was stressing and frustrating, because all the others were expecting, that we will soon have a child and own family.

⁴¹ My translation: Sámi women do not talk about these issues. There hasn’t been debates, articles or programs concerning infertility. They do not talk, not even about their health situation.

by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity” (Du Bois, 1903 p. 3).

Olivia is telling in this way about her dialogues with her mother:

Olivia: When my mom told me about this big fight with Mrs. Smith, I said, “The bottom line is that Mrs. Smith thinks you are her servant.”

My mother said, “Oh no! They don’t. They love us.”

Olivia: She even tried to separate us and said, “They may not love me as much as they love you”. When I was critical to the Smiths, my mom agreed with me most of time.

She never protected them. But she always said, “Oh Mrs. Smith really cares about

you.” I said, “That’s irrelevant. She cares about me because she failed as a mother.”

(Romero&Stewart 1999, p. 149)

It is exactly this struggle over the management of a personal biographic sense, and the ambiguities, contradictions and transitions in one’s life that is to be found layered into the interview data obtained in this research. The accounts of lives lived offered to me by the women whom I interviewed are personal accounts of a remembered past; and as such are an active construction of their life, not a mere descriptive reportage of events.

In a Sámi context, the “Talking back”- category could include the narratives of the young girls who worked as maids. Their experience of the contradictions between shared family membership and personal exploitation raised painful dilemmas that some felt must be challenged. Another issue was also being pregnant and how they had to deal with it: being accepted or not by the society! Skihkka Elle wrote her life-story in 1964 and she is mentioning about the young girl who almost choked a newborn baby, then this young man who was with them screamed and warned her: – “*De čur’vii dat álmái: “Ále har’ce áv’dal gá cum’mát dan máná!” Ii dat šaddan har’cet dan máná. De buoc’cai dat niso ja mánná bæsai ællit.*”⁴²

Sámi female author, Rauni Magga Lukkari, who also writes about taboos, has a poem about children that are set out to die, those who are not wanted or parents who can’t take care of their child.

⁴² Sámi Ællin, Sámi Servi Jakkigir’ji 1964-66, Universitetsforlaget, redaktør Asbjørn Nesheim og Harald Eidheim, pages 78-

*Eará dat leai mis dolin
bárdnemánáid bismaris vihkkiimet
ja gulaimet jo jienas
man gievran šaddá
Nieidamánát ledje vearrábut
muhtin doaggi
issoras sitkat
Elii jeakkis maid
vaikke man guhká
ovdalgo heallui
Mađe guhkit elii
dađe vearrábut jienádalai
de maŋŋá
go eahpáražžan
eallái*

*It was different in the old days
we weighed the baby boys with a steelyard
and could hear by their voice
how strong they would grow
It was harder with the girls
Even a puny one could be
quite hardy
When left to the bog
she might stay alive
a long time
before yielding
The longer she lived
the worse was the noise she made
later
after turning
into a ghost*

(Rauni Magga Lukkari, 1999 p.56-57)

Eallingearddi mitalus gives the understanding of meaning with the lifestories

From our concern, above with Indigenous methodology, and the use of biographic memory as a research tool, it is important that we give time to reflecting upon the variety of realities that may be found in Sámi narrative: and at least in a minimal way recognize some of the distinctiveness of the cultural life contained within these narratives.

*“Mus leat dakkár attáldagat mat earáin eai leat. Mun oidnen ahte Lemet Elle ii eale guhká. Son bođii mu ovddal vácci. Ii leange son ieš, muhto oainnáhus. Go moai oaidnaleimme, du mitalin ahte ledjen oaidnán su ovdosiid hámis. Čirodeimme ja ánodeimme. Lemet Elle jámii dan čavčča”!*⁴³

This elder woman “Kátjá” (born 1915) is sitting in her kitchen, reflecting about life and starts to talk about Lemet Elle, her neighbour and friend. “Kátjá” can see things and she also knows what will happen with them. She is getting the pre-messages *ovdosat*. Once she saw her

⁴³ My translation: I do see more than other people, sometimes I know before what will happen. Once I did see Lemet Elle walking on the field and I did see when she came towards me. It was not her, but a soul of her walking. At that moment, I knew she will die soon. When I met her again, I told her about it, we cried and asked for forgiveness. This is one of my true stories, which is bigger than any other stories that I could see Lemet Elle will pass away.

friend, Lemet Elles figure or shape coming towards her. She knew immediately what will happen now and later the same fall, Lemet Elle passed away. “Kátjá” says she has a role to handle her knowledge in a good way, she is aware of, when to inform and when she can not do it.

“*Eallingearddi muitalus*” is how we explain life-stories. It can be one or several stories and the person can choose where to begin and end her/his story. When Aikio is using, and explaining a life-story or a narrative story, and using the explanation “*eallingeardi*”, then the Sámi “insiders” will know that this is about people who have lived long lives. For the Sámi people; both oral traditions and storytelling, including personal stories, reflect life and has been useful to manage the struggles, catastrophes, the hard work out in the cold wilderness and even through traumas. Aikio is also using “*vásáhusdiehtu*” – how elders are understanding themselves, how they are talking about the past, how they are presenting it and about how they are talking about their traditional experienced life. Another woman, “Ingir” had a very scary story, she tells about how she reacted when she as a little girl and saw when her sister changed to *ulda*: – “*Leimme guođoheamen, de mu oabbá rievddai dasa nu fasttit, dego ulda. Logan vel sutnje ahte don leat dego ulda ja mu eatni beaska vel váldán. Ealus in dovdda šat ovttage bohcco. Heargi nu čáppat ja eará bohccot nu romit ja mos mun beasašin vel dán hearggi sealgái, de dat vuodjela, doalvu mu ruoktut*”.⁴⁴ “Ingir” was one of the few who has experienced this and they needed external help (shaman) to solve her burden. Later, every time when she passed this area, she always left some food on the place where she saw her sister changing to *ulda*. Many of my other informants are describing or telling about how others have experienced *ulddaid* or *ulddat*, those who live underground or beneath the earth. These Sámi elders, through storytelling or by narrative lifestories are describing or telling accounts about their position in their society, including where they are at a global level. Often people have told their life-story several times or kept talking about it, or repeating their stories. Aikio is aware of this and writes about old people who are talking or telling their personal stories, can do it in two ways: 1) that they are telling their personal story and they have also experienced it. In the Sámi context, we call it a story told in «*mun hámis*”; 2) that they are telling a story that is experienced by someone else, that another person has told

⁴⁴ My translation: We were by our herd, when my sister changed. She was not any longer pretty, but was an *ulda*. I commented it, that she has changed and still is wearing our mother *beaska* (furcoat). I did not know any longer the animals in our herd. The *heargi* animals was beautiful and all the other animals were ugly. I wanted to ride *heargi* that it will bring me home to our *goahti* (tent).

him/her a story and they have adopted it; as it belongs to them as a collective memory – “*i šat sáhte earuhit mat dáhpáhusaid son lea ieš vásihan ja maid dáhpáhusaid son lea vásihan nuppi olbmo muitalusaid bokte*” (Aikio, 2010 p. 66-70).

Among the Sámi it is common that we do not say it directly. You must understand the meaning of *geažideapmi* context, when people are using one or two words with the explanation of a broad meaning. An example is silenced moments, those can also describe a lot how people are thinking about work, issues and happenings or events. If a person is silent and does not answer the question or does not respond, in our context it means that the person doesn't agree or support the decision. In *dáža kultuvrras* – Norwegian culture it is opposite, if you are silent then you also do agree (Balto, 1997 and 2009 p. 40).

The good memories

As a journalist or a researcher it is important to ask from my informants about the good days, the good memories. The moments when the women are smiling and talking about their love for their parents, brothers, sisters, grandparents, uncles, aunts and cousins.

“Mis lei stuorra goahti gieddegeažis. Mun muittán dan goađi ja lei nu somás eallinain váillahan goahteeallima. Mis lei goahti ja 4 máná riegádedje doppe”

Informant #5, this story is told to me by “Rávdná Márjá”, born in 1921. This seventy-four-year-old woman is sharing a story with me from summer when she and her father were building a house for their family in the valley of Deatnu, on the Finnish side. She was only a little girl, about six or seven years old, but every day, she went with her father on a boat trip along the river to build a new house 10 km away from the field and *goahti* where they lived. She still misses the traditional life in the *goahti*, where four of her siblings were born.⁴⁵ They had a fire place in the middle of the *goahti* and the children were enjoying the life of stories and their parents' great sense of humour. Her father, “Issát”, was also good at teaching the children: they were always following him during the salmon fishing in the summertime – “*Áhčči lei viššal min oahpahit luosaid bivdit ja mii oahpaimet sus ollu. Láviimet su mieldde buođđut ja fargga časkit čuoldda*. When their father was in a very good mood, he could also

⁴⁵ Goahti is a big traditional tent

juogat- yoik for the children. He could sit by the fire and yoik forefathers and foremothers, but he also made traditional luhti yoiks for his children.⁴⁶

Informant #6 “Sofe” is “Rávdná Márjá’s” older sister, born in 1920. She is seventy-five years old and sitting next to us. “Sofe” is talking about the rituals they had every spring when the first raindrops fell down. They used to run up to the hill *láhjiid gudnejahttit*. We were shouting that the salmon is coming, salmon is swimming up the river. Their father, “Issát” was a good fisherman and a hunter.



Photo: Risto Grönhagen

“Mun muittán go gidđa bođii ja go vuosttaš arvečalbmi bođii, de manaimet čora ala. Doppe huikkiimet ahte luossa bohtá, luossa bohtá. Oahpaimet rohkadallat vai geassi šattašii buorre ja šáttolaš” Told by “Sofe”.

Their mother, “Káre” could run up and down the valley, with a child in her back. She gave birth to ten children, but she could run along the river, run to their field and cut hay – *“nu barggán lei min eadni, viegadii miillaid”*. “Sofe” is describing their life and it could be

⁴⁶ Luohti is a yoik and juogat means to yoik (verb).

difficult, and the most challenging part was to have enough food for ten children. Their parents “Issát” and “Káre” taught the children early on that they have to thank the Creator for every salmon they caught, all the animals they slaughtered and all the berries they picked together each fall. They prayed together every evening and asked for rain or sunshine, depending on how the weather has been the last days.

Informant #7 Anna Gudveig Biti Mosebakken, Lemet Ándde Ánne, is born in 1909 and grew up in Kárášjohka, on the Norwegian side. In her childhood, they lived in two places, winterhouse and summercabin. Every summer they moved to the summer place, by the river called Ássebákti. More than fifty-sixty people lived there together. There the riverpeople were taking care of their cows and they used to fish salmon and pick berries. Children knew that there was plenty of food and the adults they used to sing a special song for them, bless the place: – “*Márkanmánát nealgemánát, Ássebávtté mánát vallji mánát*” it means that the children who are staying in the municipality centre during the summer time, they do not have as much food as the children in Ássebákti. There they had salmon, berries, potatoes and fresh cowmilk.

– “*Mis lei nu buorre eallin doppe. Ollesolbmot ledje hui buorit mánáide, mii barggaimet ovttas. Muhto mii leimmat hui viššal skelbmošit. Givssideimmet ja nárrideimmet nuppiid*”.



This picture is from 1908. Márjjá Ámmun with his children Hánsa and Márja. Behind stands Sámmol Jovvna Piera, Ámmun Ámmun, Ommot Márjá, Ámmun Márja and Márjjá Kirste. Photo: Lensmann Aage Hegge/RDM.

She remembers the life by the river as happy moments. Children used to tease the adults and some of the elder women used to serve delicious food to children, especially if the children were helping them. Those who did not serve good meals, they did not get any help from the children, they refused to carry up buckets of fresh water from the river. The elders knew that if they served salt fish, dried meat and sourmilk to children, then they will run to the forest and pick firewood for them. The riverpeople had also their own coded language, so the strangers won't understand it and one of them was this message: "*Niiton berfe fandrums gustu*" (code language) it means that there is a boat with strangers coming around the curve in the river. Once three strangers, male tourists, arrived and they needed help to get to the municipality centre, so then Anna Gudveig was asked to be their pathfinder. She was a little girl and managed to row down the river. The strangers helped her and she did not talk to them, but she earned money on that trip. When she came back, she had flour and sugar with her. As a little girl, she was proud of her parents, they had been abroad. Their unique stories from Alaska were exciting and she used to beg them to tell about Alaskan life, nature (high mountains, big trees, bears and rich salmon rivers) and how they managed to teach reindeer herding to Native People.

When the women were asked to talk about the good times as children, quite many of the stories are from and about the summer season. They are describing why fishing is fun, they are describing how they are working outside in the sunshine. They tell about the peaceful life. After the migration, the reindeer and herders are relaxing in their summer place and they have enough food from the fjords. There can be several reasons why the summer moments are so good for all my informants: 1) summervacation from the boarding school and family is gathered again; 2) easy to get enough food, they do not need to work hard; 3) relatives, many generations, are living together; 4) sharing work and knowledge, they have time to teach children traditional handicraft; 5) freedom, children could be outside as long as they wanted, the midnight sun was shining.

7. ANALYSIS

In this part, I will analyse the lives of the twelve women I have chosen of twenty-seven. I have divided their life-stories into these categories over four time periods: 1) childhood; 2) being young women; 3) being adult and 4) the life as elder. With this category, I will follow a timeline from 1895 to 1996 and will start with childhood and early youth, then continue with

a period called youth, making important decisions that will affect their lives. During the adult period, many of my informants experienced huge changes: the collective family system is changing. And finally, when they are elders they are making summaries about life and how the changes affected them personally. With these personal women's stories, I will describe three different history periods in Sápmi, 1910-20, 1944-54, 1970- 80. Their personal life-stories will give us an insight into the lives of Sámi women within historical moments: and perhaps suggest some of the continuities of Sámi women's lives over time.

CHILDHOOD

I have already introduced my oldest informant #2 Ristenaš Risten and she was talking back in time when she was 100 years old. She was telling about her first memories, about their family life by the river and how difficult it was to be part of the harsh assimilation period. My second oldest informant, #3 Mikkol Elle, Ellen Mikkelsdatter Sara Buljo, is born in 1896. She was a reindeer herder and she lived her whole life in her traditional grazing areas, in the tundra or by the coast, Fálesnuorri. According to her, the first years were difficult, they were freezing and she started skiing early. She and her older brothers had to chase the wolves away from their herd. At the age of ten years old, she went to school. It was in 1906. She did not know anyone in the village and she stayed at a stranger's house. There was five winters without her parents and she had to follow two types of rules, at school and at the stranger's house, where they did not care about her. In her account, she reported that she did not learn much, but she managed to learn to read and to count. She also had to deal with *birgen* strategy, as Ristenaš Risten did. Mikkol Elle was alone, the school hierarchy was tough and she was monolingual. She had two Bibles by her bed, one in Sámi and the other in Norwegian. She needed the Sámi version to understand the Norwegian texts, because the following day the schoolteacher will require her to speak Norwegian and ask about her homework. She could not show her feelings, not cry, only accept the situation. According to her, it was a waste of time being at school. As a child she already knew that her life is with her animals. She will never move down to the village– “*doppe skuvllas ohppen stávet ja rehkenasttit*”. The assimilation of the Sámi was hard and many have told later that the school days have been wiped away. A Sámi child described the school this way: – “*My soul was damaged.*” (Quote from 1917 from a child, Minde, 2005 p. 9 and 23). According to Rasmus

the children who were sent away, had to manage their own lives. They had to solve their problems, find friends and make decisions that would help them, like in a movie with protagonist and antagonist (Rasmus, 2008, 70-73). Mikkol Elle can't remember the names of the teachers, and says that she only knows how to use *muorranamat* the initials the Sámi are using when they are marking their animals or things that belongs to them. With *muorranamat* you can see the name of the person, whose daughter or son she /he is and what their surname is (Wiig, 1951, p.98-99).

EMAS Ellen Mikkelsdaughter Sara

MAMBU Máret Ánne Josefsdaughter Utsi Hætta

EMK Lemet Jørgen Ivvársson Gaup

MNX Mihkkal Niillas Mikkelsson Oskal

When the Sámi used these letters, each name had a special letter. People could see that Elle is daughter of Mihkkal and she belongs to the Sara family, that she has been here or her animals are in this area. The reindeer herders used to mark their animals with *muorranamat*. At that time, it was also a habit among them - to leave a special stick called *asttahas* in the place where they had their *lávvu* or fireplace. With *asttahas* you are delivering messages or news to others that are later passing by and by looking at the stick they can see who has been there before them. Mikkol Elle used to do it, deliver information and read *asttahas* news.

Bustadnr.	Krins	Namn	Gnr.	Bnr.	Tilstades	Heimehørande		
0014	004	Mikkelsby						
Korn/potet: nei Kreatur: ja Fjærkre: nei Bikubar: nei Kjøkkenhage: nei Fruktthage: nei								
Nr.	Namn	Kj.	Siv.	Bust.Fam.	Yrkje	Fødd	Fødestad	Statsb.Tru.
001	Mikkel Mikkelsen Sara	m	g	f hf	Flytlap	1841	Kautokeino	
Statsb.: Trusamf.: Sannsynleg opphaldstad: Bosekop Etnisitet: ln								
002	Maret Mikkelsdatter Hætta	k	g	b hm	Flytlapkone	1869	Kautokeino	
Statsb.: Trusamf.: Etnisitet: ln								
003	Mikkel Mikkelsen Sara	m	ug	b tj	Arbeider ved Renjord	1881	Kautokeino	
Statsb.: Trusamf.: Etnisitet: ln								
004	Anne Mikkelsdatter	k	ug	b d	Datter	1882	Kautokeino	
Statsb.: Trusamf.: Etnisitet: ln								
005	Mikkel Mikkelsen Sara	m	ug	b s	Søn	1885	Kautokeino	
Statsb.: Trusamf.: Etnisitet: ln								
006	Nils Mikkelsen Sara	m	ug	b s	Søn	1890	Kautokeino	
Statsb.: Trusamf.: Etnisitet: ln								
007	Aslak Mikkelsen Sara	m	ug	b s	Søn	1893	Kautokeino	
Statsb.: Trusamf.: Etnisitet: ln								
008	Elen Mikkelsdatter Sara	k	ug	b d	Datter	1896	Kautokeino	
Statsb.: Trusamf.: Etnisitet: ln								
009	Iver Mikkelsen Sara	m	ug	b s	Søn	14.04.1899	Kautokeino	
Statsb.: Trusamf.: Etnisitet: ln								

I found information about Mikkol Elle’s family from the year 1900, called “Mikkelsby” in Kautokeino. This is the first time my second oldest informant is registered in the official register. She was four years old. We can also see that her father Mikkel is twenty-eight years older than his second wife Máret, who is Mikkol Elles’ mother⁴⁷. All the Sámi, including those who lived up in the mountains, were included in the national census for population. Every tenth year they had to report about their gender, language, housing, family and livelihood.

I changed my language and never took back my mother tongue again

Informant #4 is from the Sea Sámi area called Lebesby or Davvesiida. Elen Kristine Olsen, born 1910 is talking about the difficult years when she grew up in a *lavdnjebuvri*, a turf hut, in *Siskit-Lágesvuodna*, in a little fjord with only Sámi peoples. In 1917 when Elen Kristine came to school as a little girl, she heard from teachers that her mothertongue has no value and she was forbidden to speak it in the schoolarea. She was sitting in a classroom for years without learning anything. As the Sámi pioner, Elsa Laula Renberg, mentioned in 1917, - the school system has consequent traumas for children and parents – “*The people are weak and poor without rights and this is caused by colonizers*”, said Laula Renberg (Johansen, 2015 p. 47). As an elder woman, Elen Kristine, told with whispering voice; – “*Jeg har en smerte i meg*” - I

⁴⁷ http://digitalarkivet.arkivverket.no/ft/bosted_land/bf01037572000151

have pain, but I do not know where it comes from. It was not a headache or pain in her arms, but a pain that fills her body.



This picture is from the area where Elen Kristine Olsen grew up, Siskit-Lágesvuodna. Photo: Digitalmuseum

Saba wrote in the year 1900 about the school situation in Lebesby where Kristine grew up that sixty of his pupils are so poor, that they do not have clothes or enough food to eat and that their parents are poor, no one is living in a house – *“Til oplysning meddeles at i en blandet sprogekreds bor ca 60 børn under skoletiden borte fra sitt hjem, de fleste af meget fattige forældre»* (Lund, 2009).⁴⁸ Almost all of my informants, except two, are talking about the difficult years being Sámi child in a Norwegian school system, left all by themselves for years without support from the adults. There could be many different reasons why these women did not talk openly about it: 1) they want to forget the schoolyears; 2) the feeling of personal failure, the learning curve was low and it took many years before the children understood what the teacher was talking about; 3) their parents did not know about schoolsystems, they never went to school, so they did not know what to ask or comment; 4) upper class versus lower class, the Sámi had respect for authorities and teachers, so they did not work against or

⁴⁸ Artikkel i boka [Samisk skolehistorie 3](#). Davvi Girji 2009.

resist against the schoolsystem. And many of my informants are explaining that they did not have any arenas where they could talk about school life. The Sámi people and the politicians have asked and are still asking for our own Truth and Reconciliation Commission to look into

She is trying to write *mor*, mother in Norwegian, but she does not know how to do it. (Photo: Filmavisen)



how the boarding schools have effected children in all four countries.

Kristine also took a dramatic personal decision when she was young. As she climbed up the “kaikanten” wharfside, then the local people started to bully her– “*finnjente, skitten finnjente*”- and when she stood there, she had a flashback to her school days.⁴⁹ At that moment in year 1930-31, she decided to change her language – “*Jeg bestemte meg der og da på kaikanten, at jeg aldri igjen skal bruke det stygge språket mitt*». ⁵⁰ She

kept her promise. When she grew up, the assimilation or Norwegianisation was aggressive. Almost all the families who lived along the coastal area changed their language. Her mother.tongue is in her head, but it doesn't come out of her mouth – “*Jeg har språket inn i hodet, men det kommer ikke ut av min munn*”. This is a symbol of failure. During our conversations, I was consequently speaking Sámi to Elen Kristine and she was answering in Norwegian. The assimilation instruction from 1898 and the establishment of *Finnfondet* – when Sámi parents were forced to send their children to boarding schools had dramatic consequences for Elen Kristine and their family. Instruction from 1909 from her area prove the change of language: – «*I Landersfjord krets tales utelukkende lappisk i hjemmene, hvorfor fornorskningsarbeidet er meget byrdefullt.*». ⁵¹She is silenced- *jávohuvvan*, her mothertongue

⁴⁹ Skitten finnjente - dirty Sámi girl (very negative)

⁵⁰ I decided, that I shall never speak my ugly language.

⁵¹ Teacher P. Olsen reported in 1909 about Landersfjord school, families are using Sámi at home, so the shifting process is difficult.

is wiped away.⁵² Her decision could have been part of a survival - *birgen* process for her, to be accepted or not.⁵³ During the Norwegianisation period, almost all the Sámi in the coastal area changed their language.⁵⁴

Stolen childhood

Almost all my informants, except three, went to boarding school and they were away from their families for months. Those who could stay at home during the schoolperiod talked warmly about their daily life, about what they did together with their parents- and how they followed the family traditions. The majority, who was not at home, they lost their childhood- as one said – “*mii leimmet oarbás ja mánnávuolta jávkkai*”. They were left alone and they still can feel how their childhood



Here is Elen Kristine's boarding school in Lebesby, opened in 1909. Photo: U. Jacobsen.

was stolen. Informant #4 Elen Kristine Olsen says this; when they came home for vacations, they could feel that they have been away, no one had informed them about birth and death.

NOT A CHILD, NOT A YOUTH, BUT A HARD WORKER

Almost all my informants had to start to work early, usually at the age of eleven to sixteen years. Close relatives could come to their homes and ask the youth to work for them. As a *biigá* -maid, they were taking care of children, the house, making food and sometimes also taking care of animals. Those who had been at school for several years, they had to leave their families and homes and stay with relatives or non-relatives for a couple months or for a year and sometimes even longer. There are dramatic stories, like from my informant #5 “Rávdná

⁵² Jávohuvvan – silenced.

⁵³ *Birgen* or *birget* can be explained in many ways how to manage the life, work and situations, including knowledge. A woman explains about *birgen*- able to do all kinds of work. Also, about how to manage the life with little food or few things “gal dat birgejit, vel uhcánaččain ge”, but it can also explain about someone who is wealthy “buresbirgejeaddji olmmoš” (Nielsen 1979 bir’git).

⁵⁴ Norwegianisation period lasted more than 100 years and it was hardest in the coastal area <http://skuvla.info/skolehist/alg4-n.htm>

Márjá” who left her family, parents and nine siblings. She was fifteen years old, in 1936. She walked up two valleys to work for her *siessá* or aunt, the cousin to her father. She was supposed to stay there for five months and her promised salary was money, reindeer skins, material for *gákti* and one exclusive silk. She needed all these new clothes before her confirmation ceremony. Before she left their home, her father, “Issát” made a *bumbá* for her, a chest where she could keep what she is earning during *biigá* period.

Not able to control her days and nights

When she came to her new place, then the slavery life started. She was forced to work day and night. This was her daily routine 1) early morning to milk cows; 2) move the reindeer that was outside the house; 3) cut hay; 4) take care of children; 5) clean the house; 6) get water from the river; 7) make food for the family; 8) do the handicraft work together with her aunt and 9) late evening milk the cows again and bring the milk to the cold river. They did not have any electricity or water in the house. But her *siessá* was also forcing her to work during night time, she was not allowed to sleep. She had to knit socks for her. If she did not wake up, then her aunt used to throw wooden log (wood pieces) up to second floor – “*mu siessá láve mu bágget ihkku bargat, gođđit suohkuid. Son láve mu boktit, bálku dahje bállahastá muoraid loktii vai lihkan. Mun ovtta beaivve suhtten, in ge šat lihkkán*”. One day she felt it was enough and she did not wake up to knit socks, she needed to sleep. «Rávdná Márjá” also observed how this couple was stealing animals from others. Once the father of the house, killed twelve reindeer up on the mountainside and he hid the animals in a cold river. She was then forced to walk up and down to the mountain and she had to carry down all the killed animals by herself. He was not helping her. She can still, as an old woman, feel the pain in her neck. After this hard work, she could never carry a backpack. Her neck is destroyed after carrying twelve animals down from the mountain – “*goargnut čerrui, gurput daid vulos. Mun okto šadden bargat ja gal dat lei lossat. Mus dál ain hárdut bávččastit, in ge nagot gurput rehpo sealggis*”. One day she felt that this is enough, she could not stay there any longer, because the hard work was affecting her. She was not allowed to sleep and she had always pain in her body. After months of hard work, the only salary she received was an old fur coat and a few kroner – “*in ožžon go muottá ja moadde kruvnná*”. When she returned home to her parents, she did not have much to put in her chest or *bumbá*. The couple did not fulfil any of their promises, no silk or material for *gákti* and they did not give a skin to her. Later her *siessá* gave her a silk, but not as exclusive as promised. Some of my other informants are also

describing how terrible it was to work as a maid. One of them had to wash clothes in ice water and she was not allowed to complain or comment about anything, not even that her fingers were almost falling apart washing clothes for hours on the ice river. She came from a poor family and her parents had explained to her that she must work, and not open her mouth – “*mii leimmet geafes mánát ja leimmet oahpahuuvvon ahte eat oaččo olbmuiguin njálbmut. Lei lossat suossa čázis bassaladdat*”. According to her this was the betrayal of trust. The role as maids is one of the topics that the Sámi society hasn’t debated or talked about.

Difficult to work for close relatives

According to Romero&Stewart the collection of untold stories is also including the element of *breaking silence*. Like these women, when I heard several of them talking about their lives as maids, and that they had not been talking about it, so that they would not bring shame on the people who they were serving. The silenced and emotional isolation is difficult to cover, and there could be many different reasons why these women did not talk openly about it. Like for example: 1) these are close relatives and they did not want to tell to others how they are treated, the loyalty is strong; 2) the parents sent the children away, without being aware of the hard work; 3) people were so poor that they had to send some of their children away, so they could earn money and new clothes; 4) the value of a child, how could close relatives let children work as slaves; 5) the main and last question is- «why this has been a taboo in the Sámi society? As one of my informants #6 “Sofe” is telling about working for relatives, on both the father’s and mother’s side can be difficult. Even though she was almost freezing to death on the cold river, then she was asked not to talk about it. This was like a triangle, she had to show loyalty to them and her parents could not oppose close relatives, because their relationship was part of the daily struggles. They had to help each other during work and the little Sámi societies should not get any external information about the role of *biigá*. When “Sofe” came home, she told about her situation and her parents did not send her back again. Instead they found a new family who needed a maid and she ended up working for “Eliidá”, a very kind woman who was treating her well. According Turi Dimpas it has been difficult in our society to talk about these issues. No one has ever documented or researched the lives of young women, when they were working as maids. The word *soabadit* – to live in peace was strong in our society. The young girls did not break the silence, because they do not want to

set other families in shame, these families needed each other (Turi Dimpas, 2016). The reasons for being silenced, can have many “plausibel” reasons: women have been given such a small role in the research, lack of Sámi female researchers and the Sámi women organized themselves late, during 1970s (Kuokkanen, 2008, p.44 and Stordahl, 1990, 101-105).

Only one of my informants, informant #8, Elise Hansen, has a success story about being a maid. She went up to the mountains to work for a reindeer herder family as a *biigá*. She was only twelve to thirteen years old and grew up in the valley of Deatnu on the Norwegian side. The wife of the *siida*, *siiddaeamit* Risten was a very kind and a good teacher for little Elise. She had enough food, skins and plenty of time for this young girl – “*Moai barggaime nu bures ovttas, son oahpahii mu. Duodjeávdnasat ja borramuš ii váilon*”. Elise left school very early, because she felt that traditional knowledge will give her better possibilities, instead of sitting at school and trying to learn to read and write. According to Elise, these years as a maid gave her the knowledge and skills that she needed. Later she became one of the best handicraft makers and she was travelling around and teaching other women how to make handicrafts. She became *giehtačeahppi*. Bengt Molander is also explaining the meaning or explanation of the word *giehtačeahppi* in this way: a person who has learned traditional handicraft by working experience and then later he/she will deliver the beauty made by her hands– “*this is not only a question of traditional knowledge, but also of the management of knowledge by an indigenous people*” (Molander 1996: 189–190, Guttorm, 2011, p. 60-61). Schefferus (year 1673) is the only one person wrote about *duodji* how the young girls and women, that they were making clothes for the families and the others. “*Lapparnas döttrar lära sy kläder, lappstöflar, skoor, handskar, muddar och renåkygh* (Balto 1997, p 47-49, Schefferus 1956, s. 334).

The burdon to follow foremother’s heritage

When the girls are reaching a certain age, then the parents and close relatives will start to talk with them about the future. At the age of thirteen to fourteen years old, they are told who they should work for as maids, usually close relatives. Some of the young girls are also asked for conversations about their future and Nanna Persens’ future was made by her parents

Informant #9, by the coast, by the fjord called Leavdnjavuotna in Finnmark County in North-Norway, there I met a well-known medicine woman, Nanna Persen, 86 years old. Nannas plans were decided by her parents, Gunnil Jovvna and Piera Máret. They asked her to come in

for a conversation when she was fourteen years old, in 1923. They wanted her to continue with the family tradition, the knowledge that is passed from one generation to another. Her parents wanted Nanna to continue with this and help people when they are sick, ill or if they are not feeling well mentally. Nanna did not want to do it, so she suggested to them, that their oldest daughter, her sister, can continue with this and she can heal and help people but her parents did not accept it. She was chosen to follow the ancestor's heritage – *máttuid árbejuvvon čehppodaga*. When she accepted it, then they gave her a special cow horn that was more than 100 years old and they started to teach her. Gunnil Jovvna and Piera Máret took her into the nature, so she will learn where and how to collect medicinal plants. They taught her how to cure (*guhppet*) people. Her mother was teaching and her father was sitting on a chair, while she was cutting him with a sharp knife. This was difficult and she felt that her parents were asking her to do something she did not want to be included in. Now, when she is old, she understands why her sister was not chosen. She would never manage to help people. Nanna shows me a special book, more than 500 names. Among the Sámi each municipality used to have one or two good «helpers» and these who were chosen to be medicinewomen or men, they had also higher status. They did not walk around and talked about others, they took their role seriously, because they were chosen. Nanna has solved many problems for others, sometimes they come for conversations and other times they are very sick. She has been healing them and giving them the medicine that is needed. She used to pray for them. According Turi Dimpas this is one of the ways that someone else, an outsider is taking away the problems. Aikio calls this – *árbejuvvon vásáhusdiehtu* - traditional knowledge and skills that her parents did deliver to Nanna (Aikio, 2010, p. 66-70). Also, medical doctors used to call her, she could stop bleedings. As Bjørklund is writing, the people preferred to go too local medicinewomen or men. The people believed that our own medicinewomen and men could help or treat us. She could also have conversations with those who were not feeling well, at that time they did not talk openly about mental health situations. She could also visit those who were silenced, those who were not crying of pain. The local medicine-women- and men were not charging huge amount of money from the people; and families with many children could not afford to get help from a doctor and usually the doctor spoke another language (Bjørklund 1985, p. 258-260). Among our elders, they usually do not talk to foreign people (neither to doctors) about health, disease and illness and these topics were approached in silent and indirect ways and there were strong norms of coping and not showing weakness (Bongo 2012 p. 68-69). One of the main reasons was they did not know

who they should trust and further: 1) The elders could not communicate with Norwegian doctors and nurses; 2) it was difficult to be at the hospitals, they could not leave families and they did not get any treatment in their own language and 3) the belief that the local medicinewomen -and men, were the only ones who could treat us. Nanna herself, she never went to a doctor and all her ten children were born at home.

READY TO GET MARRIED

Mun ledjen ládjebarggus deatnogáttis. Lei čába geassebeaivi ja mearehis báhka. Oidnen dan čábbásamos gánda boahtimin min guvlui, váccii dievá miel, šerres beaivvadagas. Lei Helánderiid soga čábbámus bárdni, mu irgi. Muhto dat ii mannan nu mo leimme áigon, gárten náitalit eará olbmuin, iežan miela vuosttá"



The personal story from my eldest informant is sad. Informant #2 Ristenaš Risten, wanted to share a moment with me, a summerday that always has been in her thoughts.

Summer 1912: She was seventeen years old and was cutting hay in the valley of Deatnu. It was a hot summer day. While she was working there, she saw a young handsome man walking along the hillside with the sun shining behind him. He walked towards her. He came for one reason: to meet her. And this young couple had a love date in the field. They had also started slowly to make plans together. According to her, he was *"the man in her life"* and they were supposed to get married. But her closest family members, her parents, had another plan. They made a dramatic decision for her. She could not marry this young man – *"Duot earát"* (the others) and they had found a husband for her, a man who was much older than she, a bachelor twentythree years her senior. At the time, she was eighteen and he, Uvllá Heandarát, was forty-one years old. This personal story did not come the first, second or third time I was visiting her- it came when she was ready to tell it.



Ristenaš Risten with her only child, Olaf Henrik Olsen, born, 1921.

In the beginning, she did not want to say much, only that she was in love with her husband and that she has had a good life, nothing to complain about. When I talked to her about trust and the possibility to save or store her story for many decades, then she started to talk with me. I had to give a promise to her, that her personal story will not be published the first years and she was satisfied with my promise. I could spend hours with her including feeding her while we are talking about her life, about traditions, assimilation, love stories, personal achievements and about how she is bored at the elder center.

Informant #3 Mikkol Elle: It took a while before she started to talk to me about her personal issues and about her thoughts. In the beginning, we were talking about her life at the elder

centre in Guovdageaidnu, about the change of her life from *goahti* to a warm single room and strangers - nurses who are taking care of her.⁵⁵ I spent many days and evenings together with her - and in one way I knew that if I want to get her story, then the best way is to give her the time she needs. I also knew that she would not talk, if she doesn't trust me. Kovach, Gaski and Smith are writing about the need to build trust, give enough time to the people and make my preparations before entering to the homes of elders or the people I wanted to conduct interviews. I was not a foreigner, but one of us! I was using my traditional method *oadjudit*, building trust and Kovach has built a model called "Nêhiyaw Kiskêyihtamowin" epistemology, describing how Indigenous researchers use a variety of methods, such as conversations, interviews and sharing circles or information (Kovach 2009, p. p 44-45 and 99). One day, when I came back to Mikkol Elles room she said; – "*dál mun de dieđán ahte duinna sáhtán hupmat*" now I know that I can talk with you. From that moment, we moved from *dialogues* to *conversations* and this is the story she told me that evening:

*"Ledjen nuorra go náitalin. Mun dat gal ledjen nuorra, ledjen 21 jahkásaš ja nu jalla ii galgga oktage. Máná eallima siste náitalit, ii ge ádde mii náittosdilli lea. Dat dieđusge boares leaska, mu isit. Ii lean eará bargu go rápmot iežas vuosttaš eamida. Gáhtet go? De hal várra gáhten, čirron vel go nu jalla ledjen- maid áigun suinna ja náitalit vel. Doppe livččejit bártnit!"*⁵⁶

Back to winter 1917: #3 Mikkol Elle was young when she got married. Only twentyone years old. She married a widower, who was fifteen years her senior. Bieraš Biera was one of her relatives. He had lost his wife, Máret, while she was giving birth to their first child. The mother and the babyboy did not survive the birth, they both died. Mikkol Elle was still in 1995 blaming her parents, that they did not stop this marriage. He was always comparing her with his first wife and was praising these two women. His first and second wife. In one way, he was not treating her well, or as she wanted to be treated. Mikkol Elle was also talking back in time and she told me that there were some young men who would like to marry her. She

⁵⁵ Goahti is the traditional house used by reindeer herders, can be moved easily from one place to another. It is a Sámi tent. Goahti is bigger than a lávvu.

⁵⁶ My translation: I was young when I got married. I was young, 21 years old and so stupid should no one be. Getting married when you are a child and don't understand anything about marriage. He was an old widow, my husband. He did not do anything else than to talk in a superlative way about his first wife who had passed away. Did you have second thoughts? Yes, I did, I cried, because I was so stupid that I got married with him. There were other young boys, who would like to marry me (my translation).

kept repeating these words during our conversation; – “*vuoi, vuoi manne mu isit lea suhttan. Go suhttadan dan isida. Vuoi,vuoi, dan mánnávuoda, jallavuoda!*”. Here she is describing about her husband’s mood, how easily he gets mad, and about how she is behaving so he gets mad. She describes her decision “being young and stupid” to marry so early. A young woman choosing an old widow.



Almost all my informants married close relatives or they accepted how their parents pushed them to marry old bachelors or widows. Only one of my informants went to the Swedish side of Sápmi to find a husband. Two of my informants never got married. One of my informants married her uncle (mother’s cousin), who was much older. She was twenty and he was thirty-seven – “*Sus lei stuorra báiki, rikkis boares bárdni ja jábálaš olmmoš*”- he had a big house, he was a wealthy bachelor. When I asked her to describe her uncle who became her husband, she used only few words – accept what you get: – “*Olbmot mángga lunddogat, duhtat masa šaddá!*”

Another women describes in this way why she married her close relative; – “*he was kind, he did not drink and it was the easiest solution, because both families knew each other*”. Many of my informants are explaining their choices this way: 1) This was part of an alliance- to manage the daily life; 2) in many occasions, they did not have other choices, they had to marry old men, widows or bachelors, because people were poor at that time; 3) older men had already all the resources they needed for housing and they had enough animals; 4) the society was small and people did not leave or move from the homearea; 5) *Love* was something that will come or grow and if not, they had to manage living together; 6) at that time, it was just impossible to get divorced, no one wanted to bring shame on their families.

A young woman marrying old men, means that she will usually be widowed very early. The women I have conducted are explaining to me, that they had more freedom, when they were remarrying. Three of my informants did choose husbands themselves their second husband. The parents did not get involved the same way as earlier. Like informant #3 Mikkol Elle. She was married for ten years, in 1927 her husband passed away. In 1929 she married again, with a reindeer herder who was six years younger than her, “*Juosát*” or Per Josefsen Buljo.⁵⁷ According to her he was kind and was giving the support that she needed in her life and they were equal partners. He was also helping her to take care of children. They did not get any children together, but she did take care of her brother’s children. While she is sitting in her room at the elder centre and she still remembers how her second husband used to call his wife number one, it means one and only woman of this position, she was a good reindeer herder “*doppe mun lean nummar vuosttaš, nu lávii mu isit lohkat*”.

#2 Ristenaš Risten also remarried and this marriage was not as good as she expected. He was strict with her, most of the time not in a good mood. She did not oppose him, she accepted the way he was treating her, because according to him, her opinions were not as good as his: – “*ii gierdan olu, galggai su miela mielde. Jos mun jietnadin maidige, de ii lean goassige riehta. Mun fertejin dohkkehit, in viššan nágget. In viššan suinna njálbmedola boaldit*”. She lost her independence and power in charge of family economies, which was usually strong as Solem and Paulaharju have documented (Solem,1970, p.65 and Paulaharju 1921).

⁵⁷ My translation: Mikkol Elle and Juosát were married for 44 years and they did not get any children together. She had one child and did take care of her brother’s children. Her brother, Niillas, died early, so she became “*eadnesiessá*”- motheraunt.



One of my moments with informant #3, Mikkol Elle. Photo; A.L. Flavik

The history 1940- 1950

The Second World War has dramatic consequences for the Sámi living in the Finnish, Norwegian and in Russianside. For the first time the Sámi must fight against each other, brother against brother, relatives against relatives. They are divided and on the opposite sides of the border the close familymembers are enemies. Women and children are asked to leave the area, to evacuate or escape to mountains and forests (Lehtola 1994: p. 286- 287).

In 1941 the Sámi people see with their own eyes when 50,000 German soldiers are coming to the area, heading towards Murmansk and Russia to take control over the icefree fjord and Kola Peninsula. In the border area between Norway and Russia more than 100,000 soldiers were killed. The peaceful part of Sápmi was Sweden, neutral during WW II.

The brutality and violence harsh also in little Sámi villages. The families had to escape from their homes and neither had they time to go back down and take the most valuable things and personal memoris. The animals are abused or mistreated and in some areas, the Germans are killing huge number of reindeer. The Sámi people responded negatively to the Germans and escaped to the mountains, to the Islands or up the rivers. 60,000 people were told to leave the

region, but 25,000 of them escaped to the forests and mountains. The Germans burned down all the buildings in Finnmark and North-Troms, the area with same size as Denmark and Northern-Germany. 11,000 houses were burned down, 4,700 barns, 106 schools, twenty-one hospitals and twenty-seven churches. In North-Finland 90% of the houses were destroyed. (NRK tema krig, 2015 and Jaklin 2016 p. 180-197)⁵⁸

Women helped the prisoners

In the Sámi society, there hasn't been much attention given to how the war affected the women and their families. Most of the war stories are told by men, those who were out in the battlefields, they were also honoured with medals after the war period. There have also been women heroes, those who helped the starving prisoners; for example, 450 young Serbs, that came from former Yugoslavia to Kárašjohka in the Norwegian side.

The Sámi women could not accept prisoners had to work without food, so they started to put foodpackets in the forest, salted meat and fresh bread. One of the woman, Joá Kirste, or Kirsten Svineng, a single, unmarried woman, she decided to take a huge personal risk to help them. She fixed food, organized it together with other women. She also helped prisoners to escape and many of the young Serbs gave her letters so she could deliver or send it to their families. Prisoners named her "Mamma Karasjok".⁵⁹ Only 100 men of 450 survived. Two years later, in 1944, when the Germans ordered the Sámi people to evacuate, then Joá Kirste again walked up the rivers to help families and give them the sad message "*duiskalaččat boaldit bohtet*" *Germans are coming, your houses will be burned down*. (Jacobsen 2014, NRK-tema krig, 2015, Hansson, 1970 p.168-182).

⁵⁸ <https://tv.nrk.no/serie/folk/DNPR65000015/29-04-2015#>

⁵⁹ Joá Kirste or Kirsten Svineng received in 1957 a medal from President Tito in Yugoslavia, for helping the prisoners or as she called them the "serbár fänggat".



The German soldiers in Kárášjohka in 1944. Foto: Nord-Troms museum



Photo: Digitalmuseum

In Finland, it was the opposite when the entire population were forced to evacuate. The sudden message came in September 1944 that everyone was to leave the area immediately. As one of the stories that is written about Biret Máret, she was in a bed with a newborn child and was told to leave immediately her home in Anárjohka (Lehtola 1994, p. 76). Because of the sudden evacuation, the Sámi came to Ostrobothnia, in the southern part of Finland, with empty hands, they did not have any food or personal belongings with them. Their

animals, hundreds of cows and thousands of reindeer were killed. Most of the Sámi did not know anything about the Finnish livelihood and the language problems were huge. Children

were dying and hardest struck, they got diarrhea and epidemics. The people were suffering, starving and freezing. For the Skolt-Sámi people in the east, the war had dramatic consequences. Their area and land was surrendered and they lost all their grazing, home land to the Soviet Union (Lehtola 1994, 75-79, 288-291).



Photo: Lapin maakunta museo

The tough years during the world war

My informat #9 Nanna Persen was then a young woman with six children.⁶⁰ The youngest child was only two days old. She was lying in her bed with her newborn child when the German soldiers came to their house and threatened her with guns. A Polish soldier had escaped from the area nearby and the Germans were looking for him. They checked if she had hidden him in her bed – *“lea áibbas veadjemeahttun jáhkkit man vártnuhis dilli mis lei. Mun ledjen seanggas ja bás mánná giehtagávas. Bođiiga sisa, soalddátguovttos, sisa mu lusa, revolvár gieđas ja lohke munnje – don dieđát mii geavná jos it hála, jos it hála duođaid”*.⁶¹ They forced her up and ransacked her bedroom and the whole house. They did not find any

⁶⁰ Nanna is the medicinewoman

⁶¹ It is still unbelievable. I was in my bed with a newborn baby in my hands. Soldiers came in with guns and threatened me: “you know what will happen, if you do not speak or tell the truth”.

strangers, but they forced her and her six children to leave their house and walk up to the hill side. The Germans killed her animals, four cows and thirty-six sheep. They ruined her, while she was up in the hills and she was looking down at her farm. This was so crucial, that Nanna had a mental reaction, – *“duiskalaččat godde mis njeallje gusa ja 36 sávcca, mii manaimet badjeliidda ja doppe fas gávnnahalaimet. Mis ii lean ollu borramuš, vuššen hávvarrievnni mánnái ja fas vulgen smávva mánáiguin vulos”*.⁶² She was forced to travel to the Southern part of Norway. She was a refugee in her own country and knew that all of Finnmark was burned down and that the Germans had not left any houses in their area. In the south, she tried to do her best, for her children. She is very grateful that a Norwegian couple opened their home for her and the housewife helped Nanna to take care of the children.

Informant #5 “Rávdná Márjá” she has not talked openly how the war affected her family. During the evacuation to South-Finland, she lost two children, a newborn babyboy and a little son that was one and a half years old. He died of pneumonia.

*“Eváhko mátkkis mus jápme guokte máná. Bás gánddaš mii lei áiddo rievádán ja nubbi mánná, dušše beannot jahkásaš. In moraštan, ledjen lihkolaš go Ipmil válddii mánáid. Hui čáppa mánát ja erenoamaš gáibme namat vel sudnos.”*⁶³

At that time, she thanked God because he took her youngest children, they were in a desperate situation, refugees in their own country. She calls it, the will of God and when I asked her about it, -how come she did not react opposite and get angry at God? Then she answered: – *“I accepted it and lived with that, it was his will”*. She did not get any help when they lost their children, she buried them and her husband was in the war. She did not know where he was and it was difficult to send messages to him. He did not know that his children had passed away and she did not either know if he was still alive.

According “Rávdná Márjá” the life in Alavieska was awful. They were always hungry; the water quality was bad and they did not have any money to buy food or clothes. *“Eat beassan*

⁶² The Germans killed our six cows and thirty-six sheep. We went up to the hillside, but they found us. We did not have much food with us. So I had to make fire and make porridge to my baby and the other children. I had to go down again with my six children, they forced us down.

⁶³ Two of my children died when we were evacuating to South-Finland. A newborn boy with a beautiful name and a boy that was 1,5 years old. I did not cry, I did not show my sorrow, but I did thank God that he took my children. Two beautiful children with traditional names, after our grandfathers and uncles.

ovdalgo veaigin mánáide vuoššat biepmu – “Látteáhkku ii diktán, ieš vuoššai čázi beaivvi. Ii divtte min málestit. Nealgi nu goddá”. ⁶⁴

Informant #10, Lemet Anne, Anne K. Hætta, eighteen years, from Guovdageaidnu managed and fulfilled a very dangerous plan to save her family from the Germans. Her three brothers went against the Germans and they were helping refugees to cross the border over to Sweden. Someone in the village reported to the Germans that this Hætta-family is working against them and that they are helping enemies over to Sweden – *“oainnahalle ja dieđihedje ahte mis leat spiuvnnat”*. The German’s troop went after Lemet Anne's brothers, but they managed to escape through the forest and they ran on dangerously thin ice. They knew the river and knew how to cross it without running over deep water areas. The Germans did not know how to cross rivers and lakes, so they had to turn, instead they went back to the village Guovdageaidnu and put Lemet Annes’ parents in a jail in a private house. The next day, the German troops with Norwegian Nazis, did not recognize this young girl who was coming with a reindeer and they stopped her. She explained to them, that she is a reindeer herder and that she is on the way to Bassevuovdi (Holywood) in North-Troms, in North-Norway. The area where Germans had required all the reindeer herders to move with thousands of animals. She lied to them. She was not a reindeer herder, but a farmer. She had a very risky plan to confuse and destroy the orders made by foreigners. She did not tell them that there are two forests with the same name Bassevuovdi (Holywood), one in North-Troms and the other in the borderarea towards Finland. The Sámi were already mobilizing, they used their own code languages and were planning a migration towards the opposite direction, to Finland.

Anne also had her own secret plan, rescue her family and give important messages to the people in the village. She stood there in front of the Germans and told them, that commands will be followed. After she left them, she immediately turned around and went up to the mountainarea and went directly to Finland. Her first plan was to check if her brothers were still alive. She found all three in Bievrrašjávri. The next day she started back to Guovdageaidnu, to deliver messages to the Sámi, start moving towards Finland, to the East, not West! – *“Johttát dál bivvalin, ovdalgo muohttigoahtá!”* The weather was unusually mild. Her second plan was to find helpers who can rescue her parents, so they managed to escape

⁶⁴ We were not allowed to cook food during daytime. The Finnish woman who owned the house did not allow us. She was boiling water and making food and we were starving.

from the private house, where they were captured. Anne had told her helper to bring her parents to a mountain cabin and when they arrived they found their daughter sitting there, waiting for them to come. Her uncle Morten was helping her to deliver the messages.

There she told her parents that all their children are alive, and that they must move as fast as possible towards the Finnish border. Her mother said this was just unbelievable, that her son, Ánnes' brother, Máhtte, is still alive, even though five or six German soldiers followed him and were shooting at him. She still remembers her mother's questions: – *“mun muittán go eadnerohkki jearai, leago jur duohta ahte bártnit leat beassan dearvan Supmii. Lea go Máhtte maid dearvan ja birgen- ja mo son nagodii guođildit duiskalaččaid”*.⁶⁵

When the Germans came to Bassevuovdi in North-Troms, they did not find any reindeer herders, nor 10,000 animals as expected. Almost all the herders had gone in the opposite direction. The Germans tried to find the people and animals, but it started to snow heavily so all the tracks were wiped away. Ánne and her parents managed to cross the border to Finland. She stayed in Finland for a while, but as a young woman, she did not want the war to destroy her future plans. She went to Sweden to get education and earn money, because she knew returning home to Guovdageaidnu will be a disaster, 168 of 220 houses were burned down.

Informant #7 Anna Gudveig, is already thirty-five years old when she is asked to evacuate. Instead of moving anywhere as the Germans' had required, she is first on her way to Máhkarávju by the coast of Finnmark in North Norway.⁶⁶ She had a dentist appointment and she can't miss that. Her journey was like a fairytale. First, she went on bicycle, and then she managed to get a ride with a bus towards the coast, where she could jump on a boat. It was a journey that lasted for days and she knew that she can't miss her appointment. When she and her two male friends from Kárášjohka arrived to Máhkarávju, then the Germans started to bomb the area. People left their houses and hid in cellars. So did Anna Gudveig. The next day it was quiet and she went again to her appointment and the dentist pulled out all her teeth – *“nuppi iđida, bátne doaktára lusa logi áiggi. Gaikon eret visot bániid, mollii visot njálmmi ja de deškii hirbmat láirra njálbmái”*. She had saved money, so she could buy a dental plate.

⁶⁵ I remember when my mother asked me, is it true that all my sons are safe in Finland. Is it true that Máhtte also managed to escape and that he is still alive, because five or six soldiers were running after him and shooting at him.

⁶⁶ Máhkarávju is the Island where the huge North Cape tourist destination is placed now.

When she finished her first treatment, the alarm went off. She had to escape, run up to the mountains. There she was hiding under some big stones and people around her were crying. Women and children were scared to death. The German planes bombed houses. They saw dead people all over, by the seaside, in the bombed houses and on the hillside, many were badly injured – *“várrevielttis olbmot hávváduvvon. Ovtta rivgus lei čoavji guovdat”*. They did not dare to go down any longer, so they stayed the whole night up in the hillside. Her mouth was bleeding and she had terrible pain and she did not have any medicine with her. The next morning, a new appointment again. Then she heard the alarm again and had to hide in a urine cellar. The whole week continued this way; when it is quiet, then she is running down to her dentist and when the planes are coming, then she is running up the hill and hiding. Finally, her new dental plate was ready. She paid for it and ran up again. Russian and German planes are bombing around her. She saw when the dentist’s office was bombed and nothing was left, but Anna Gudveig is happy that her dentist was not killed during the attack. He had just left the building.

Her long journey back home is also very tough. The weather was terrible. She walked over sump areas. She climbed up mountains and when she finally managed to reach a boat it was already a full storm. Suddenly, a very huge wave hit the boat. All four were thrown ashore. She checked her mouth and her dental plate was not broken. Her long journey home lasts many days; she walked the distance of 150 km when it is dark – *“Min olbmot viggan ringet Honnesváhkai ja eadni gulai ahte buohkat leat duššan”* - her mother had received the message that she was probably killed by massive bomb attacks. She still remembers the touching moment when she met her family again. They were all crying and her mother checked her daughters body if she was injured. An old woman came to see her and told that she had prayed for her, trying to help her, before and during the risky voyage. Anna Gudveig believes that her prayers had helped her. This old woman was a shaman; she could help people.

These stories from four women, Nanna, “Rávdná Márjá”, Lemet Ánne and Anna Gudveig, are describing how Sámi women were affected by the war. They were forced to leave their homes and the whole villages were burned down. Enemies killed their animals and they had lost almost everything they owned, but these women kept their families together, children and elders. Many of my informants had to escape to the forests or mountains and others were forced to evacuate and settle down in new foreign places, with foreign languages.

The research that is done about the Sámi during the Second World War has been mainly focused on men and their stories. There hasn't been a focus on how the war affected women and how they managed the difficult years when they came "home" and everything was burned down. As Turi Dimpas mentioned that – *"not talking was also one way to survive"*. Informant #9, Nanna Persen describes the years after: – *"Mun fertejin doalahaddat, mánáid gullut jávohisvuođas dálostaddat. Go kránnjá áhkkut ja fuolkkit bohte, de geahččaleimmet ovttasrádiid sollet iežamet jurdagiid. Eat mii hállan olbmuid siste, eai ge virgeolbmot boahtán mis jearrat mo minguin manná, mii han leimmet heajut"*⁶⁷ Their traumas were never solved. They had to start from scratch and she can't understand how they managed to take care of children while trying to stay in good mood. At that time unity and stability was important! Being in a war and that people were evacuated to the southern cities, affected the Sámi society. They returned "home" and saw that the entire villages were burned down. The Finnish and Norwegian states established a fund, so people in the North could build new houses. Their housing style changed to *gjenreisningshus*. There were a new type of houses with two floors, with several bedrooms, a big kitchen and a living room with sofas and comfortable chairs. Finnish and Norwegian tools and decorations came into the Sámi homes. New vehicles came, tractors, bigger boats and some families also bought cars. The practice of cultivation and planting changed due to exposure to methods in the south. After the war the language also shifted, in official meetings they started to use Norwegian and Finnish. In some areas, the people started to wear western clothes. This period can be seen as a time of post-war recovery where the infrastructure of Sámi life was slowly being restored and Sámi identity politics were beginning to be developed (Solbakk 1997 p.224- 226 and Lehtola 1994 p. 291-292).

So how come that these women did not become heroes in the local society? There might be several reasons for that; 1) the majority society did not pay any attention how the Sámi women managed the war period; 2) most of the stories about the WW II is told by men, including Sámi men; 3) the society has been gender blind, not asking stories from the silenced or hidden women group; 4) according to our people, we shall never describe ourselves as

⁶⁷ I had to be strong. I could not show my pain. I did not say or talk much if children were around me. When the neighbours or female relatives came, then we tried to solve and talk about our thoughts. We did not speak loud and the authorities never came to us and asked how we are dealing with our traumas.

heroes, it means that you seldom hear anyone describing themselves with superlatives, we call it “*iežas rápmi hakso*” – to brag about oneself gives of a bad smell.

The first radio program in the Sámi language



Just after the war, the Sámi were speaking up about their needs. They were not satisfied, because they did not get any news in the Sámi language; only in Norwegian, Swedish or Finnish. In 1946, a year after the war, then NRK started with this process to have news in the Sámi language. The first Sámi program

was broadcast on Friday November 8th in 1946, a 20-minute-long program with news and important messages to Sámi People. A young student, Lemet Sárá, Sara K. Hætta (21) was broadcasting live, speaking her mother tongue – “*In mun dieđe mii čorpmaid mu lusa, muhto bohte jearrat mus in go sáhte lohkat oddásiid oktii vahkkus. Vearrámus lei mikrofuvdna, in lean goassige gullan iežan jiena. Vuoi, hearrásivdnit nie fasttes jietna go mus lea!*”⁶⁸ She doesn’t know why she was chosen, but she enjoyed working as a radio journalist. She collected news and translated it to her mother tongue. The Sámi people travelled far to listen to radio programs once a week. Only a few houses had radios at that time, right after the war. (Hætta S.K 1996 and 2016 and Hætta O.M., p. 15- 24). But her story starts years before, during the war period, when she was hiding in the forest. Already as a young girl, she wanted to get an education. She was seeking knowledge, so she could strengthen Sámi society.

⁶⁸ I do not know why they did choose, but they came and asked if I can read news once a week. I had never seen a microphone before and I had never heard my voice and it was terrible to hear myself on radio.



Informant #11 Lemet Sára or Sara K. Hætta, did make her own plans, totally different than how the other girls were thinking at that time. She did not want to stay in Guovdageaidnu, she wanted to see the world outside our society. She had to finish the elementary school, so she applied and went to Finnsnes in South-Troms. This was in 1945. When she came to the school in the Norwegian area, she was the only pupil wearing a *gákti*. After the schoolyear in Finnsnes, she then applied and was accepted as midwife student in Oslo. Sara managed to learn Norwegian well – “*in máhttán nu bures dárogiela go vulgen, lei oba unnán. Muhto ledjen hui oahpalaš. Losimus dahje váivvimus lei gávtti nuollat ja atnigoahtit rivgobiktasiid. Vierrásiid biktasat*”.⁶⁹ It was difficult to change her clothing, from *gákti* to dresses. She felt that she was taking on a new identity, when she was wearing western clothes. In Oslo Sara was mingling with a group of Sámi youth, mostly young men, and they started to talk about organizing themselves. They wanted their own association, to fight for their own rights and they were aware of the language situation, especially along the coastal areas. In 1948 the first

⁶⁹ I did not speak so good Norwegian in the beginning, my language was poor. But I did it well, managed to learn Norwegian. The toughest part was to take off my traditional *gákti* and start to wear western clothes I felt that I was changing my identity.

Sámi Searvi was established, called Oslo Sámi Sær'vi and Sara was the only woman attending this meeting. At the same time, the main national hospital, Rikshospitalet, wanted her to work for them because she was one of the best students. She was professional at work, but very homesick. She wanted to go back to Sápmi, back to her own people and start to work there – “*Mun dihten ahte davvin lea dárbu jordamovrraide*” -there was a huge need for a midwife and she could not spend her days in Oslo, because her own people needed her. Weekly her mother was sending two letters to her and writing about the life in Guovdageaidnu – “*Son čálii váimmugillii ja váimmus dat vuolga go čállá sámegillii*”.⁷⁰ She missed the traditional livelihood, the food and her parents – “*eadni ja áhčči leigga beare divrras ja mu eallinvuohki han lea min eallin*”. She left Oslo and travelled home. Later I will write more about how she managed her duty as midwife for forty-two years.

The history 1970-80

During the 1970s, the life, the family habits, the culture and ceremonies are changing. The local societies are changing and the dramatic shift of language is a reality. The Sámi prefer speaking the majority language to their children and instead of Sámi classes, their parents are sending children to Norwegian classes. They are giving Norwegian, Finnish and Swedish names to their children. Many families are leaving their traditional land areas, moving to the municipality centres. The modern time and the modern life is affecting our society; the collective norms were changing into individualism. In December 1970, a group of young students and young researchers gathered in Guovdageaidnu one of the main municipalities in the Norwegian side of Sápmi. The main purpose was to discuss the possibility to establish a Nordic Sámi Research Centre, Sámi Instituhtta. A centre for the whole of Sápmi, where Sámi people are able to do research about themselves and they were not satisfied that foreigners or non-Sámi are doing the research about us.⁷¹ At the same time, the youth also started to organize themselves and the first Sámi movement was established. It was called ČSV, *čájjet sámii vuoinna*, show the Sáminess and the Sámi spirit. Youth were arguing why the Sámi needed their own political system, they were fighting for language revitalisation and that children should have more books in their own mother tongue. The ČSV activists also fought

⁷⁰ She wrote in our language of the heart and the Sámi language comes from the heart.

⁷¹ Sámi Instituhtta was opened in 1973.

for land rights and the right to have their own cultural events. This movement had a strong political and cultural voice. During the 1970s, there was also aboriginalization of Sámi ethnopolitics and part of it was self-understanding. The Sámi movement established contacts with Indigenous peoples in other parts of the world, it was the beginning of Sámi- and Indigenous people's perspectives. A group of Sámi also moved to Greenland to teach the Inuit people traditional reindeer herding and some of the men lived there for many decades (Eidheim, 1997, p.36-38 and Hætta, 2012 p. 96-100).

Shifting language and leaving the traditional areas

A new Sámi statistics study or census was conducted in 1970, and this is at the National level in Norway, including the entire Sámi population. Now we can see the consequences of assimilation. In two Sea-Sámi areas, in Láhppi and in Nuorri or Hammerfest in West-Finnmark, the amount of Sámi speaking population decreases dramatically. In Láhppi municipality 44% of the population had previously reported that they are Sámi speaking. In 1970 it had reduced to 10%. The same happened in Nuorri, from 50% to 11%. Also in another Sea Sámi area, called Davvesiida or Lebesby there was dramatic language change: in 1930 more than 50% spoke Sámi and in 1970 it was reported that only 24% still speak the language. Lebesby is quite unique, because there are so many little villages with Sámi populations, but all the children were sent to boarding school, where there were very strict language requirements. It is reported in this way at the National census: – *“Her har det skjedd en fornorsking som har strukket seg over et ganske langt tidsrom”*. Also in Kárašjohka, a Sámi municipality, the number of children under ten years old that speaks Norwegian is increasing. “Kátjá”, born 1915, she still can feel the sorrow because she could not speak with her grandchildren.

“Mun muittán dan morraša go mánáidmánáiguin in šat sáhtán hállat. Mun gielahis olmmoš, in han mun máhtán earágo sámegiela” ⁷²

If we are looking at families and housing, then in 1970 it was still usual that big families lived together, more than two generations. Each Sámi house had more than seven (7) members.

⁷² I remember the sadness when I could not speak with my grandchildren. I did not have language; I could only speak Sámi.

Getting divorced was still low; almost no one did that. The census also shows that the amount of non-married people is growing, mostly young men. In some areas, more than 50% of the men are not married: – “*de ugifte sterkt overrepresentert blant personer med samiske kjennetegn med 53,7 prosent*».⁷³ Reproduction is low, and in the report, we can see that the consequences are because young women are leaving traditional areas. When women are leaving, then the young bachelors do not go out to find wives. In the report, we can read that, these young bachelors do not want to marry their neighbour’s daughter, but the reason is that usually the neighbours are close relatives (this part is not mentioned at all, but among Sámi the housing tradition is that you live close to your brothers, sisters, uncles, aunts or cousins).

The villages changed dramatically in a short period

During 1960s and 70s many families left their traditional homes in the valleys and mountains. They moved to the municipality centres. The huge family clan's *bearaš and sohka* that lived together, were divided.⁷⁴ It was part of the state policy, to centralize the people. Many Sámi families in Finland and in Norway left their areas, where many generations had lived together. Their daily work and habits, like hunting, fishing, handicraft sewing and ceremonies changed. The boundaries between the family clan systems also changed, because the neighbour you had for many decades was not any longer walking in and out of your house (Stordahl, 1996, p.107-109). This is the way Isko Injá, Inga Näkkäljärvi (83) from Anár in Finland is describing moving to the centre – “*Doppe mun galgen dálostaddat, čáhci, el-rávdnji ja lieggaviessu, muhto daid iežan guovlluide, eatnamiidda dokko mun láven áibbašit*”. Isko Injá is talking about her modern warm house in the village centre, but she always had in mind the area she left, her homeland. Another woman, “Sárá” is sitting in her modern house and talking about her *ruoktu* home. She misses her hills with berries and the salmon seasons. – “*In šat oainne joga, in ge dieváid, dušše duon márkangeainnu, in ge dovdda dáid kránnjáid*”- She no longer has the view of the river and to the hills, only this new road and all her neighbours are strangers.

⁷³ 53,7% of the Sámi are unmarried and it changed dramatically since 1960s.

⁷⁴ Bearaš is the closest family that are living under the same roof and sohka is the extended family, like uncles, aunts, cousins and second cousins.

The pain to be left

The sisters “Rávdná Márjá” and “Sofe” can describe how their valley changed in a period of ten years, from 1960s to 1970s. They both sent their children away, to boarding school at the age of seven year. “*Asuntola han gal bilidii min mánáid giela, sátneriggodat jávkkái*” – the language also changed among those who went to the boarding school. These two women are explaining, how children are forgetting words in Sámi and that their traditional rich language had a shift during these years. They were not anylonger part of the daily work, where the language was in use and they did not hear the stories told by elders. After finishing the school, many of the young girls did not return home – “*Gal dat lei moraš ja ahkit, go nieidamánát vulge, eai eahccán šat ruovttu*”.⁷⁵ Some of their sons returned home, so did also the neighbours sons. “Sofe” did not accept the choices of her daughters, because she wanted them to come home and marry young reindeer herders. These marriages could have kept the traditions and stability in their valley. Her plan was to give her daughters a good life, together with her own people. When they came home with Finnish men, she had to accept it, but she always kept a distance from her sons-in-law.

She did not like the language shift at all, that she was no longer *áhkku*- grandmother, but a *mummo* in Finnish; – “*Na, de bohtet loma-áigge ruoktot. Mánát huiket “mummo mummo” ja gii mu bijai mummon, áhkku han mun lean. Áhkku namahus nu čáppat, speadjalasttit sáhtat jos máhtat!*”.⁷⁶

These two sisters are also describing the change of their society. When they grew up, there were people around them, close relatives and many generations together. During 1970s the elders had to accept that youth left the area, to find better jobs and to take education (Rasmus, 2008, p. 104). The old men who were good to make traditional river boats, they did not have any longer strong arms to help them. The elder women who continued to milk cows, pick berries, cut hay or finish their traditional handicraft, they might only have had few listeners to their stories – “*Eat oba fuomášan ge, baifáhkka nu guorranit dálut, boares olbmot bázadišgohte ja vel min bártnit, says “Sofe”*”.⁷⁷ When Vuolab is writing that storytelling is a

⁷⁵ It was a sorrow and a pain, when our girls left, they did not want to stay at home any longer.

⁷⁶ And then then they are coming home during vacations. The children are shouting “mummo mummo” and I am not a mummo. I am áhkku. The meaning of áhkku is so beautiful, you can use it as mirror, if you know how to do it!

⁷⁷ In the beginning, we did not recognize it, that the houses had less and less people. When we looked around, we did see elders and young men.

lifelong friend and that elders are delivering their wisdom and knowledge from one generation to another, then the those who left the areas, they did not experience it (Vuolab, 1995, p. 33).



GREENLAND: Maria Ama in the reindeer fence in Kalaallit Nunaat (photo M.V.E)

For some of the women this decade also gives them new possibilities. The world is coming closer and they are able to travel. Informant #12, Maria Anna Valkeapää Eira, born 1922, is asked to live in Greenland or Kalaallit Nunaat. The Inuit people needed help from the Sámi to learn traditional reindeer herding. A group of Sámi men had accepted the invitation, also Marianne's husband Juhán, but he wanted to take his wife with him. They did not have any children so it was easier for them to make this decision. She had never been outside her traditional areas, so it was exciting to fly over the Atlantic Ocean and finally reach a new land, meet new people: – *“Mii manaimet amas eatnamiidda. In lean goassige ovdal girdán, muhto vásáhus johtit Atlanterábi badjel. Go joavddaimet*



*dohko, inuihtat čájehedje buori muođu midjiide”.*⁷⁸ They stayed for two years in a very little place called Itinnera, not far from Kapisillit, a village 100 km east of Nuuk. Maria Anna was the only woman there together with six men, in an isolated area with the sea, reindeer and mountains – *“ávdin báiki, ii gullo ii ge oidno mihkkige. Dušše mearra ja alla gáissát”.* They managed the reindeer herding well, but it was difficult and frustrating for Maria Anna to be alone with men. She missed her conversations with other women about women's issues and she became like a mother for the other herders: she was making food, baking bread and cleaning the house. She was not satisfied with that. Maria Anna wanted to earn her own money, so she started to sew skin clothes and was selling *gápmagiid*, Sámi furboots to local people – *“Ii gola áigi joavdelassan ja válden gápmasiid mángalogi gottura. Suonaid botnen ja ieš nesken gápmasiid. Buorre johtu, láven vuovdit visot ja dinejin 30 ruvnnu gámapáras”.*⁷⁹ When she met Inuit women she tried to speak with them, using fingers and the few Native words she had learned. Living in an isolated area was also challenging and Maria Anna

⁷⁸ The Inuit people did show us the good cheek, they accepted us.

⁷⁹ I could not be there without doing anything. I started to sew skinboots. I dried the sinew and did make sewing thread of it and the people, they used to buy traditional Sámi boots from me. Each pair did cost 30 kroner.

demanded that one of the Sámi men always had to be with her, she did not dare to be alone long evenings and nights. The years in Greenland gave them better opportunities when they came back to Guovdageaidnu.



They had experienced a new life with better opportunities, they had enough money and good memories. She is also reflecting about the “right” time, if they had asked her ten years earlier, during 1960s, she would never have left her family and homeplace – *“70-logus olbmot hupmagohte odđa vejolašvuodaid birra”*, during the 1970s- people started to talk about the new possibilities outside our area, so this was her once-in-a-lifetime opportunity.



Maria Anna and her group slaughtering reindeer in Itinnera, Kalaallit Nunaat. Photo: MVE

Almost all my other informants are living the traditional life. #3 Mikkol Elle is up in the mountains and she seldom visits the municipal centre. #2 Ristenaš Risten is living by the river and she spends most of her time with her family and they are farmers. In the valley of Deatnu my informant #8 Elise Hansen is having conversations with her brothers. She is a well-known handicraft maker. She has a success story being a maid. Her brother Issát wanted Elise to leave their village, learn to read and write and get a job where she can earn money. The other brother, Ivvár, was proud of his sister. He used to come and look at all the products his sister was making and called her *giehtačeahppi*.⁸⁰ Issát was a merchant and Ivvár a farmer.

“Ivvár viellja láve mu rápmot, lohká mu nu čeahppin go duddjon ja visot maid máhtan. Son láve bohtit geahččat mu dujiid ja lohká daid nu erenoamážin. Su mielas

⁸⁰ Giehtačeahppi is how we explain one who is good to make traditional handicraft.

lei nu somá go mun duddjojin. Nubbi viellja, Issát, su mielas ii leat duddjon mange veara ja bivdá mu heaitit duddjomis”⁸¹

They both wanted to keep the traditional way of living. They lived and worked in their area and they both agreed, that they had a successful life, as Ivvár used to say to his sister: – «*we only got few months of school each year and we have managed our lives. We know how to pay bills and we are earning money*”. Issát, the merchant, he married a Norwegian woman and did not speak Sámi with his children. Elise, she never gave up. She was a single mother with three children.

The new period of ČSV movement was also affecting the local societies. The youth who have left our area are getting education. They are debating, asking questions and also arguing why our society needs knowledge and competence, and that the Sámi rights must be strengthened and that their identity will be strengthened if children and youth are able to speak and learn their mother tongue at school.

Informant #10 Lemet Ánne, is the young girl who saved her family and many others during the Second World War. She was now a farmer and married. She was interested in politics and was also dreaming about getting education. The possibility came through her oldest son Johan Klemet. He was living in a city and challenged his mother to apply and take some courses. She did so and was accepted as a student. In the beginning, it was tough. People talked and said that she is getting divorced. She knew what her plan was, it was to get education and do it well. So, she hired a maid to take care of her family and animals – “*Álgnos de ii lean beare somá. Olbmot nu hállet, ahte dál lean guođđán ruovttu ja isidan. Bivden biiggá, guđđen dálu ja vulge skuvlii.*”. She returned home again with new possibilities, a good job and people elected her to the municipal board and later to the county board. Her main issues were welfare and language. She was soon the leader of the *Trygdekontoret- National Insurance Service*. One of her main issues during her professional work was to help other women. She had seen how early Sámi women were burned out – “*oidnen iežan čalmmiiguin mo nisssonolbmot leat váiban badjelmeare bargguiguin ja mun han dihten man ollu sii barge, birra jándoriid barggus*”. As an insider, she knew about their background, which family they belonged to, how many children they have and she knew that many of these women were triple workers:

⁸¹ My brother Ivvár he always used superlatives about my work, that I was good with my hands. He used to come and look at my products and according him, they were special. He was proud because I was a duogjar. Other brother, Issát, he did not see any value of my work and asked me to leave handicraft production.

family, servicejobs and handicrafts. She wanted to give these women better opportunities and her solution was this: 1) women should earn their own money; 2) she was arguing for changes in the local welfare system and 3) she was getting *trygdepenger* (welfare benefits) to middle age women. According to her, if there had been a non-Sámi, an “outsider” as the caseworker, they would not support these women the same way she did “*ii sápmelaš vuolgge kántuvrraid miel biehkut, iige muital dilis birra. Mun han dovden ja dihten man ollu sii barget, mun han oidnen dan sin hámis. Ja gal dáža stádas liigu, lámispenšuvdna nai midjiide*”.⁸²

During this period, we can see how the changes are affecting the people. Some are suffering because the young people, especially women, are leaving the areas. Others are taking the new opportunities, because of the changes - 1) mothers who did not want their daughters to leave, they got this answer: “*bággu vuolgit, bággu birget*” we have to leave, we need money; 2) the years of absence, living in boarding schools had consequences, many lost their ties to their families; 3) there is a shift from traditional life to a modern life, some are giving up their Sámi identity and the way of being; 4) women are organizing themselves, it promotes the understanding that they can control their lives; 5) the world is getting closer and there is a greater mobility; 6) the ČSV movement had a huge impact. People were no longer afraid to fight for our rights – the Alta-case changed the Sámi society.⁸³ The official statistics for Norway does confirm there are many women who are getting higher education. In the Sámi municipalities, in Kárášjohka and Guovdageaidnu the Sámi women has the highest education in the whole Norway and it is opposite for men (ssb.no/befolkning).⁸⁴

⁸² A Sámi would never visit official offices and talk about themselves, about their problems. I knew about them; I knew how much they worked and I could see how tired they were. The Norwegian State has enough money, that they also can pay pension to us”

⁸³ “Bággu vuolgit, bággu birget”- sámi researcher Minna Rasmus has researched about the consequences of Boarding Schools and my informant “Rávdná Márjá” is also using the same description as Rasmus.

⁸⁴ *I Karasjok og Kautokeino er andelen kvinner med høyere utdanning over landsgjennomsnittet for kvinner, mens mennene i de to kommunene riktig nok ligger over gjennomsnittet for menn i STN, men likevel langt under landsgjennomsnittet for menn.* <https://www.ssb.no/befolkning/statistikker/samisk>

3. THE TABOOS, WHAT THEY DO NOT TALK ABOUT?

So, what are the taboos women do not talk about? What are the issues and topics that they never debate? How is the innermost room, the close and closed conversations, where we seldom have any access? Here is one of them, told by an elder woman who has asked me to use her story confidentially. She told me never to tell the gender of the child and neither where this person lives now. They were cutting hay by the “*čáhcegáddi*” it was summer and they were working long days.⁸⁵ They could hear somekind of a voice or noise, but they did not pay so much attention to it. When this woman stood on one of the stones, she kept hearing this voice and she could not understand where this sound was coming from. They continued to work and the sound or voice kept coming and going. She then decided to look: What kind of an animal is under the stone? When she lifts it up, there is a newborn baby, still alive, covered with gras – “*lei bidjan njuorat máná danjassuohtu vuollai, ii lean goddán máná*”. The woman took that baby and wrapped “her/him” in warm clothes and took this newborn child home. When her husband later comes home, he finds his wife with a baby. She told him how she has saved this beautiful little child and it must be their responsibility to take care of it. The next day, a young girl came to their place and explained that the child belongs to her, but she did not get her child back again. This old woman said: – “*mánná lea mu*” the child belongs to me!” The story about this young girl had a very sad ending, she was found dead: she had bled to death. The close relatives kept the child. There are only a few people who knows about this and the official version is – *the child lost mother!* My informant explains that this was one of the most dramatic weeks in their little closed society. They did not talk a lot about it and they did not include that many people to their “silence” conversations, only a few close relatives – “*Dál ain ravget nahkárat go jurdilan dan birra, ahte mánná lei sáhttit šaddat eahpáraččan ja doppe geađggevuoalde čuorvut buoret hávdesaji alcces*”.⁸⁶ After she has delivered this story to me, she is then including me to a close conversation about my responsibilities how to handle this story. Not add anything, not talk about it loud.

⁸⁵ Čáhcegáddi is the same as waterline. It can be fresh water or sea water. I have promised my informant, not to tell where this happened and neither when it happened. This little baby who was found under the stone is still alive- and it has to be protected

⁸⁶ An *eahpáraš* is the spirit of a dead newborn child that is haunting people, asking to be buried.

ELDERS

According to all the women, the years after the Second World War were very difficult, this was the period they do not talk about out loud. Almost all of them had to start from scratch again, they were ruined and then had to build new homes. The most dramatic and difficult part was that they did not know how to deal with the traumas the children were carrying – *“jávohisvuohta sihke skuvlii ja bilidii”*— being silenced had consequences, it destroyed many of them with a burden of pain. Anna Gudveig is talking about how they tried to help each other – *“mánáziidda attiimet dan buoremus bihtá, nu láviimet málesruittu bálddas lohkat”* – to cheer up their children, they always had a mantra while they were cooking the *best meat pieces must be given to children*. This was one of the methods to keep the sorrow or grief away from their knees or lap – *morraša biepmadit, ii galgan!*

I asked these women about what was the most important issue for them being a Sámi and living in Sápmi? Almost all of them answered that it was the language situation, *“sámeigiella,”* that they did not want the language to disappear during the hard years of assimilation. All the women, except one, continued to speak Sámi at home and in their villages.

They never used alcohol, a strict internal rule

None of my informants drank alcohol and only three of them smoked tobacco – *“Eai nissonolbmot juhkan, hui hárvve dáhpáhuvai.”* Before there was a strict internal rule regarding alcohol. Some of them told about how the alcohol abuse has destroyed their homes and they had to accept that their husbands and sons drank. Issues about sexuality were a taboo. My informants did not learn anything about it from their mothers or female relatives. According to *“Rávdná Márjá”* and *“Sofe”* this was a topic only between sisters or cousins. Also, the experienced midwife does confirmed that they never had these kind of topics and neither did she bring it up while she was working as a professional health worker and helping pregnant women.

How come Elsa Laula Renberg was unknown?

Only two of my informants had heard about Elsa Laula Renberg and what happened in Tråante in 1917. Some of them had never heard about her, but all of them knew about Kathrine Johnsen, the famous journalist who covered Sámi issues from 1948 until she retired during the 1990s, and they also knew about Sara K. Hætta who was a midwife for forty-two years and the first radio journalist – “*One of the main reasons is because the Sámi society, including the media, they have not been good enough covering our own history*”, is the answer from Lemet Sára. The Sámi people did not learn anything about their history at school and the media has not fulfilled its role. She notes the importance of delivering stories through radio, the strongest medium for Sámi people. The elders do not read books or long articles.

I have met twenty-seven women with twenty-seven different stories. They are representing themselves, their families and their villages. They also have told stories from their daily life, including ordinary stories about how they work or how they are spending their leisure time. Our villages are not homogenous, living by the coast is totally different than in the little villages along the rivers or at the mountain areas, where all the people speak Sámi and the elders are still wearing traditional clothes.

Emic and epic from Sámi perspective

There are still stories to be told. Stories that are not published yet, about domestic violence, how women are treated by their husbands; about criminal issues. The stories about how widows and unmarried women are treated in reindeer herding husbandry, they must be covered and told. One of my informants, we will call her “Sire,” is 86 years old. She was once a wealthy reindeer herder, but when her husband died and their only son was an alcoholic, she lost her herd. Close relatives stole it, more than 600 animals – “*Ii báhcan gazza ge*” all her animals, marked with her family’s earmarks disappeared.

According to the epic and emic discussion in Indigenous societies, I am very sure that my language knowledge, that my cultural background was one of the reason why these women gave me their stories. Heatta argues that it would be difficult for a non-Sámi journalist to get these kind of stories without the language and cultural knowledge. Hanusch calls this kind of reporting “through a culturally appropriate framework” (Hanusch 2013a). This is also about a

linguistic and narrative technique in how to get people to talk with me. Anna Gudveig is talking about trust that her stories would not be delivered to a stranger: – “*in lean gal vaikko geasa miehtat muitalit iežan birra ja fertet bissut mu duohtavuodaš.*”⁸⁷ What is left is the argument that is a necessity for research and researchers to have a Sámi perspective, first hand knowledge and proximity to our culture and society. (Stordahl, 2008, p. 259-260, Pedersen 1990).

To memorize and document the people

One of my “new” friends, #7 Anna Gudveig, she was very concerned about our relationship. She wondered about how we are communicating and in what way she is delivering information from her to me, including trust and knowledge. In one way, she was my pathfinder for methodology. She will first give a lecture, prepare what she is going to talk about and she will give information and details about the people in her stories. Sometimes she could come with better solutions and good advice, including how she is recommending to find other women with important stories. She was helping me with the snowball effect. One day when I came back to her, she had planned her story about her strength and weakness. In 1918, she was nine years old and she was part of dramatic weeks in her local society, Kárášjohka. Twenty-five people died in October and November 1918. She still remembered details and information about all the twenty-five people and described who they were and when they died. She had made her own system, a catalogue for me and showing the relationship between them and telling stories about the people that passed away in 1918 – “*Luhkkár Jovsset Máhtte buohccái, su mielde bođii dát dávda 8. oktobera 1918. Ovlla Piera jámii 13.oktobera ja su eamit, Behtoš Sofe ja Jovvna Biehtár 17. oktobera.*”⁸⁸ At that time, she was part of *ceavzin* – surviving strategy. She was asked by the local sheriff, *lensmánni*, to help so people will survive. Anna Gudveig walked around in the village, feeding children and cleaning the houses where the sick people were. No one paid attention to the fact that she could also get the Spanish flu. She was washing the blood and vomit, going from house to house, cleaning the floors and dishes. But she did not get any money, not even ten øre – “*Mun headju veahkin. Guottán olggos daid vuovssanasaid. Mángga dálus guoddit vuovssanasaid, bassat láhtiid ja*

⁸⁷ She would not tell her story to a stranger, but because I asked in a kind way, she allows me to come to her place and keep to her truth.

⁸⁸ Luhkkár Jovsset Máhtte was the first one who got ill, it was Oct. 8th 1918. He came with the disease. Ovlla Piera died Oct. 13th, his wife Behtoš Sofe and Jovvna Biehtár died Oct. 17th

lihtiid. Eai attestan eai logi evrrege munnje, eai addán maidige. Mun dáluid mieldede mannen”. She cried when her dearest godfather Jovvna Piera Jovvna died of this flu. He was kind with her. As a little girl, she had saved all the money he gave her. After his funeral, she went to the shop and bought *gáktedingga* – a material to make traditional *gákti* that she can wear at school. That *gákti* was a memory of her *ristáhčči* – godfather.

This is about promising, not stealing or taking her story. Indigenous researcher Smith calls “research” the dirtiest word in our vocabulary, that strangers – *vierrásat* – are doing their research and disappearing (Smith, 2012 p. 3). On the other hand I have asked women like Anna Gudveig “*to cloth our own history*” and as Sámi researcher Gaski is asking for, the premise for doing Indigenous research is to have a solid backpack, speak the language, understand the values and traditional knowledge (Gaski, 2009, p. 116-118). It is important to avoid making our stories exotic and pretend that we all live in harmony and that we all are children of nature. These stories told from my informants, they came from their heart. Some of them did prepare well before delivering it to me and now my responsibility is not to add anything that is not untrue.

So how can I fulfill *Nêhiyaw Kiskêyihtamowin*” epistemology; this is how the researcher will gather knowledge from Indigenous society (truth and trust) and then give it back to the society where it belongs and benefits the community in some manner, as Kovach required (Kovach 2009 p 44-45). This the first step, by publishing the first stories from twelve women; the life stories that would not be told or published if there has not been the interest to collect and to store them! As an example, one of the topics according to Kovach’s epistemology, could be to tell the younger generation about the brutality of “yoiking,” – what words we are using in our traditional *luodit*. I met Duttá Pier Mággá, ninety-six years old. She felt so uncomfortable and ashamed when her *luohti* was played on the radio. Originally her father, Duttá Piera did make beautiful *yoik* to his daughter, the nicest gift he delivered to her;

Na Duttá Pier Mággá

Na guhte mu Mákká

vieččaš/ Čiežain čáziin

galgá basadit/ Na Singer

mášená Mággái attán/

Duttá Pier Mággá

The one who comes to get my Magga

He has to wash with seven waters

I give Magga the Singer machine/

I give her seven pair of porslins cups

Čieža pára porslins
gohpaid/ Badjegiettis go
beali vel attán/

I also give her half of the field called
Badjegieddi

Someone (unofficially, a young man) changed her *luohti* and started to *yoik* that where there is party, there you also will find Mággá and where Mággá is, there is a party. It means that she is partying and might have had many men – “*Doppe gos lea márkka, doppe lea Mággá. Doppe gos lea Mággá doppe lea márkka*” In this yoik she was described as an attractive beautiful girl, as a Morning Star. This young man, he would give the whole of Sápmi to her, if she accepted him. She never did it and this yoik, the second version, is often played on the radio and only a few people know the background of it. Duttá Pier Mággá told me, that she is often yoiking her fathers version. She never does it loud, but keeps yoiking it in her thoughts – in her head. She has learned that yoiking is sin, so that is the reason why she is doing it in silence.

My informant #9 Nanna still remembers the yoik that people were yoiking at their wedding party when she married Hánssa Piera Lásse or Elle Lásse. At their wedding, she was sitting beside him and listening to this yoik: – “*Ovdal oazžu Elle Lássii geađggi čeabeha birra bidjat ja merrii luoitit go njárgga niidii addit*” It would have been better to let Elle Lásse drown with a stone around his neck, instead of giving him to a woman from the *njárga*. The woman who was yoiking wanted to marry him, but he did not accept her. Also the others, their invited guests, kept yoiking that Lásse is the most handsome man, most clever and he should not be given to someone who does not deserve him – “*čáppat čábbáid gaskkas, jierbmáid jierbmáid gaskkas, ii ge galgan addot dakkáraččaide, Ráigeádjaga stuorra čeavli, Vilbban áiggun várjalit, geasa vilbba attán, čábbáid čábbaid gaskkas.*”⁸⁹ Nanna’s father, who also was a medicine man, did not accept the way they were treating his beautiful daughter. So, he put a spell on them and it did not go well with those who were cruel with Nanna that evening – “*áhčči jorgalahtii nuppe láhkai.*” This was in 1932. Yoik belongs to the genre of oral literature. It has parallels to our storytelling – and these are disappearing. According to

⁸⁹ He was the most handsome among all the others, he was the cleverest man. We won’t give this proud man from Ráigeaja to anyone, we will protect our cousin and the one who gets him, must be the beauty of the beauty.

“Rávdná Márjá” and Anna Gudveig this tradition is changing. Before they could embroider the stories in traditional yoiks and now they have taken away almost all the words – *“luđiin njáskan eret dehálaš sániid.”* The reason might be the change of oral traditions, the generations that used to live together also yoiked the people and close relatives in the community. Yoiking was also banned for many decades. Children were not allowed to yoik at school and it was categorized as a sin. Now it is a new trend among the youth, to enter the different stages and have workshops to develop *juoigan* and *luođit*, but they should have used the elders as teachers.

All the women agree that there have been dramatic changes. Before they were equal to men and they shared their work. When I was asking informant #10 Lemet Ánne, who was a politician, a translator and the leader of the *Trygdekontoret*- National Insurance Service – about if it is only a myth that Sámi women had and have power. She answered “yes” and “no.” The changes of the society came fast. People left the little traditional villages and they moved to centres where some of the women started to work. There were not any program or resolutions of how to protect the Sámi rights and the Sámi livelihood, including habits and lifestyle. The laws, the instructions and decisions came from outsiders, the authorities – *“Jurddaš jos mis livččii lean áigá juo Sámediggi, de dilli livččii eará”* imagine if we have had a Sámi Parliament for many decades ago, then the situation would have been different! Lemet Ánne was the only one of my informants who would like to be a politician at the Sámi parliament, but she was getting too old and did not have the energy any longer – *“lean menddo boaris, muhto hui somá livččii!”*

My midwife friend, informant #11 Lemet Sára. She had her own plan in 1996. She wanted to write books, so her knowledge and stories will be passed to new generations. She was a dedicated midwife, honoured by the Norwegian King. For many decades she went out to women who were sending a message to her, that they needed help. She has managed to help premature children up in the mountains. She has walked in a blizzard and in sunshine. Each year, between twenty to sixty children were born and she has registered them all in her private midwife book. Notes about children and mothers – *“Juohke álo go ledjen geargan riegádahttin bargguiguin, de čohkkejin čállit. Čállen máná birra, čállen eatni birra ja čállen dieđuid mat leat ávkin boahhtevuođas. Čállen mo manai mu mátkkis dahje mo geavai mánáin.*

*Maŋŋil láven lasihit vel máná nama go gulan mii namman šaddá.*⁹⁰ When I came back to her again in 2016, two books were delivered to me. Her first book “*Árbedieđut, muittut ja vásáhusat*” – is about traditional knowledge, memories and the experienced lives. Her second book “*Jortamovra-Sára bargu- 42 jagi Sámis*” is an autobiography about her life as a midwife, published in 2010 and 2011. Now her third book is just released about Sámi weaving traditions. The last seventy years she has collected 1 100 weaving patterns and now she is delivering her personal patterns to younger generations. This ninety-one year old woman is still updated about international news, about the Brexit-process, about the American presidential election and she is commenting on global news, the world outside Sápmi interests her!

The last time I went to see #2 Ristenaš Risten, she was sitting on her chair, looking at me. While we were talking, she said this: – “*guokte áimmi okta suotna*” – *two skin needles and one sinew thread*. I could only have registered this and not commented it at all. Or I could have thought, here she goes again, talking about how they used to sew together. But I caught its meaning! This is our hidden internal way of communication called “*geažuhit*” do not say it directly, hide the message. The two needles were mother and daughter. Her mother, Juhkanaš Risten, regretted that she married Biret Ovllá when she was eighteen years old. He was old widow and she was young. This unhappy mother put her daughter in the same situation as she was in. She was one of “*duot earát*” who decided in the summer of 1912, that Ristenaš Risten could not marry the most handsome man in the valley of Deatnu. She followed her mother *suotna*, the sinew thread! This message is so powerful and deep. She had accepted it and lived with that! Not talking was also in one way to survive, being silenced – *jávohuvvan*.

⁹⁰ After each birth, then I always used to sit down. Write briefly about the child, about the mother and I could also write notes that can be interesting in the future. Information about my journeys and about the circumstances (born in lavvu, house, sunshine, blizzard or if the baby is born ex. on the road or in an ambulance). I also fill in the names of the children, so the parents were asked to send me information about it.



Maria Anne Valkeapää Eira singing psalms to Mikkol Elle.

8. CONCLUSION

The Sámi women that are presented in this thesis, they all lived in little communities. Some of them grew up in isolated areas or in little villages and they lived together with their close relatives and family-members. Each of them, all twenty-seven women, has unique experienced stories – that is untold and hidden or not told in publicity. Returning to the theoretical part about; about why and how traditional knowledge has helped people in generations to manage the life and why women do not talk about themselves (Eira, 2012 p.47 and Magga 2011 a and Turi Dimpas, 2016). These women they have lived and managee the life of eight-seasons.⁹¹ They did take care of families, animals and were part of the

⁹¹ Eight seasons; summer, summer-fall, fall, fall-winter, winter, winter-spring, spring, spring-summer, and the cyclus of a Sámi life.

nature. They were told how to continue with the traditional life and it was their responsibility to continue by teaching traditional knowledge to younger generations.

These women they have also celebrated personal survivals, even though they have gone through difficult historical periods, like harsh assimilation, the dramatic WW II and they have seen the consequences of modernity and dramatic changes in the society. They have managed their lives without learning to read and write, but at the same time they have had full control over the family economy. They could not break up the structures of the families, without them the society and livinghood could have fallen apart. The quality of the every day life, including work, habits and family was part of their wisdom, I met the heroes who did not raise their voices. They did not ask to get their stories to be published, I went after them.

They learned early to be silenced, not asking difficult questions or oppose someone. My informants accepted the way life turned out for them and their survival-mantra was this; *the will of God* or that *the life is preterminded*. These life stories confirm that many of my informants followed the same pattern, the aim was to survive and manage life in the Arctic. Some of my informants are describing their choices, part of a *ceavzin* survival strategy. Falling in love was also part of *ceavzin* and it affected their lives. Marrying older men was in one way to secure the economic situation and at that time, the elders told youth “*vállje riggá*” – choose a rich man. Getting divorced was not accepted, this is called shame.

The Sámi people and our societies in all four countries, Norway, Sweden, Finland and Russia, has experienced a violent Christianisation, followed by a racist politics of assimilation. As my informants told me, that there is no doubt that this had huge and dramatic consequences of horror for them. The Læstadianism movement with hierarchical understanding of genders, that men were prioritized and gave the women a feeling of low self-esteem. Still when I grew up during the 1970s, it was a sin to watch television and we were not allowed to play music or yoik. So, I did the same as the elder women, I went to the forest or behind the hills to yoik. As a child, I remember how fun it was to yoik mosquitos or little reindeer calves, but the elders did not allow us to do it. Instead of stopping to do it, I remember how I also walked or worked and did yoik in my head and whispered the words.

The colonization of the Sámi people, World War II, and the modern life was often mentioned during the interviews, which indicates that these historical periods had dramatic consequences for them. All of them, except one, was proud of being a Sámi and they were proud of their families. The family, *bearaš* and *sohka*, the clan relatives were important for them and they

talked about them and described close relatives with pride and love. The Norwegianisation changed their livelihood, including culture, language, emotions and traditional ceremonies.

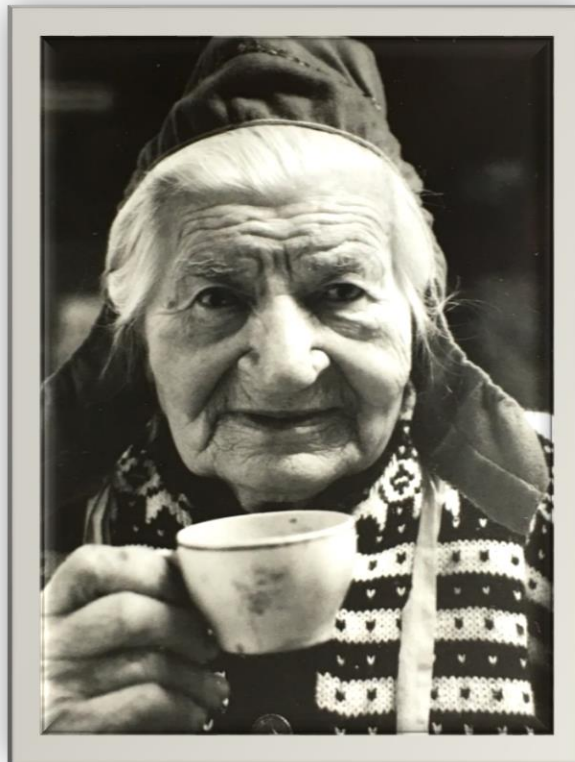
The crossing point of getting invisible might have happened when the modernity came to our society. The Sámi people started to organize themselves, establish new institutions during the 1970s and the first Parliament was established in 1989. These new institutions, new type of politicians and the process of building a stronger Sámi society, by fighting for our landrights, language rights and the process of self determination might have had consequences, that the elders were not anylonger part of making decisions. Their role changed and their advices were not anylonger part of the society building. Reindeer herder women became invisible in the system made by the States. So, my suggestion is that our society does need a strong focus on gender differences and discussions about the womens position in the Sápmi.

By reflecting about my informants, about the hidden heroes from the past. Many of them were invisible at municipality or county level, but it was opposite in their little villages or among the family members. When I was doing new research about my informants, then some of the close family members, including grandchildren, are still yoiking their grandmothers. Their personal *luohti* – yoik are still describing the hidden messages that are so powerful. The sounds of *váimmu ivnnit* – the colours from the heart are delivered from one generation to another. In my opinion, the elders have stories with great value and their historical and personal life stories are important for the future generations. They have experienced changes in our society, but the culture and traditions are still so strong, so these storytellers will give an important perspective about life. Also, their unique knowledge will help us to reflect about our own society, our own people, and the history we are carrying with us should be understood, including the values of daily life.

I started my thesis with telling about #1 Ánte Jon Mággá. She was the first woman I interviewed for almost twenty-three years ago, January 1994. Her words; “*mus lea nu ollu muitalit, muhto dus lea nu unnán áigi mu muitalusaide*”, was the reason and fundament for my work in collecting womens life stories. She has been in my mind the whole time, while writing this thesis. Her story will conclude my master thesis. In my opinion, this story is a great example why stories like hers should be told and not hidden. Ánte Jon Mággás story will illustrate how life stories can be told by a journalist. Here is Mággás story and this story is endorsed by Jouni in August 2016. We have agreed about our roles, they as informants and me as a researcher and journalist.

“You need time to understand the meaning of life”

I met Mággá and Nila already when I was a little girl. I used to see these two, an old couple, walking together, working together in our reindeer area on the Finnish side of Sápmi. I used to look at them, but they never paid any attention to us children. We were invisible and they were visible for us- but we, both children and elders, had a common focus, our animals should be marked and slaughtered.



“Á N T E J O N M Á G G Á, duo lea du miessi, duo maid du, merkes daid!” As a little girl, up in the mountains, in a cold windy reindeer fence. Hundreds of animals running in a circle. The others, adults and elders are screaming to Mággá, there is your little reindeer calf, there is also another one, a third one, mark them, with your earmarks. She was coming towards me, always wearing traditional clothes, white hair, big nose, strong eyes and big skin clothes. She will grab her calves from my little hands, without saying “*giitu*” or thanks. Me and our neighbour’s daughter, did enjoy to grab as many calves as we could, it was fun, like a play (scene) in a movie. We pretended that we were strong, much stronger than Mággá. After this day, it went many many years before I met her again. Then I was a young girl, doing the same

work and I could see that Mággá was not any longer the «nana bákti»- the strong woman in the fence.



January 1994: So now I am sitting in her kitchen in Gámasmohkki. I have never been here before, but I have always known where she is living. In a white house, up in the mountain area and there is a little river between her house and the main road. I also knew that during summertime we need a boat to come to her white house. But there is also a bridge build for them. Her kitchen; a mix of traditions and modern equipment. Her sewing corner is close to the door and there she has cardboard boxes with reindeer skin, she is sewing a pair of *gápmagat*, winter shoes. On the work top, beside the sink the smallest dishwasher I have ever seen. “Not in use, easier to wash by hands”, says Mággá, when I am standing beside the sink, drinking coffee. She is sitting by the warm oven, the panorama place in her kitchen. The control post, she can see who is coming in to her front yard: a perfect place to have a view out from two windows. One window towards the river and the other towards her front yard.



I have always wondered, who are they? Why Mággá, Mattus Nila and Jouni? Who are these three and how come that they are living together? I did know that Mággá and Jouni are sister and brother, but why is he also there? Why is he not married or working somewhere else? How come that Mággá is speaking Sámi and Jouni is answering in Finnish?

I am Ánte Jon Mággá. My father is Jovvna and he is son of Ánte, so that is the reason why I am carrying my fathers and my grandfather's names. My mother was Vulleš Elle. We were farmers and we did not have reindeer, only few for using as transport. We were five sisters. I was oldest, born in 1906. Then my sisters, Biggá, Káre, Áile and Elle. We lived in Ohcejohka, the church place, the municipality centre and there we had two rich salmon rivers. We grew up by the lake called Máttajávri.

Mággá doesn't remember much from her schooldays, they were few. Her parents needed her at home and she was helping her mother, who was sick. On New Year's evening in 1920, when Mággá is fourteen years old, her mother dies in front of her. She and her younger sisters

were standing around the bed and looking at their mother when she closed her eyes for the last time.



This is the only picture of Maggas family, before their mother, Vulleš Elle passed away in 1920. Here is her father Ante Jovna, her sisters Biggá, Káre, Áile and Elle and their close relatives, uncle, aunts and cousins. (Photo: private)

“I knew what my duty was. Take my mother’s fingers and stretch them. Stretch her body before it gets cold. Then I walked out, to my father who was working outside and it was dark. I was sitting outside, not saying one word. Just waiting that he could respond or ask why I am sitting in front of him. I did not want to tell it first, but it took a while, then I dared to tell him that our mother has passed away. We walked in and I knew that my life has changed. From that moment, I had to take responsibility at home and I also did it”, says Mággá.

She also knew that her father will never live alone with five children that he will soon find a new wife, a new woman who will come and take their mother’s empty place.

Elsa Maria Morottaja was a young girl who came to their place as a maid. She was asked to take care of his five daughters and make food for them. It did not take long time, before her role had changed from maid to marrying an old widow, a man who was much older than her.



We could not do anything. We did not know what to do, only to accept our father's decision. In his second marriage two more children were born, Jouni and Anna Maria. When Jouni was two and a half years old and Anna Maria was seven weeks our father passed away- and our family was in deep crisis. I was working as a maid and they asked me to come home again, to take care of my younger siblings and my stepmother. We were poor and we did not know anything of the future, neither who could help us.

They tried to live together, they tried to have a home, but one day Elsa Maria walked away.

It was August 1929. Elsa gave her youngest daughter away to Norway and then she started to walk. Walk to an orphanage in Rivdol in Inari, 150 km. She did not say anything to Jouni about their last journey. She did not explain which direction they are walking towards. Only walking, hand in hand. Jounis eldest sisters were upset and they were crying in their little house. Sister Káre knew that Jouni will be given away, sent away from them, but she was not allowed to say «good bye» to him.

Káre went to the barn, to the cows and there she cried. She knew that Elsa Maria will disappoint him. That he will never come back home again. So, it happened, when they came

to Rivdol orphanage. Mother asked her little son to look at the hens and when he came back, she was gone. He was alone and six years old.

Mággás face is full of tears. I look towards the kitchen table where Jouni is sitting and his eyes are wet and he is holding the coffee cup. She is shaking her head; she is putting down the reindeer skin. Just sitting there, on her little chair and rolling her *suotnaáimmi*, a skin needle with sinew. I can hear the clock on the wall, see the fire in the oven and the cat that is trying to come in. I feel like I am invading their life, invading their kitchen. Honestly I did not know how to behave and what to say, so I just sat on the chair. A chair that was placed in the middle, not the best place to sit if you are insecure. Not saying one word, just watching out the window, to the cold dark Arctic mountain nature. I knew that it was just impossible for me to understand their life, the pain and the dramatic family history. I was there seeking for women's stories, but I did not have any idea at that moment, what kind of stories I was looking for just «*Women Stories*»- and that is as huge and deep as the wide mountain areas in the whole Sápmi. I remember that I was looking at her. Thinking about the little mountain birch trees that are growing up in the mountains. The little strong trees, maximum 50-centimeter-high, that are managing the strongest winds from the North, just bending towards North, South, East and West. During summertime, these little trees are bending towards the Sun. I remember I was thinking. Can I compare her with these trees or not? I still remember how stupid I felt, that I was trying to compare her with something- someone, but with what? Then the pictures, my saved movie from our reindeer fence, came into my mind and I remember the strong and scary Mággá and me, a little happy girl running after the calves.



I asked her if she remembers it? She is shaking her head. Ok, that was kind a mistake from me again, having a conversation about nothing. Silence. Then she smiles her biggest smile and says: - *I remember you. You were a fast runner "háhppilis juolggat nieiddas"*. Then Jouni also opens his mouth and confirms that he also remembers me in the fence. Running and catching animals and then I disappeared and he was asking if I went to a boarding school – Yes, I answered him.

Back to Mággá again. She keeps looking at me and asks *"what kind of stories are you looking for?"* I am explaining to her - stories told by elder women about their untold stories. About their life experience and secrets, about the ordinary life and her status in the society. I was telling her that I would like to collect the stories and save them for a while- and that I do not have to publish it anywhere – I want your story before it is too late, I said to her and looked in her eyes, I did not move my eyes from hers.

Then she says this sentence that gives me the kick and power to continue with my project:

"Mus lea nu ollu muitalit, muhto dus lea nu unnán áigi mu muitalusaide- I have so many stories to tell, but you do not have enough time to listen at them".

And that is so true, I was just planning to tape them. Visit them, get what I get, nothing more.

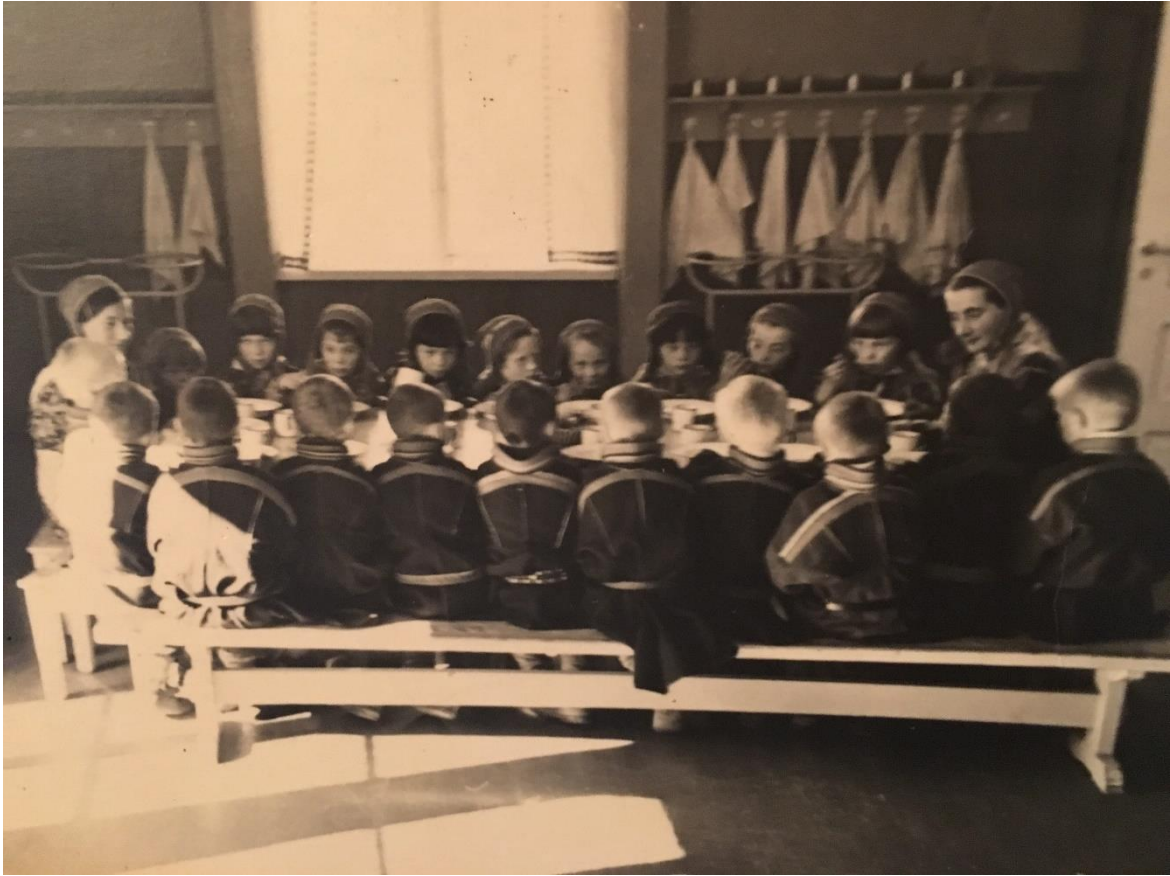
Afterwards, during my reflection time, I knew that this will not be an easy project- I have to take responsibility. Use the time that I need, including to leave my professional job, work as a freelancer. I went back to Mággá and Jouni, to do the first recordings. Our first agreement was **TIME**, that I shall not be in a hurry, just stay with them. Do my recordings, eat together

with them and clean the house. I was going in and out to from the house, they needed a lot of wood to heat the kitchen.



Year 1930. Jouni is staying at the orphanage. He speaks Sámi and doesn't understand Finnish. Mággá is working as a maid for reindeer herders, but one day she had enough. She wanted to see Jouni again, talk with him. She starts to walk to the orphanage and when she arrives there, the leader offered her a job. She can stay there together with them and take care of children.

It was good to see Jouni again, but I could see that he was not happy. His hair was cut very short, he was wearing láttebiktasat (Finnish clothes) and he was not talking much. I stayed there as long as they allowed me and trying to take care of my little brother. One day I had to leave the place and leave my little brother. It was tough, because I did see how they are bullying him and sometimes also hitting him hard, the adults and the children and I could not do anything, not protect him either from the enemies.



This is when Magga (left) went to Rivdol orphanage. Here she is together with the Sámi children and one of them is her brother Jouni. (photo:private)

Mággá continues to work as a maid. She goes back to the mountains and is earning many animals, reindeer. Ánot Piera was a rich reindeer owner and while Mággá was working for him, her own little herd started to increase. She had *boazolihkku* or *reindeer luck* a Sámi way to say when you are managing to increase the heard, that the animals are not dying or disappearing. No one is stealing animals from Mággá.

She falls in love with a very young man, Junná Hánsa, Hans Paltto. She is thirteen years older than him. When they got married summer 1944, he was twenty-four years old and she was thirty-eight. But their marriage lasts only one year, then Hánsa is killed by a hand grenade in 1945. They did not have any



children, but she had two miscarriages. Mággá did not consider herself as a beauty and she says in this way: “I have a big nose, big eyes, but the animals are not looking for beauty, but they want the best herders in the area. I feed them, I move with my animals and that is the best part of our life, peaceful life”. During the war, she lost many animals. Soldiers shot them down and animals that crossed the border to Norwegian side, the owners could not go after them. She was a ruined widow after the Second World War.



Then one day in 1951 her life changes again. A young man, Mattus Nila is in love. He is asking if Mággá would like to marry him and she says: “*juo, dieđusge válddán mun du!*” – Yes, off

course I will marry you, is her answer. She moves with her animals from one reindeer area to another and they are settling down in Gámasmohkki.

According to her Mattus Nila is the man in her life. He treats her well and they are such a good couple together. They are trying for years to get children, but she has again many miscarriages. This is their sorrow, that they can't get their own family.

But they are continuing with their daily life. Up in the mountains with their animals and always working together. Mattus Nila, the quiet man with slowly steps and Mággá.



“Son lei mearehis čáppa ja buorre lunddot olmmoš, máhtii eamida ráhkistit”, these words belong to Mággá. She is telling me, that her husband was handsome. A kind man and he knew how to treat his wife, so she is satisfied in their marriage. She is explaining to me that they were good lovers.

Back to her brother and his childhood. Jouni had to move to a new place. The teachers at the local orphanage had concluded that Jouni is retarded. He doesn't speak Finnish and he is not playing with the others. He doesn't learn much, because he never talks. He is transferred to South-Finland to a home for retarded children and his sisters do not know the reason. Jouni's mother has left her stepdaughters and has moved to a new area. She is married again and starts a new life by a big lake. No one has any contact with Jouni for years, no one is sending any letters to him. He is alone in the world and the life continues in Sápmi.

August 1939. The teachers are telling Jouni (sixteen) that he can leave them now that he can return home, back to his family. Then a long journey starts for him, with a bus towards the North. He hasn't seen his mother since she left him by the hens. The only person who has visited him is Mággá. He is not updated about his family situation, only that a man called Hjalmar Tapiola will come and pick him from the road towards Nellim, not far from the Russian border. Hjalmar is his mother's new husband. There they are, these two sitting in a boat on a huge Inari-lake. Hjalmar is rowing twelve km and Jouni doesn't open his mouth.

When they arrive, Jouni is asked to look at the floor, he is not allowed to lift his head.

Hjalmari wants to see if his mother recognizes her son. Her son who is sixteen years old.

Elsa Maria has finished to milk their cows. She comes in, opens the kitchen door and there is this young boy sitting on a low bench looking down to the floor. He doesn't lift his head. She only says in Finnish: "*Jouni, oletko sinä Jouni?*" - Jouni, are you really Jouni? He nods. She doesn't hug him, she doesn't kiss him, and she doesn't touch him. She does nothing.

"Can you imagine, after ten years or even more, almost eleven years, she doesn't touch me! A mother who has not seen her child for a long time, doesn't give him a hug, just a little hug, what I have been dreaming about for a long time". Jounis' face is full of tears. The stay with his mother was not as he had expected, so he doesn't stay there too long. He leaves his mother and her house and goes out to find jobs. He is building roads, building houses and he stays in the army for five years, during the Second World War.

Mággá and Nila are continuing their traditional life and she doesn't feel well. She is missing her brother who is somewhere in North-Finland and Mattus Nila is also sick. She asks her husband to write a letter for her, a letter to Jouni if he can come to Gámasmohkki and help them. She doesn't know how to write, so she asks assistance from her husband.



August 1969. Jouni receives the letter, a letter with quite few words, only one sentence that will change his life. *“Jouni. Can you please come to us, I am sick and Mággá is alone. Greetings from Mattus Nila”* He came and has stayed there since then. He never left Mággá. When he came he only spoke Finnish, he had lost the Sámi language, his mother tongue. Mággá did not speak much Finnish, so she started to learn a new language, so she can communicate with her brother. She was then already sixty-three years old, but she did not give up.

It was challenging in the beginning. How can I find the right words so he can understand the meaning of our conversations? It was easy to learn words about food, weather, going to the shop or to cut wood. But he had to accept that I can't speak Finnish when I am talking about reindeer or duodji – handicraft. And on other hand, I do not understand if he talks about movies or about his film equipment.

Jouni has one interest and that is filming. He has been filming their life for many years and he has been following Mággá with his camera, filming their daily work. According to him, if he had a chance to get a new life, he would then have chosen a life as a photographer: a documentary photographer.

“I watch movies at television and I am dreaming about the big world, the countries and people far away and I would like to travel”, says Jouni.

He is sitting in his room where he has several cameras, a tripod and a huge television. Mággá has her own arena in the house, her own bedroom, beside the kitchen. A room with a single bed, a chair and walls decorated with pictures from the past - and Bible and a Psalm book. She asks me to come in to the bedroom, close the door and sit on a chair. She has something more to talk about. She is glad that I am visiting them that I have been there so many times. Now she is asking me a favour, to help Jouni if he will get any trouble when she passes away.



“We do have an agreement that Jouni can stay here the rest of his life. This is a decision made by me and Mattus Nila, done before he passed away. Now I want to include you to this agreement, is that okay for you?”

I can't say yes, or confirm anything before she can explain more about their problem. They do not have any papers, not testamentary inheritance, so she is asking me to confirm and tell their relatives that Jouni can stay in Gámasmohkki, that no one can chase him away.

“Mu viellja lei aktonas loddi, gii girddašii golgosis máilmmis. Manjil go bodii mu lusa 30 jagi dassái, de lei son mu eallima čuovga. Vássán áiggit ja vássán jagit leat jávkan. Lea gal váivi go ii gávdnan eamida, de livččii lean mus manji dál”

With this sentence above, she is explaining about their relationship. He was like a lonely bird flying all by himself in the world. When he moved to her place, then he came with the light of life. The past thirty years are gone. She is sad that he did not find a wife, then she could have a sister-in-law. She calls Jouni her *birthday present*. He was born the same day as Mággá turned seventeen, they are both born March 23rd, in 1906 and 1923.

But I had this last question that she must answer, before it is too late. I went to her many times and one day, when I asked again, how come that he was sent away? The answer came when she was ready for it, when she knew that I will treat it with propriety.

It was not anything wrong with our family system or clan. We were poor, but we had enough food. I was old enough and so was my sister Káre, it means that we could have taken care of our brother. It was Elsa Maria; she was the problem. She was a woman without heart and she did not care when she suddenly left Jouni in Rivdol. She never went after him, to take him back home again. So, the problem is how we are as human beings how we are acting or behaving and how we are treating our children. I can never forgive her and will not do it either.

I did not know how to respond and it was hard to find the right words when I am looking at an elder who is crying loud, very loud.

Listen at me, “háhppelis juolggat nieiddaš” fast runner girl. You asked if I rememebered you when we were in the fence with the animals, that is irrelevant, but now you will remember me the rest of your life and so will your daughters also. They will always know who is Jouni and Magga. You came to us to ask for stories and we gave it to you. If you had not asked, then no one would have known anything about me, about Mattus Nila or Jouni”. That evening, when I went back to my car, my face was wet, tears were falling. Instead of just crossing the little iceriver, I walked around. I wanted to walk again on this special bridge Jouni had made for them.

What a bridge, an impressive wire suspension bridge and he has worked with this for years. But this was not just an ordinary work. It was kind a reminder that this work has been a process to take away all the pain this family has gone through since August 1929. Hundreds of iron bolts, meters of planks and heavy wires has maybe kept his pain, his trauma away. When I came back again to them weeks later, Magga knew I had stood on the bridge for a while. I did not ask anything, I did not comment it, but she answered this: “*mun máksen iežan ruđaiguin, vai vielljan solle jurdagiid*”. She paid for the bridge, so her brother can clear up his thoughts. Sister and brother. The meaning of *birgen* and *ceavzin*. Now their story is not anylonger untold.



9. FUTURE PROJECT

This project has been about the past and the present, about elder women so we can understand them in the future. They have told us stories, how they have managed three different historical periods in Sápmi. With the following and next project, then I would like to continue with the same topic: conduct elder women who are born between 1930 and 1950. By doing it, then I also can compare the traditional- and modern life in Sápmi. Most of the elders are not anylonger monolingual or living up in the mountains. Many of them are very well educated. They have been building up our society. They have had keyroles at municipality, county and at national level, leading institutions. It would be interesting to take a look at the modern society, conduct them about the gender role. Also, to see how the role of the Sámi women has changed since 1985 and what are the challenges that Sámi women face today.

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