



Article

“I am Sámi, but I am not a Sámi”: Coastal Sámi students’ articulations of identity in a colonial-blind Norwegian state

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Abstract

This article gives voice to coastal Sámi students and explores their negotiations over being Sámi or Norwegian within the Norwegian education system. Through interviews, students share insights on the extent to which education focuses on Sámi issues and reflect upon their identity. The article explores how youths negotiate personal identity within pre-existing structures by employing Archer’s theory on structure and agency as a backdrop. The changing phases in how ‘western’ societies view indigenous practices and knowledges are applied together with (de)colonial perspectives to understand (colonial) structures. Some key findings are that the coastal Sámi students’ identity negotiations are complex, as official discourses seem to restrict them from identifying as ‘real’ Sámi, and that the local Sámi is within a discursive void due to unintended consequences resulting from the unification in the centralised education system. In focusing on students and using the educational system as a backdrop, this article seeks to deepen the understanding of how society and the educational system in particular condition students’ notions of what it entails to be Sámi and how students negotiate their identity.

Keywords: decolonisation, education system, identity negotiation, Sámi



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Introduction

This article's focal point is students in Sápmi¹, Norway, and how they understand and negotiate their identity, or more precisely, their struggles over identifying as (indigenous) Sámi and/or majority Norwegian. When examining individuals' identity negotiations, the interplay between structural factors, encounters with social institutions, and cultural imperatives must be considered (see Stenseth & Bæck, 2021). As these students undertake education, it locates them as part of spatial and historical processes that influence identity negotiations, here understood as the Norwegianisation²/ colonisation of Sápmi.

This work aims to challenge "coloniality in institutions and curriculum" (Eriksen & Svendsen, 2020, p. 4). Eriksen and Svendsen (2020) remind us of decolonial perspectives as opportunities to move beyond traditional modes of social critique by confronting denial problems rooted in the eagerness to continue the modern-colonial habit of being (Maldonado-Torres, 2007). Stein et al. (2020) find that scholars are socialised into colonial habits of being, such as knowledge appropriation (Morgan, 2003), extractive research (Igwe et al., 2022; Kouritzin & Nakagawa, 2018) and eurocentrism (Andreotti, 2011; Quijano, 2000).

Hagatun (2020) engages in decolonial perspectives when researching Roma students' experiences in Norwegian schools. She argues that coloniality produces and upholds structures of inequality that suppress minorities within the education system. In line with Hagatun, my study finds that "the curriculum and organisation of schools can be challenged in ways that go beyond superficial adjustments" (2020, p. 135), which includes accommodating Sámi diversity in the education system.

Places are not assumed to be unrelated, but connected across place, space and time. Thus, a comparison that considers similarities, differences and possible linkage across sites, hierarchies of power, and time is valuable (Bartlett & Vavrus, 2017). Challenges, like those presented in this article, are evident in Norway and beyond. For instance, the Norwegianisation policies toward Sámi have been a systematic part of the power and political structures (Balto & Østmo, 2012; Keskinen et al., 2016). Seurujärvi-Kari and Kantasalmi (2017) emphasised that there are similar histories of colonisation among indigenous peoples globally.

Researchers found diverging curricular discourses concerning 'cultural identity' in Finland and

¹ Sápmi refers to the area where the Sámi people traditionally lived. The Sámi are the indigenous people of the northern part of the Nordic Peninsula (Norway, Sweden, and Finland) and large parts of the Kola Peninsula (Russia).

² Norwegianisation is a term used when understanding the assimilating processes, especially the Sámi and the Kven in Norway. I regard the term to be problematic as Norwegianisation could be 'detached' from colonisation, thus positioning Norway as a non-colonial state.

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Sweden. The Swedish discourse was more essentialising than the Finnish (Zilliacus et al., 2017). In schools and education programmes, indigenous knowledges are still underrepresented and undervalued. This is for instance found in Canada (Higgins, 2014), Aotearoa New Zealand (McKinley & Stewart, 2012), and the United States (Ngai et al., 2015).

Young people with minority backgrounds are positioned as “the Other” in Norwegian schools based on skin colour and language (Mathisen, 2020). Saltzburg and Davis (2010) found that youth who challenge the culturally fixed gender dichotomy can face harsh societal reactions. The research presented here shows that youths' struggles with identity are comparable across research disciplines and demonstrates that we can learn from each other. Research has a public responsibility to translate peoples' struggles in certain societies in ways that allow these struggles to be understood widely and compared with the conditions of individuals in other societies (Fox & Gingrich, 2002). Although it is important to emphasise the heterogeneity of dominant and colonised contexts (Fox & Gingrich, 2002), this article invites researchers to examine colonising educational structures in various societies. Thus, it can be a point of departure for comparative studies along the lines Fox and Gingrich suggest.

This article explores the research question: How do coastal Sámi students negotiate identity, and how does the Norwegian education system condition such identity negotiations?

During the 1700s, structured and formalised education became common in Norway. At that time, the belief was that if Sámi people received an education in Sámi, they would want to learn Norwegian to better adjust to the Norwegian culture (Jensen, 2005). In the mid-eighteenth century, the predominant view regarding the Sámi changed. The will to use the Sámi languages in school decreased, and by the mid-nineteenth century, an assimilationist policy was implemented (Aikio-Puoskari, 2009; Ngai et al., 2015). For several decades, the use of Sámi languages was prohibited in school. According to Skutnabb-Kangas (2016), education through the medium of the majority language has been a major assimilating force for minority children, thus having a homogenising function (see also, Aikio, 1989).

Towards the end of World War II, the Nazis used scorched-earth tactics, leaving Finnmark³ and Northern Troms in ruins, resulting in many Sámi being deprived of their material culture (see Eidheim & Schjøtt, 1958). Thus, the effort to make them Norwegian was easier. Many Sámi, especially those along the coast, found it hard to rebuild from such devastation, and changed both their language and their ethnic identity and ‘became’ Norwegians (Aikio, 1989; Johansen, 2010; Keskitalo & Olsen, 2019;

³ Finnmark and Northern Troms are the northmost areas in Norway, situated in Sápmi.

Olsen, 2010; Pedersen & Høgmo, 2012). After World War II, Norwegian authorities formally changed the assimilation policy towards minorities. In the Education Act of 1959, the ban on the Sámi language in schools was abolished, and in 1969, the Education Act introduced the right to be taught Sámi languages (NOU 2000: 3, 2000). However, Norwegianisation continued to occur until at least the 1960s, and in many cases until the 1980s (Jensen, 2005; Minde, 2005).

By the end of the 1970s, the Alta conflict⁴ had reformed the Norwegian Sámi policy. In the aftermath, there has been an increasing interest in revitalising Norway's Sámi language and culture.

Nevertheless, Sámi perspectives, knowledges and practices have been an insignificant part of the Norwegian education system, and the Sámi people have held a disadvantaged position (Askeland & Aamotsbakken, 2016; Dankertsen, 2014; Hoëm, 1976; Hovland, 1999; Niemi, 2017; Vars, 2017).

Moreover, researchers find that the curriculum is often developed from the majority perspectives, with few references to indigenous knowledge (Apple & Buras, 2006; Eriksen, 2018; Gruenewald, 2003; Olsen & Andreassen, 2018). While the Norwegian curriculum regarding Sámi issues, has gone from being ignorant to aiming for inclusivity (Hirvonen & Keskitalo, 2004; Olsen, 2019), indigenous Sámi perspectives are underdeveloped, and regional and contextual diversity is lacking.

Methodological approach

For this study, students in a coastal Sámi area were interviewed to understand whether the education system nourishes Sámi knowledge and practices and strengthens Sámi identity. Students' voices from (coastal) Sámi areas are not often heard. This article, therefore, offers a unique contribution to the field of indigenous research, including minority identity-struggle processes.

The participants were educated according to the National Curriculum for Knowledge Promotion– Sámi (LK06-S) (Utdanningsdirektoratet, 2008). The core curriculum in LK06 states that the Sámi language and culture are part of Norway's shared heritage; therefore, this legacy must be *nourished* to strengthen *Sámi identity* (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2015, my emphasis). Thus, when referring to 'curriculum' in this study, it is to LK06-S. Most students (approximately 70%) are taught Sámi as their second language, while some choose not to learn the Sámi language. The aim of Sámi as a second language is for students to become (functionally) bilingual (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2013).

The study's data collection method is semi-structured interviews carried out on three occasions with eight students in one small, multi-graded school in Fjordbygda. The interviews were conducted when

⁴ This conflict was a series of massive protests from the Sámi people and others over construction of a hydroelectric dam on the Alta River in Finnmark.

the students were in tenth grade, with follow-up interviews in the first grade in upper secondary school (age 15-17). The main questions were related to learning about the local community, Sámi topics, learning the Sámi language, and reflecting upon identity. The interviews were conducted in a small community where persons can be easily identified if too many details are provided; therefore, neither gender nor the exact year of the interviews is revealed. The interviews were conducted with the written consent of students, recorded electronically, transcribed, and analysed using NVivo. The data was stored and treated according to guidelines from the Norwegian Centre for Research Data (2022). The consent was discussed with the participants to clarify their rights following ethical guidelines for research (NESH, 2016).

In interviews, it is important to facilitate communication that feels safe and encourages understanding and reflexivity. During the interviews, I took the time to talk to students before and after the interviews, building trust and mutual understanding of what we wanted to achieve from the interview. They were invited to ask questions and to stop at any time if they had questions or felt uneasy. This meant listening, being quiet and having time to stop and think. As stated by Ahmed (2000), "ethical communication is about a certain way of holding proximity and distance together: one gets close enough to others to be touched by that which cannot be simply got across" (p. 157). To Ahmed, careful listening is about being able to balance closeness and distance and strive for mutual understanding. Careful listening is more than hearing; it is a process that challenges the researcher's prejudices and means learning from the interviewee.

This article explores whether youth in Fjordbygda regarded themselves as Sámi, Kven, Norwegian, or mixed⁵. To be sensitive to the possibly difficult question, I asked the students: "In this area, many would say that "I am Sámi, Norwegian or Kven", or that "I am mixed". How do you think about yourself in this regard?" I was eager to be sensitive when asking the question because there are still 'scars' within the community, to define as 'Sámi', 'Kven' and/or 'Norwegian'.

I grew up and have been a teacher in a similar context as the interviewees; hence, I am an insider, thus holding an emic perspective (Olive, 2014). The possible drawback of an emic perspective is that one might be at risk of not achieving enough analytic distance (Paulgaard, 1997). However, an outsider may struggle to get close enough to understand what is taking place (Olive, 2014; Paulgaard, 1997). According to the informants, it was easy to talk to me because "you understand how it is to grow up in a place like this⁶" (Alex⁷).

⁵ The term mixed is used as some people in this area describe themselves as such, various 'mixes' of Sámi/Kven/Norwegian.

⁶ The interviews were translated from Norwegian to English by the author.

⁷ Names are fictive and gender neutral.

When researching in a Sámi community, I seek to understand and contribute to decolonising the position of the Sámi. As stated by Smith (2012), research that involves indigenous peoples should seek to make a positive change for the participants. Further, “the research approach also has to address seriously, the cultural ground rules of respect, of working with communities, of sharing processes and knowledge” (Smith, 2012, p. 193). I attempted to adhere to Smith’s suggestions by being respectful, ethical, sympathetic and beneficial toward my informants (Porsanger, 2004). The results from the study have been shared with the participants in follow-up interviews and with the local school.

Theoretical positioning - complexities of negotiating a non-hegemonically defined identity in a colonial-blind Norwegian state

As most young people spend a substantial amount of time within the education system, the process of negotiating identity also occurs in education and could be referred to as socialisation (Hoëm, 2010). According to Kumashiro (2000), education can – while wanting to be inclusive – run the risk of reconstructing “us” and “them” by presenting dominant narratives. Therefore, it is important to understand educational structures when examining students’ identity negotiations. Thus, I start by defining the Norwegian educational system.

Educational systems are nationwide collections of institutions devoted to formal education. They are at least partly controlled by the government, and their components and processes are related to one another (Archer, 2013). The Norwegian education system is governed centrally by politicians that initiate reforms and educational guidelines and has a high degree of unification and systematisation (Skinningsrud, 2012). A high degree of unification means strong and effective government control (Archer, 2013). Moreover, political negotiation processes are crucial for changes within the system. A high degree of unification suggests limitations when attempting to initiate changes. This is exemplified in a report on LK06-S (Solstad et al., 2012). The report argued that the Committee for Upbringing, Care and Education⁸ in the Sámi Parliament, found it disadvantageous that Sámi schools solely had the opportunity to offer opinions on specific Sámi issues and not the entire content in the national curriculum. Furthermore, the report found a conflict between the Sámi Parliament (hereafter Parliament) and the Norwegian government, as the former desired parallel and not identical curriculums (2012, p. 53). Findings from fieldwork in five schools in the Northern Sámi area showed that the implementation of LK06-S was left to the individual schools and the individual

⁸ Norwegian: oppvekst-, omsorg- og utdanningskomiteen.

teacher (Germeten et al., 2010), receiving little or no support from the Norwegian state/Ministry of Education.

Until quite recently, formal Norwegianisation was in effect. Morgan (2003) has described the changing phases in how Western societies approach indigenous cultures and knowledge, from appropriation to appreciation and then accommodation. He argues that indigenous knowledges have been and still is actively excluded by the dominant Western paradigm. Furthermore, Tuck and Yang (2012) analyse the unwillingness of Western nation-states and institutions to acknowledge the consequences of colonialism as settler moves to innocence, "... those strategies or positionings that attempt to relieve the settler of feelings of guilt or responsibility, without giving up land or power or privilege, without having to change much at all" (p. 10). Settler moves to innocence can here be interpreted as the Norwegian state taking the position of the 'settler' – in other words, in the Norwegian context, this notion has been manifesting as the state moves to innocence (see also, Hervik, 2019).

It is possible to argue that Sámi people must make a shift from being victims to becoming self-reliant and proactive in attitudes and actions (see Smith, 2003; Balto & Østmo, 2012). To do so, they must solve challenges and be able to endure pain (Balto & Østmo, 2012). While these strategies might be beneficial on an individual level, seen from a structural perspective, they move the responsibility for making space for identity processes from the system to the individual. In other words, where the system should give space for individuals' identity processes, Balto and Østmo's perspective could allow for an approach where the individuals have the responsibility for creating these spaces. Hence, exempt the state's responsibility and thus tolerate the state moves to innocence.

Students' perspectives on Sámi identity

The students in my study self-identified using three categories: *Sámi and Norwegian*, *coastal Sámi*, and *mostly Norwegian*. The mentioned categories are by no means exhaustive. People in the community also define as Kven, Norwegian and with an identity from various countries of origin. The three categories are used when attempting to understand the informants' negotiations, ambivalence, and struggles concerning their identity. The majority of students in this study identified as both coastal Sámi and Norwegian. These students have studied the Sámi language in lower secondary school and have learnt about the Norwegianisation process, coastal Sámi people and Sámi place names etc.

Lacking resources while engaging with Sámi diversity and language

The participants are educated according to LK06-S. Nevertheless, they expressed having little focus on Sámi issues during ordinary classes. Sámi topics were addressed mainly during a school camp and the Sámi week. When asked what they had learnt about their natal place and Sámi issues at school, they had similar responses, with some variations. Remi explained: “We don’t learn much, sometimes there is some. . . maybe one or two weeks when the Sámi national day approaches, but otherwise there is nothing”. Frøy adds:

When we attend a school camp, we learn about Sámi place names, and that’s interesting because they reflect how the place was used. So, we have learnt some, even though I don’t learn Sámi.

Nergård (2005) argues that there is a lack of Sámi focus in education and that Sámi schools lack an overall purpose, ideology, and a distinct understanding of how the school can contribute to the development of the Sámi community and culture. This lack could be due to little support from the government to emphasise Sámi issues in education. This lack is illustrated in the following statement:

The [Sámi language] teachers give us teaching material on a sheet of paper. They have produced it for many years. They have done a good job of teaching us. I feel that most of my competence about the Sámi, our area and the culture is because of them (Alex).

The students acknowledged their teachers’ efforts when making them instructional material. This adds to Germeten et al. (2010), who found that the implementation of LK06-S was left to the individual school and the individual teacher. In informal conversations with Sámi language teachers⁹, they state envying other language teachers – their textbooks and educational resources – and express having to use much time and effort to produce their own teaching material.

Solstad et al. (2012) argue that the Sámi Parliament was not sufficiently heard in negotiations with the Ministry of Education (hereafter Ministry). The Parliament and the Ministry must cater to teaching about (coastal) Sámi knowledges and practices in schools by providing resources that contribute to diverse perspectives in the learning material. Nevertheless, the limited Sámi focus in the curriculum and textbooks can be traced in the students’ statements. Alex stated:

We learn that they [Sámi people] do reindeer herding and that kind of stuff. Some do it. But we also learn that not everyone does reindeer herding, that there are coastal Sámi, and that everyone doesn’t need to have reindeer to be Sámi. It was more like..., not solely the typical. We learn about how they lived [previous generations], and everything about the Norwegianisation process – we have learnt a lot about that.

⁹ The teachers have given me permission to cite them.

Although they learnt about the Norwegianisation process, and that not all Sámi lived inland, the dominant narrative¹⁰ of the Sámi is so prominent that they did not depict themselves as 'real' Sámi. Frøy expressed: "I don't know if I would say I'm Sámi. It depends on what kind of Sámi and what a Sámi person is. Because I'm not on the plains with reindeer and I don't live in a lávvu."

Regarding learning about Sámi issues, the Sámi Parliament and the Ministry could promote Sámi diversity in the education system. To analyse the situational logic between the Ministry and the Parliament would demand more space and is not within the scope of this article. Nevertheless, it is observed that the Parliament's agency seems to be restricted by the Ministry. The Parliament's desire for a parallel curriculum was not fulfilled, they could state opinions upon issues marked as Other (specific Sámi issues and language), but not about unmarked topics targeted as Norwegian/majority perspectives. This might endanger putting forward Sámi diversity as the dominant Sámi narrative appears to be the Sámi in the Norwegian education system. According to Kumashiro (2000), while wanting to be inclusive, education can run the risk of reconstructing "us" and "them" by presenting dominant narratives. As Sámi topics were taught in relation to the 6th of February¹¹, students experienced that this week was marked as the Sámi week. When attending upper secondary school, Kim stated:

On the Sámi national day, we had a Sámi week, then we had Sámi in nearly all subjects. Then, we learnt some about Sámi culture and such things. This year, I actually wore the gákti¹² on the Sámi national day. Several wore the gákti at school. At the end of the day, everyone who wore it was asked to enter the stage to show the gákti and that sort of thing.

This is what Kymlicka (2010) characterises as a feel-good celebration of ethnocultural diversity, or what Alibhai-Brown (2001) has depicted as the 'samosas, steel drums and saris' approach. The 'celebration' of cultural diversity can obscure structural inequalities and institutional discrimination towards minority groups (Hesse, 2000). Furthermore, it focuses on exotic (indigenous) features understandable to the majority, allowing these to represent the culture (see also Scully, 2021). Morgan (2003) terms it the appreciation of indigenous culture. The participants experienced appreciation during the 'Sámi week', when all students wearing the gákti were asked to enter the stage. When schools designate specific days in which to appreciate and celebrate the Sámi culture, there could be a danger that they do not accommodate Sámi history, knowledges and practices, but instead initiate a feel-good celebration at a specific time of year. This could result in a divide between 'us' (the majority) and 'them' (the Sámi), where 'we' appreciate 'them'. This might give 'us' the

¹⁰ The dominant Sámi narrative is understood as living inland, herding reindeer, dwelling in a lavvu (Sámi tent), and being fluent in the Sámi language.

¹¹ The 6th of February is the Sámi National Day in Norway, Sweden, Finland and Russia. It is celebrated in memory of the first Sámi national meeting that took place in Trondheim on this date in 1917.

¹² Gákti is a traditional Sámi costume.

means to supply the conditions for the Other and therefore have done our part in addressing diversity. Thus, this could be linked to state moves to innocence, that attempt to relieve the state of feelings of guilt or responsibility without giving up power or privilege, that is, without having to change much at all (Tuck & Yang, 2012).

Appreciation does not alter the situation or accommodate teaching/learning about Sámi perspectives as an included part of the curriculum, nor does it provide diversity; rather, it situates the Sámi as the Other. Hence, upholding the notion of the innocent state facilitates appreciation of Sámi culture without making a substantial effort to decolonise education. While the Ministry, through for instance the Sámi curriculum, apparently appreciated a set of Sámi perspectives, they did not necessarily accommodate including Sámi knowledges per se. Thus, the dominant Sámi narrative is reproduced through education in the curriculum and textbooks, as well as through the media, and in society in general.

The high degree of unification in the Norwegian education system might explain the situational logic between the Parliament and the Ministry. The Ministry's intent to keep the education system consolidated concerning, e.g., curriculum, might limit the Parliament's agency. This, in turn, brings about a curriculum that, to a small extent, displays the multitude of Sámi knowledges, practices, languages, identities, and so forth, neglecting the coastal Sámi topic in schools. Furthermore, on the practical level, receiving Sámi language education is constraining in upper secondary schools. Some students do not have access to Sámi language teachers at school and must thus attend digital education if they want to pursue language classes. Alex reported not studying Sámi in an upper secondary located in the city:

I thought I had to attend classes online. They [students] need to attend classes at a different school. So, if Sámi was offered at my school, I would consider studying it, but I didn't because it was only available online.

In addition, access to Sámi language camps is constrained by the fact that students miss out on ordinary education when attending such camps:

Recently there was a language camp in Kautokeino, but I didn't attend. We had a heavy workload at school at the time, and I couldn't miss school (Kim).

These constraints indicate that students must make a tremendous effort to learn the language, an effort the educational system does not sufficiently accommodate. The Norwegian colonial position reinforces the insignificance of Sámi history, knowledge, and practices (see Eriksen, 2018; Hoëm, 2010; Kumashiro, 2000; Maldonado-Torres, 2004; Morgan, 2003). Because of this, education downgrades Sámi worldviews and the aim to strengthen Sámi identity, which causes an insufficient

understanding of the Sámi and thus brings about a deprived feeling of being Sámi amongst coastal Sámi students.

The lack of sufficiency in Sámi language is a major issue among students:

We speak Norwegian because we don't speak Sámi well. We don't have the vocabulary. English is easier because I watch English television series all the time, and I have more English than Sámi at school. If I meet someone who says "buorre beavi", who greets me in Sámi, then I can greet them in Sámi and ask 'how are you?' (Remi).

There is not enough support to learn the language through other means, such as the mass media, as expressed above by Remi. Learning English is mandatory while learning Sámi is not. Holmarsdottir (2005) argues that in many colonised contexts, language learners do not encounter the taught language outside of school and thus do not have learning opportunities available to them.

Furthermore, Olsen (2010) states that "it is difficult for children to become fluent in the language as long as it is kept out of most public spheres in their everyday lives" (p. 153). Skutnabb-Kangas (2016) argues that education, through majority language has been an assimilating force for minority children. Language is a means for seeking psychological, educational, and political self-determination. Yet, in this study, the coastal Sámi students state that their Sámi language knowledge is insufficient, even though they have studied it through primary and secondary school.

The lack of sufficient Sámi language knowledge is important when the informants attempt to define themselves. To them, the lack of Sámi language appears to be identical to the lack of Sámi identity. The following statement from Alex demonstrates the notion of authenticity: "Much of being Sámi is being able to speak Sámi." Moreover, the reflections by some of the students, "how can I be Sámi if I cannot speak Sámi" (Nicky), point in the same direction. According to Olsen (1997; 2010), the Sámi language can be used as a symbol that can situate people along a continuum between the Sámi core, inner Finnmark, and Norwegian modernity. Moreover, it is a symbolic statement that ranks people according to authenticity. Personal identity is achieved by individuals in relation to their environment and is thus relational (see Archer, 2003; Jenkins, 2014). Therefore, the students' equation between the lack of Sámi language and lack of Sámi identity needs to be addressed throughout education. This is because identifying as Sámi cannot rest upon the idea of speaking the language well. This is not to say that students should not learn the Sámi language, because this is crucial. Yet insufficiency in the Sámi language cannot be equal to being defined as less Sámi, which should instead be understood as an effect of colonisation.

The coastal Sámi in a discursive void

The students participating in this study did not reflect on a blank canvas disembedded from their location. They were part of social locations; their experiences were embedded, and they shared meanings and social norms within spaces. The students' identity negotiations are historically constituted, tying the past to the present and the future (see Stenseth, 2022). In Fjordbygda colonisation still seems to have an influence.

To most students, wearing the *gákti* and living in a coastal Sámi area does not seem to be enough to consider themselves as 'real' Sámi. Most students considered some features essential to being defined as Sámi. Alex reflected upon the criteria for being Sámi or Norwegian:

I would say that I'm equally Sámi and Norwegian. But that might be because I speak Norwegian and kind of belong more to that culture. Much of being Sámi is being able to speak Sámi. When you don't have the language, you may lose some of the culture as well. But innermost one is Sámi. Or I'm both; deep down, I'm both . . . I'm Sámi¹³, but I'm not a Sámi. I'm more Norwegian than Sámi, but I'm also Sámi.

To Alex, criteria such as language and culture were important and closely connected when defining identity. However, the "innermost one is Sámi", which exists alongside "I'm not a Sámi" because they speak Norwegian and belong more to that culture. Could it be that they are more exposed to that language and culture, thus finding it more relatable?

Remi struggled over being Sámi, Norwegian or both:

I don't have Sámi genes... I don't know if I can say I'm a real Sámi or a Norwegian, so I could say I'm both. I do have some Sámi heritage, and I've lived in Fjordbygda my entire life. And here, there is Sámi culture and that sort of thing, but at the same time, all those close to me only speak Norwegian. Mum and dad can't speak Sámi... I feel it has become more 'in' amongst youth to learn Sámi at school. It feels more okay for us than it might have for them. This might have to do with the Norwegianisation process and the fact that they were closer to those who didn't accept it – things that have got to do with Sámi and such. Now, more people seem to accept it.

Wearing the *gákti* and learning the Sámi language are active ways of expressing being Sámi yet are insufficient to hold a Sámi identity. Olsen (2010) argues that identifying as Sámi is an active expression for those living along the coast; otherwise, they are assumed to be Norwegian. To work on Sámi identification (see Jenkins, 2014) is an active choice, according to these students.

To be able to express a Sámi identity appears to be a demanding endeavour. To Chris, holding a Norwegian identity is linked to disinterest in Sámi issues:

¹³ In English, Sámi is both an adjective and a noun, whereas in Norwegian, these are two different words: *samisk* is an adjective, whereas *same* is a noun.

I don't feel like a real Sámi; I would say I'm Norwegian. My family is interested in that [Sámi], but I'm not that interested in those issues. For instance, I have my gákti, so one could say I'm not 100 per cent Norwegian. [When wearing the gákti] people can give you strange looks. Before, you could get cruel comments. I think that today, people might not say anything, but they would still think it. If I wore my gákti in the city, I would not have felt as comfortable as when wearing a suit.

This indicates that students need to actively engage in identifying as Sámi to reject a sole majority identity. They believe they must be interested in Sámi issues to take on a Sámi identity. This task is demanding, as reflected by Nicky:

I believe I'm Norwegian, I think – I can't be Sámi. Or does one need to speak Sámi to be Sámi? Do I have to reflect upon this? No, I think I am Norwegian.

These youths try to relate to the Sámi. The cost of being required to make such an effort is the risk of marginalisation. Also, on top of the struggles youths everywhere face, there is the additional cost of having to use mental capacity for Sámi identity negotiation. Furthermore, due to the revitalisation process, holding a Norwegian identity could be regarded as difficult and sometimes a 'deficit' and thus lead to a double stigma¹⁴ (Johansen, 2010). Previous generations were stigmatised and marginalised for being Sámi, whereas today you should be proud of being Sámi. Thus, identifying as Norwegian could be regarded as a costly and stigmatised option (see Eidheim, 1971). However, displaying a Sámi identity also comes with a cost as expressed by Nicky, people can give you strange looks, and Kim (see below), who refers to prejudice against Sámi people.

The term *revitalisation* has been used when addressing the resurgence of Sámi culture and language in areas where it has previously been suppressed (Hiss, 2015; Høgmo, 2011; Johansen, 2013; Nystad et al., 2017; Pedersen & Høgmo, 2012; Sarivaara, 2016). Revitalising here is understood as bringing something back to life, rejuvenating, or giving a new lease of life to something. However, it is essential to ask whose language, practices, and knowledge is being revitalised. The education system and other societal systems, such as the mass media, put some Sámi history, culture, and language forward to acknowledge some Sámi areas in Norway. However, as the Sámi community is diverse and holds multiple languages and dialects, entails different ways of living, and has diverse histories, this move could homogenise the Sámi world and be seen as a form of neo-colonialism.

Students in this study find it complicated to articulate what it entails to be a coastal Sámi, but it seems easier to claim a partial Sámi identity if you have relatives in inner Finnmark. This is articulated by Kim:

¹⁴ During colonisation of Sápmi it was a stigma to identify as Sámi. During the revitalisation process it was a stigma to reject a Sámi identity, thus the double stigma (Johansen, 2010).

My mum is Sámi, or she can speak Sámi fluently, and half her family lives in Fjellbygda [in inner Finnmark]. Her dad, my grandfather, was Sámi from Fjellbygda. I would say I'm Sámi, or maybe 50-50. Because I've sort of learnt Sámi, always used gákti, and been to Fjellbygda quite a lot, that's kind of my everyday life... My dad's family isn't Sámi like my mum's. I live in Fjordbygda, and there is quite a lot of Sámi here. However, I don't feel like I am a real Sámi since I still don't speak Sámi well and there are a lot of things in the Sámi culture that we don't do, like reindeer herding – and we don't do this and that, we do everything differently. There are many similarities between our culture and the Sámi culture, but there are some things that are different, which are those things we don't do.

I would say I'm Sámi and an ordinary Norwegian... I would say that my family is partly Sámi... I'm not afraid to say that I'm Sámi, which some might be. I'm sort of proud of that part.

Q: Do you think some are afraid to say that they are Sámi?

Kim: Yes, I think so.

Q: Why?

Kim: Many have prejudices against Sámi, and everything related to the Norwegianisation process that went on. Many have not recovered from that.

Thus, having family origins in inner Finnmark makes Kim partly Sámi, yet Kim is Sámi and an ordinary Norwegian. This suggests that having roots in inner Finnmark somehow gives one the right to be Sámi. In addition, it has been proposed that the Sámi in inner Finnmark had to teach the coastal Sámi to be Sámi due to the latter's perceived submissiveness to the Norwegianisation process. This burden should not be placed upon the Sámi in inner Finnmark (Nergård, 2005). This contributes to the dominant Sámi narrative which understands Sámi as the ones living in inner Finnmark. Furthermore, suggesting that the coastal Sámi more easily complied with the colonisers, underestimates structural conditions, such as a sedentary lifestyle and the composition of the population (Sámi, Kven and Norwegian).

The term *ordinary Norwegian* is interesting as it might suggest that being Norwegian is ordinary while being Sámi is not ordinary, even in this context, linking being Norwegian to whiteness (see also, Fylkesnes, 2019). This is not unexpected as students are aware of the cost of expressing a Sámi identity. The following statement also addresses the struggle when negotiating a personal identity. Chris quit Sámi studies when entering lower secondary school. For Chris, this seemed to be related to not seeing themselves as Sámi arguing that: "I don't know if I would say I'm Sámi. It depends on what kind of Sámi and what a Sámi person is. Because I'm not on the plains with reindeer and I don't live in a lávvu".

The criteria for defining oneself as Sámi are narrow and cause alienation among the Sámi residing outside the inner Finnmark area (Gaski, 2000). Notions of what constitutes being Sámi are narrowly tailored to embody some features, such as herding reindeer, living inland, dwelling in a lávvu and

speaking the language. This could leave students' coastal Sámi identity in a discursive void¹⁵, not because of identity deficiency but due to encountering the dominant Sámi narrative, which seems to restrict them from being real Sámi. Therefore, there is a need to present Sámi multi-vocalities in the curriculum and textbooks to ensure that, for instance, various Sámi knowledges, practices and identities are visualised and hence formalised and revalued. Today, coastal Sámi knowledge and practices are devaluated and un-formalised in the Norwegian education system. Among other things, teaching material is presented on a sheet of paper and not in formal textbooks. The Norwegian education system could prevent coastal Sámi ways of life from remaining in a discursive void by presenting Sámi multi-vocalities throughout education.

Concluding remarks

The students' statements depict 'the Sámi' as someone else – not them. Such an understanding might be traced to the harsh assimilation policy in the past. Furthermore, the substance within Sámi society, such as the Sámi signifiers, is easy to define as Sámi because they are strikingly distinct. Inner Finnmark's Sámi signifiers might become the symbol of the Sámi way of being/living, which is not necessarily consistent with the Sámi people along the coast (Eidheim, 1971). Thus, "those things we don't do", such as speaking the language fluently and herding reindeer, prevent youths in Fjordbygda from identifying as Sámi, because they do not conform to what is put forward by the education system and the general society as Sámi. In future research, these struggles could be compared with the conditions of individuals in other societies as suggested by Fox and Gingrich (2002).

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