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The Burning Question of Identity

An Examination of Visual Sovereignty and Self-representation in
Sámi Feature Films

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Foreword and acknowledgements

As this thesis contains heavy subjects, I suggest approaching it with this in mind. As such, the thesis was at some points grievous to write, especially since many of the narratives have been present throughout my family history.

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Abstract

Ever since the birth of the film medium, the Sámi people, indigenous to Fennoscandia, have been depicted on film. These early films are ethnographic, made from an outsider perspective, depicting the Sámi as exotic and simple. However, in the 1970s, the Sámi became more involved in the filmmaking process, and in 1987, the first Sámi film, *Pathfinder*, was made. This shift to Sámi self-representation is examined in this thesis, where films made by Sámi, in Sámi languages and with Sámi themes are included. Looking at all these Sámi feature films, common narratological and visual themes are examined, more specifically through the lens of visual sovereignty, in order to fully comprehend what stories are told from a Sámi insider perspective. Hence, the research illustrates how Sámi languages, culture and iconography are reclaimed through filmmaking processes, and how these cultural themes are widely handled by Sámi filmmakers. This way, this thesis can contribute to Sámi film research, and provide an overview of the existing Sámi films—thus providing results to the Sámi branch of international indigenous film research.

Keywords: Sámi, indigenous film, visual sovereignty, self-representation, identity, historical revisionism, Fourth Cinema

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1. Introduction

Los Angeles, California, 1988. A young man, in a colourful folk dress, walks down the red carpet outside of Dolby Theater in Hollywood. It's the 60th Academy Awards, and among the Oscar nominees this year, we find stars such as for instance Meryl Streep, Michael Douglas, Bernardo Bertolucci, Cher and Glenn Close. *The Last Emperor* is nominated for, and will win, the prize for Best Picture. The young man in a folk dress, whose name is Mikkel Gaup, is not nominated for an award himself. However, he is the lead star of the film *Ofelaš* (1987), or *Pathfinder*, as it was known internationally. Directed by Nils Gaup, *Pathfinder* had been nominated for Best Foreign Language Film. The folk dress Gaup is wearing is Sámi, more specifically native to Kautokeino in Northern Norway, and its intricate design and embroidery contrast the black smokings and gowns otherwise dominating the red carpet. *Pathfinder* was in many ways groundbreaking, as it is the first film made in a Sámi language, by a Sámi director, handling Sámi themes—in this case an ancient legend. The film will not win the prestigious Academy Award, but the film and all that surrounds it mark an important cultural happening.

After the release of *Pathfinder*, it would take ten years until the next Sámi film was released, namely *Sagojoga Minister* (1997), in English titled *The Minister of State*, by Paul-Anders Simma. This film would not face the same amount of attention as *Pathfinder*, but it does mark the occurrence of the second film partially in a Sámi language, by a Sámi director, handling Sámi issues.

Thus, the Sámi people, an indigenous group in Northern Fennoscandia, were able to become part of film culture on their own terms, albeit rather late in the history of the medium. This does not mean that the Sámi were excluded from film culture; rather, the opposite is true. As the Sámi were often portrayed in scientific ethnographic films in the early 1900s, depicted as exotic beings, the 1987 shift to self-representation is interesting to research on a deeper level.

This thesis will examine how Sámi self-representation is expressed in Sámi feature films, more specifically what visual and narratological themes are present. In this way, I aim to shed light on Sámi self-representation and expression, which is to date still relatively underrepresented within film studies. Hopefully, this thesis can make visible the narrative and thematic strategies of Sami self-representation in film. In doing so, I hope to place Sami film within the broader field of indigenous film research. I will first present previous research as well as historical and cultural background regarding the Sámi and films connected to the

group. After presenting the method, research material—in this case all the Sámi feature films—and the theory of visual sovereignty, I will be analysing the films through the lens of said theory, thus illustrating common themes found in the films.

Unfortunately, a big part of Sámi history is unknown to populations in the Fennoscandian countries.¹ The history of systematic oppression has been somewhat kept in the dark, which makes these matters important to me on a more personal level. The Sámi part of my family has been subjected to racial abuse including measuring of skulls, oppressive language policies leading to physical abuse in schools if not speaking Swedish and being called slurs such as *lapp*,² eventually leading to many denying their Sámi cultural backgrounds. As mentioned, this history, as well as current problems and oppression, remain widely unrecognized, especially in the southern parts of the Fennoscandian countries. Hopefully, this thesis will highlight these issues on a more general level through the discussion and analysis of the film medium.

Moreover, the research on Sámi film is not by any means extensive. Naturally, this is largely due to the area of Sámi films being relatively small, both in national and international context. This thesis will not only fill parts of this research gap, but will also contribute to the much larger research area on Indigenous film in a more general sense. Especially, as an overview of all Sámi made films has not been made yet, this thesis will be extensive and contributory to research on Sámi films. Thus, hopefully the results can help other scholars diving into research on Indigenous films, as it will be translatable for other Indigenous groups, or even minority groups.

2. Material, method and disposition

When answering the questions of what Sámi films look like and what themes they have in common, all Sámi feature films—to date, there are only nine—will be watched and examined. More specifically, the thematic elements and imagery will be thoroughly looked upon. Doing this, the common elements of the films will become evident, thus presenting how Sámi self-representation and visual sovereignty are established.

¹ Denmark is part of Scandinavia, but is not included within Sápmi. However, as many of the films examined are co-productions where Danish actors are involved, one can motivate mentioning Denmark and including them in the geographical area.

² *Lapp* is how many referred to the Sámi in the past, but the word today is considered a slur. However, there are still many place names that include the word, for instance Lappland (English: Lapland), which stretches from Sweden to Finland, as well as Lapträsk and Lapporten—just to mention a few.

As consciously created narrative and visual topics will be the main focus of this thesis, documentary films will here be excluded. As such, the research aims to look deeper into which stories are chosen and highlighted in fiction—despite many of the films being based on true stories, and thus still historically interventionist and partaking in the act of cultural reclamation. This way, the real events and stories connected to them become reappropriated by the ones who they actually affected on a wider level. Furthermore, short films will also be excluded, in order to somewhat limit the research material. The films that will be examined in this thesis are *Ofelaš* (dir. Nils Gaup, English: *Pathfinder*, 1987), *Sagojoga Minister* (dir. Paul-Anders Simma, 1997, English: *Minister of the State*), *Guovdageainnu Stuimmit* (dir. Nils Gaup, 2008, English: *The Kautokeino Rebellion*), *Sameblod* (dir. Amanda Kernell, 2016, English: *Sámi Blood*), *Ellos eatnu - La elva leve* (dir. Ole Giæver, 2023, English: *Ellos eatnu - Let the River Flow*), *Je'vida* (dir. Katja Gauriloff, 2023), *Eallogierdu* (2023 English: *The Tundra Within Me*) and *Stöld* (dir. Elle Márjá Eira, 2024, English: *Stolen*).³ These films can all be defined as Sámi, as they are all made by Sámi directors, include a Sámi language and handle Sámi themes. For instance, South Sámi director Amanda Kernell's Swedish feature drama *Charter* (2020) and Nils Gaup's Norwegian historic feature *Sulis 1907* (2023) will not be examined as they do not include Sámi languages or themes. In a similar light, *Bázo* (2003), which could in some ways be considered a Sámi film, will also not be examined in this thesis, despite it including Sámi languages and themes, as the director Lars-Göran Pettersson is not Sámi.⁴ Nevertheless, this film has been defined as Sámi, but for the sake of this thesis, where self-representation through directorial work is centered, it will be excluded.⁵

Furthermore, the film *Biru Unjárga*, directed by Norwegian Sámi Egil Pedersen, was released in 2024 and was screened in cinemas during the beginning of 2025. At the time of writing this thesis, the film is not possible to watch anywhere, and must therefore be excluded from this research. The film is a coming of age film, and as it is a Nordic co-production, it features several languages including North Sámi, Norwegian, Danish and English.

³ The films will be referred to by their international titles from now on.

⁴ Kääpä, Pietari. "NORTHERN EXPOSURES AND MARGINAL CRITIQUES: THE POLITICS OF SOVEREIGNTY IN SÁMI CINEMA." In *Films on Ice: Cinemas of the Arctic*, edited by Scott MacKenzie and Anna Westerståhl Stenport, 45–58. Edinburgh University Press, 2015.
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.3366/j.ctt14brwjm.9>.

⁵ MacKenzie, Scott, and Anna Westerståhl Stenport. "Sámi Media Sovereignty and Interventionist Historiography: ENVIRONMENTAL, EXPERIMENTAL, AND ARCHIVAL POLITICS." In *New Arctic Cinemas: Media Sovereignty and the Climate Crisis*, 1st ed., 115–54. University of California Press, 2023.
<https://doi.org/10.2307/jj.455897.9>. pp. 134

Furthermore, it is important to note the feminist tendencies present in Sámi cinema, with several female directors, as well as depictions of complex female characters, where the films often take place from their perspectives. However, as directors such as Katja Gauriloff and Sara Margrethe Oskal have made Sámi documentaries and short films, the area of feminist representation and agency will be excluded in this thesis, as these subjects, mainly due to their vastness, would require a thesis on their own.

After this section of the thesis, where the method has been explained, the theory which will be applied, more specifically visual sovereignty, is going to be thoroughly reviewed. Then, I will go through previous research on Sámi film, as well as explaining the historical background and context in which Sámi film finds itself. Here, both ethnographic depictions of the Sámi, and then turn to Sámi self-made films will be presented. The chapter after this will be focused on the actual film analysis, where the themes and narratives in Sámi films will be examined. All sub-chapters are organized after themes, and the films are presented chronologically, with short synopses where it is needed. Finally, the thesis will be concluded and the results summarized, before I provide a brief commentary on the research as a whole, as well as future possibilities in connection to Sámi film research.

3. The theory of visual sovereignty

Representation in film is something that has been examined and theorized by many scholars throughout the history of the discipline—however, when researching indigenous films, Michelle H. Raheja presents a notion specifically dedicated to this area. The theory of visual sovereignty is presented by Raheja in *Reservation Reelism: Redfacing, Visual Sovereignty, and Representations of Native Americans in Film*. As Sámi film is a branch of other Indigenous film studies, Raheja's theories are translatable into a Swedish Sámi context. I will explain the notion of visual sovereignty further when describing the method of the thesis. Raheja explains it thusly:

I suggest a reading practice for thinking about the space between resistance and compliance wherein indigenous filmmakers and actors revisit, contribute to, borrow from, critique, and reconfigure ethnographic film conventions, at the same time operating within and stretching the boundaries created by these conventions. Terming this approach "visual sovereignty," I demonstrate how this strategy offers up not only the possibility of engaging and deconstructing white-generated representations of

indigenous people, but more broadly and importantly how it intervenes in larger discussions of Native American sovereignty by locating and advocating for indigenous cultural and political power both within and outside of Western legal jurisprudence.⁶

Using Raheja's descriptions of the ethnographic film representations of the North American Inuit, illustrating Robert Flaherty's *Nanook of the North* (1928) as the main example, it is possible to note rather clear parallels to the depictions of the Sámi in Nordic ethnographic films. According to Raheja, the practice of visual sovereignty started being implemented by North American Natives in the 1960s, but also notes that *Nanook of the North* was affected by Inuit working closely to the production.⁷ The practice of visual sovereignty encourages the visibility of indigenous cultures and issues, while implementing film technologies that highlight indigenous oral storytelling.⁸

Furthermore, Raheja highlights the complexity of visual sovereignty, as it critiques the previous depictions of Indigenous peoples, while still being part of conventions guilty of the previous problematic representations.⁹ It is also possible to connect visual sovereignty to Fourth Cinema, as Raheja explains that the notion of Third Cinema, which emerged from post-colonial theory, mostly entails the practices of filmmakers in other colonized parts of the world, while Fourth Cinema and its "indigenous aesthetics with their attendant focus on a particular geographical space, discrete cultural practices, social activist texts, notions of temporality that do not delink the past from the present or future, and spiritual traditions."¹⁰ In this way, indigenous filmmaking operates within an indigenous framework, which differs from the practices of Third Cinema filmmakers.¹¹ Using *Nanook of the North* as a point of departure, Raheja connects and compares it to *Atanarjuat* (English: *The Fast Runner*), a Canadian Inuit film released in 2000 in order to illustrate a concrete example of visual sovereignty. Raheja explains that *Atanarjuat* encourages non-Inuit audiences to reflect around indigenous aesthetics and representations on film.¹² The film also moves away from traditional Hollywood narratives, rooted in the indigenous oral storytelling practices that oftentimes are not rooted in binaries.¹³ Raheja states that

⁶ Raheja, Michelle H. "Reading Nanook's Smile: Visual Sovereignty, Indigenous Revisions of Ethnography, and 'Atanarjuat (The Fast Runner).'" *American Quarterly* 59, no. 4 (2007): 1159–85. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40068484>. pp. 1161

⁷ Ibid. pp. 1161-1162

⁸ Ibid. pp. 1162-1163

⁹ Ibid. pp. 1165

¹⁰ Ibid. pp. 1167

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid. pp. 1168

¹³ Ibid. pp. 1172

[T]he filmmakers self-consciously deploy hallmarks of ethnographic cinematography without interpretive interventions such as the expert talking head. This is done in the service of drawing attention to the film as a film, as opposed to an "authentic" visual record of a vanished past, as part of a larger project of visual sovereignty.¹⁴

In many ways, the practice of visual sovereignty fortifies the act of self-representation, as the voice of an outsider is excluded. By emphasising the film medium as a narrative tool, indigenous directors engage in an act of sovereignty from the oppressive tradition of anthropological film, which has dominated indigenous representation. Indigenous directors might still use anthropological visual conventions, but with their own chosen narrative.

As noted here, the notion of visual sovereignty is rooted in North American indigenous cultural practices, but the focus on the ethnographic material and the reappropriation of these practices can confidently be applied to Sámi filmmaking (as well as other indigenous cinema cultures).

Here, it is also important to note that through this theory, Sámi cinema largely connects to *Fourth Cinema* rather than *Third Cinema*, even if some of the post-colonial and decolonial ideas interconnect and overlap. Referring to Maori scholar Barry Barclay's ideas, the authors of the chapter "Sámi Media Sovereignty and Interventionist Historiography" in *New Arctic Cinemas* note that Fourth Cinema "is articulated a posteriori, championing anticolonial and decolonial strategies as a constituent part of what we define as interventionist historiography".¹⁵ Notably, the indigenous people's historic disconnection from the borders of nations is also important, and one of the reasons the ideas of Fourth Cinema differ from Third Cinema practices.¹⁶ These ideas are important to know and to keep in mind when delving into indigenous cinema research, as indigenous histories (including oppression and violence) can differ from histories of nation states.

¹⁴ Raheja, Michelle H. "Reading Nanook's Smile: Visual Sovereignty, Indigenous Revisions of Ethnography, and 'Atanarjuat (The Fast Runner).'" *American Quarterly* 59, no. 4 (2007): 1159–85. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40068484> pp. 1174

¹⁵ MacKenzie, Scott, and Anna Westerstahl Stenport. "Sámi Media Sovereignty and Interventionist Historiography: ENVIRONMENTAL, EXPERIMENTAL, AND ARCHIVAL POLITICS." In *New Arctic Cinemas: Media Sovereignty and the Climate Crisis*, 1st ed., 115–54. University of California Press, 2023. <https://doi.org/10.2307/jj.455897.9>. pp. 116

¹⁶ Ibid.

4. Previous research

As previously stated, the amount of research on Sámi film is somewhat limited, seemingly due to the fact that the Sámi population is small and thus lacks a larger amount of films produced. However, there have been several articles written on the subject, many of them fruitful for this thesis. These articles include for instance “Changes in Film Representations of Sami Culture and Identity” by Anne-Kari Skarðhamar, “‘Call the Norwegian embassy!’: The Alta conflict, Indigenous narrative and political change in the activist films *The Taking of Sámiland* and *Let the River Live*” and “Dealing with racism: Colonial history and colonization of the mind in the autoethnographic and Indigenous film *Sami Blood*” by Stine Agnete Sand, and “Ghosts Haunting the Norwegian House: Racialization in Norway and *The Kautokeino Rebellion*” by Adriana Margareta Dancus.

Furthermore, Sámi film falls under the scope of both Arctic cinema as well as Indigenous cinema, both of which there is also useful research on the subject in a broader sense. Research on other minority cinemas can also be applied to the area of Sámi film, so the lack of research on Sámi film specifically does not have to be an obstacle as it relates to this thesis and other research on the area.

One important contribution to research on arctic and Sámi cinemas is the book *Films on Ice: Cinemas of the Arctic*, edited by Anna Westerståhl Stenport and Scott McKenzie.¹⁷ The most relevant articles from the book are “Northern exposures and marginal critiques: The politics of visual sovereignty in Sámi cinema” by Pietari Kääpä and “Cultural stereotypes and negotiations in Sámi cinema” by Monica Kim Mecsei.¹⁸ Both articles offer valuable insight into self-representation, visual sovereignty and the handling of stereotypes in Sámi cinema. However, the articles on other indigenous arctic cinema are also of relevance, as they handle similar notions and questions, providing other insightful perspectives. Westerståhl Stenport’s and McKenzie’s more recent book *New Arctic Cinemas: Media Sovereignty and the Climate Crisis* also include several articles important to Sámi film research, for instance the chapter “Sámi Media Sovereignty and Interventionist Historiography”.¹⁹

Adriana Margareta Dancus’ article “Sámi Identity across Generations: From Passing

¹⁷ MacKenzie, Scott, and Anna Westerståhl Stenport, eds. *Films on Ice: Cinemas of the Arctic*. Edinburgh University Press, 2015. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.3366/j.ctt14brwjm>.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ MacKenzie, Scott, and Anna Westerståhl Stenport. “Sámi Media Sovereignty and Interventionist Historiography: ENVIRONMENTAL, EXPERIMENTAL, AND ARCHIVAL POLITICS.” In *New Arctic Cinemas: Media Sovereignty and the Climate Crisis*, 1st ed., 115–54. University of California Press, 2023. <https://doi.org/10.2307/jj.455897.9>.

for Nordics to Sámi Self-Exposure” is also of relevance and important for my research, as she examines the connection between Norwegian Sámi documentaries and *Sámi Blood* (2016), while looking at self exposure.²⁰ Faroese scholar Anne-Kari Skarðhamar also deals with Sámi film and representation in the article “Changes in Film Representations of Sami Culture and Identity”.²¹ She researches how Sámi identity is represented in films from Finnmark in Norway between the years 1929 to 2007, an analysis useful when looking at Sámi films from different eras in Sweden as well.²²

Apart from these academic articles, there are two dissertations focusing on Sámi film, one written in the United Kingdom and the other in Norway. The British dissertation, *Decolonising the eye: visual sovereignty in Sámi film and storytelling*, is written by Erin Kelsey Lee at Durham University.²³ Specifically, Lee researches the Norwegianization of the Sámi in Norway, looking at stereotypes in Nordic mainstream media.²⁴ Lee states that

“The Sámi and other global indigenous groups have been forced to grapple with the widespread misapprehensions of majority cultures as well as stereotypical, simplistic, and reductive depictions of their lives, epistemologies, and identities in both ethnographic media and other forms of global cinema.”²⁵

This perspective is important in researching Sámi film and visual sovereignty, and provides a valuable point of departure in my own research, especially when looking at the shift to self representation.

The other dissertation, written at Tromsø University in Norway, is *Religion som samisk identitetsmarkør: fire studier av film* (English: *Religion as Sámi identity marker: Four studies on Sámi film*) by Cato Christensen.²⁶ The thesis, written in Norwegian, examines the films *Pathfinder* (1987) and *The Kautokeino Rebellion* (2008), directed by Norwegian Sámi director Nils Gaup.²⁷ Christensen uses a perspective of social constructionism when analyzing

²⁰ Dancus, Adriana Margareta. “Sámi Identity across Generations: From Passing for Nordics to Sámi Self-Exposure.” *Journal of Critical Mixed Race Studies* 1, no. 2 (2022): 262–76. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/48680649>.

²¹ Skardhamar, Anne-Kari. “Changes in Film Representations of Sami Culture and Identity”, *Nordlit: Tidsskrift i litteratur og kultur*, Vol. 12, no. 1, (2022)

²² Ibid.

²³ Lee, Kelsey. E., *Decolonising the eye: visual sovereignty in Sámi film and storytelling*, Durham University (2022)

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Christensen, Cato. *Religion som samisk identitetsmarkør: fire studier av film*, University of Tromsø (2013)

²⁷ Ibid.

the films, and focuses on the notions of *religion*, (Sámi) *identity* and *ethnicity*.²⁸ Christensen also handles concepts such as colonialism, global trends and Sámi cultural revitalization.²⁹

5. Background and historical context: The Sámi and cinema

In order to fully understand the history and themes of Sámi self-representation in film, it is useful to look at the history of the Sámi culture and film as a medium more broadly.

Unfortunately, the Sámi people and their cultures still remain unfamiliar to many. In Norway, Sweden, Finland and a small part of Western Russia, the Sámi have lived for thousands of years, and are thus regarded as an Indigenous people of the area.³⁰ This area, called Sápmi—the land of the Sámi—spreads across the national borders of mentioned countries. However, the Sámi culture and languages differ from the cultures of the majority population of these countries. Unlike Swedish, Norwegian and Russian, the Sámi languages are Finno-Ugric, and are thus not understandable for the majority of the populations of the countries where they reside³¹. In many ways, the Sámi culture is thus rather different from the cultures of the Fennoscandian countries. For instance, reindeer husbandry, traditional craftsmanship and yoik (Sámi chanting) are all central to Sámi culture, and differ from the cultural traditions of the nation states of Fennoscandia.

Moreover, similarly to many other indigenous groups, the Sámi people have been subjected to racial discrimination and assimilation policies throughout history. Here, I will mostly focus on the Swedish history of the oppression, as well as parts of similar events in Norway. However, the Swedish history of abuse will stand as representative for how it worked in Norway and Finland, as the histories and cultures share many of the historical and current oppressive elements. In the then Swedish part of Sápmi, a colonization process started as early as the thirteen hundreds, something that later has been called *internal colonialism*.³² During the 1600-1700s, the Sámi people were christianized. Sámi pre-christian religions had several matters in common with other Indigenous religions, especially from the same

²⁸ Christensen, Cato. *Religion som samisk identitetsmarkør: fire studier av film*, University of Tromsø (2013)

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ “Historia”, samer.se, accessed 2025-05-20, <https://samer.se/historia>

³¹ Just as Finnish, the Sámi languages are Finno-Ugric, but not are not necessarily understandable to one another.

³² Höglund, Johan, and Linda Andersson Burnett. “Introduction: Nordic Colonialisms and Scandinavian Studies.” *Scandinavian Studies* 91, no. 1–2 (2019): 1–12. <https://doi.org/10.5406/scanstud.91.1-2.0001>. pp. 3-5

latitudes as Sápmi, and focused heavily on nature and its elements.³³ Nowadays, churches and christian traditions are important to many Sámi – including confirmation, weddings and funerals.

Furthermore, an important part of Swedish history that affected the early ethnographic films of the Sámi was the eugenics movement, taking off in the early 1920s.³⁴ Racial biologist Herman Lundborg founded the State Institute of Racial Biology, and this led to a process of systematic abuse in the name of “science”. This included, for instance, measuring of skulls (phrenology), ethnographic pictures of nude Sámi people against their consent, and the propagandizing of the Sámi as exotic and lesser than the majority. Lundborg’s ideas were based upon the classifications by Swedish botanist Carl von Linné (Carl Linnaeus), where humans were put into various sub-races.³⁵ One of Lundborg’s books on racial biology from 1919, called *Svenska Folktyper*, different groups of people in Sweden are classified by ethnic background. The book, which is still easily accessible, includes images and descriptions of the different “racial groups”, as Lundborg calls them. The following quote, where Lundborg describes the Sámi, illustrates and summarizes much of his eugenic ideas from this time:

The Lapps, which in Sweden consist of just over 7000 people, differ from both Swedes and Finns. The Lapp is short; the hair dark, often black or black-brown, straggly; weak beard growth; eyes brown; yellowish skin; short skull; the face wide and short, with prominent cheekbones and a small lower jaw; nose often concave. [...] Among the Lapps, mixed types frequently occur, indicating that they have received both Swedish and Finnish blood.³⁶

It is during this era, the rise of ethnographic films of Sámi people occurred. Many of These films can today be found on the Swedish archive Filmarkivet.se (The Swedish Film Archive), an online archive run by the Swedish Film Institute. In May 2023, Filmarkivet launched, together with Ájtte (The Sámi Museum), The Sámi Parliament and The Swedish Film Institute, 150 new films with Sámi content on Filmarkivet’s website.³⁷ The collection is called *Sapmi på film* (*Sapmi on film*), and the different films are to be seen from the

³³ “Kunskap om den samiska religionen”, samer.se, accessed 2025-05-24, <https://samer.se/3627>

³⁴ “Koloniseringen av Sápmi”, samer.se, accessed 2025-05-20, <https://samer.se/3600>

³⁵ MacKenzie, Scott, and Anna Westerståhl Stenport. “Sámi Media Sovereignty and Interventionist Historiography: ENVIRONMENTAL, EXPERIMENTAL, AND ARCHIVAL POLITICS.” In *New Arctic Cinemas: Media Sovereignty and the Climate Crisis*, 1st ed., 115–54. University of California Press, 2023. <https://doi.org/10.2307/jj.455897.9> pp. 146

³⁶ Lundborg, Herman. *Svenska folktyper : bildgalleri, ordnat efter rasbiologiska principer och försett med en orienterande översikt*, Stockholm: Tullberg, 1919,

<https://www.alvin-portal.org/alvin/view.jsf?pid=alvin-record%3A104403&dswid=8491> pp. 10

³⁷ “Sapmi på film”, Filmarkivet, accessed 2024-04-20 <https://www.filmarkivet.se/teman/sapmi-pa-film/>

perspective of the majority group in Sweden, while the Sámi are one of the official Swedish minorities. In the introduction of the collection, it is stated that due to the contents of the films, they need to be understood within their context, and therefore there are ethical recommendations that the viewer can read beforehand.³⁸

5.1 Ethnographic films

Many of the ethnographic films featuring Sámi people can be found at Filmarkivet.se, as well as on other governmentally run channels, for instance at the online archival sections of SVT (Swedish Television) and NRK (The Norwegian Broadcasting Corporation). As previously mentioned, Filmarkivet launched their ambitious project *Sápmi på film* in 2023, and the featured ethical recommendations note that

Some of the earlier films display a simplified and stereotypical image of the Sámi and Sámi culture due to the norms of the time, where there for instance occurs an offensive use of language.³⁹

The ethical recommendations also note that it is uncertain whether all the people featured in the filmic material had consented to it, and how some Sámi expressed a feeling of being exoticized as they were forced to be photographed or filmed.⁴⁰ The archival material mostly consists of newsreels, but there are also quite a few short documentaries—everything produced between the early 1900s and 1980s.

An early example of ethnographic films featuring Sámi people, found at Filmarkivet, is *Med svenska lappar på vårflyttning* (1915, English: *Spring Relocation with Swedish Lapps*).⁴¹ In this silent short film, we follow a Sámi family relocating their reindeer from Sweden to Norway during spring. The footage features Sámi men, dressed in traditional clothes, herding reindeer across snow covered landscapes and mountains. There is also footage of Sámi children taking part in school activities inside of a *lávvu*⁴² with a female Sámi teacher. The short documentary *Med svenska renar till Norges nordkust* (1920, English: *With Swedish Reindeer to the Northern Norwegian Coast*),⁴³ is very similar, as it also features reindeer

³⁸ “Sápmi på film”, Filmarkivet, accessed 2024-04-20 <https://www.filmarkivet.se/teman/sapmi-pa-film/>

³⁹ Nilsson, Ragnhild. “Etiska rekommendationer”, Svenska Filminstitutet & Kungliga Biblioteket, 2023, https://www.filmarkivet.se/wp-content/uploads/Etiska-rekommendationer_Sapmi-pa-film_Filmarkivet.se_.pdf

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ *Med svenska lappar på vårflyttning* (1915), Pathé. Kungliga Biblioteket. <https://www.filmarkivet.se/movies/med-svenska-lappar-pa-varflyttning/>

⁴² Lavvú is the North Sámi word for a tent similar to a tipi, in Swedish also often referred to as a *kåta*.

⁴³ *Med svenska renar till Norges nordkust* (1920) Svenska Biografteatern. Kungliga Biblioteket.

herding practices where reindeer are relocated across the Swedish-Norwegian border. It also features landscapes and mountains covered in snow, and Sámi men herding reindeer, but unlike *Spring Relocation with Swedish Lapps*, this one contains intertitles explaining the reindeer herding practices. It also includes closeups of Sámi elders, and images of Sámi women and men doing daily work, such as cooking and chopping wood, around the area where they live. The Sámi are depicted as simple beings, and mirror some of the ideas of Herman Lundborg, connecting the Sámi to nature, but not on their own terms.

Filmarkivet also features the feature length drama documentary *Med ackja och ren i Inka Lántas vinterland* (1926, English: *With Ackja and Reindeer in Inka Lánta's Winterland*), directed by the Swede Erik Bergström.⁴⁴ It was digitally restored by the Swedish Film Institute in 2021, and follows the Sámi woman Inka Lánta and her family through an everyday life centered around reindeer herding, and a visit to the famous Jokkmokks marknad (the Jokkmokk Market).⁴⁵ Unsurprisingly, as we have seen in the previously mentioned films, this drama-documentary displays beautifully snow covered landscapes, reindeer, lávvus, traditional clothes and crafts. As it also is a silent film, it includes intertitles explaining the events, and especially the exclusively Sámi practices, that might be alien to the general Swedish audiences. The first intertitle of the film utters that “when the winter comes to Lapland, the trees are beautifully dressed in snow. Then, the lapps travel from the mountain to the forest.” Act two starts off with an intertitle stating that “at the beginning of February, there is a market in Jokkmokk. Inka has to prepare the ackjas”. This is followed by another intertitle explaining that the men are fetching the reindeer that help pull the ackjas. Thus, the film tends to become somewhat pedagogical, as it in many ways seems to be made for non-Sámi audiences to enjoy and learn from.

Arne Sucksdorff also directed an 18 minutes long drama documentary in 1942, called *Vinden från väster* (English: *The Western Wind*).⁴⁶ Since the film is made after the arrival of sound, it includes both music and a narrating voice. Once again, the film includes snow covered mountains, nature, reindeer and beautiful landscapes. In fact, the narration is somewhat poetic, as it describes the nature and arrival of spring. The Sámi are wearing traditional clothing, skiing and herding reindeer, and as they are relocating the reindeer, the

<https://www.filmarkivet.se/movies/episoder-ur-svenska-nomadlapparnas-liv-1914-stockholms-kolonitradgardar-1914/>

⁴⁴ *Med ackja och ren i Inka Lántas vinterland* (1926, dir. Erik Bergström) AB Svensk Filmindustri. Svenska Filminstitutet. <https://www.filmarkivet.se/movies/med-ackja-och-ren-i-inka-lantas-vinterland/>

⁴⁵ The Jokkmokk market has been around for over 400 years, and is still an important event for many Sámi, as they gather, dress up in folk dresses, sell crafted goods and party. <https://jokkmokksmarknad.se/en/welcome/>

⁴⁶ *Vinden från väster* (1942, dir. Arne Sucksdorff) AB Svensk Filmindustri. Svenska Filminstitutet. <https://www.filmarkivet.se/movies/vinden-fran-vaster/>

narrator emphasises that it is not only about reindeer herding, but also an escape from civilisation. Furthermore, the wind from the west becomes a narrator as well, explaining nature and animals to a Sámi boy looking out his school window. The boy is not a nomad, and the western wind illustrates how a nomadic life would look like. Nature is largely emphasised in the film, and most footage contains one or two Sámi people navigating in settings of nature. Suckdorff's documentary short *Sarvtid* (English: *The Time of the Sarv*)⁴⁷, also from 1942, shares themes and narratives with *The Western Wind*. The film starts off with a Sámi woman milking a goat, and the narrator explains that she will soon be working at an office. However, the narrator firmly states that the Sámi man Petter Ailu Kallok is a "reindeer lapp with all his soul". Similarly to the other films, the relocation of the reindeer is centered, together with the reindeer and nature. The Sámi are clearly connected to reindeer herding, and the narrator, once again pedagogically, tells the story of the reindeer slaughter, and the details of how all the parts of the reindeer are used and how hard the Sámi work.

Even if these are only a few examples of early ethnographic films depicting Sámi people, the themes of the Sámi connected to reindeer and nature are rather distinct. Monica Kim Mecsei note the themes of feature or narrative films depicting Sámi from the early 1900s, such as *Marken grøde* (1921, English: *The Growth of the Soil*), *Viddenes folk* (1928, English: *People of the Highlands*) and *Laila* (1929).⁴⁸ Mecsei states that

The films of the 1920s represent Sámi culture as ambivalent, varying from demonising to romanticising representations. This is in accordance with the dominant attitude towards Sámi culture in the interwar period. As such, representations of Sámi culture are regarded as relational and subordinate in the individual film stories, as well as in scholarly studies.⁴⁹

These ideas and their relations to colonialism are further examined by Anne-Kari Skarðhamar, who researches these stereotypes while focusing on *Laila* (1929), and its readaptation from 1937.⁵⁰ She concludes from her analysis that the Sámi are depicted as exotic and ingenious, and references Homi K. Bhaba when illustrating the stereotypes from the perspective of colonialism and ambivalence.⁵¹ This way, the Sámi stereotypes of early

⁴⁷ *Sarvtid* (1942, dir. Arne Sucksdorff) AB Svensk Filmindustri. Kungliga Biblioteket. <https://www.filmarkivet.se/movies/sarvtid/>

⁴⁸ Mecsei, Monica Kim. "CULTURAL STEREOTYPES AND NEGOTIATIONS IN SÁMI CINEMA." In *Films on Ice: Cinemas of the Arctic*, edited by Scott MacKenzie and Anna Westerståhl Stenport, 72–83. Edinburgh University Press, 2015. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.3366/j.ctt14brwjm.11>. pp. 73

⁴⁹ Ibid. pp. 74

⁵⁰ Skarðhamar, Anne-Kari. "Changes in Film Representations of Sami Culture and Identity", *Nordlit: Tidsskrift i litteratur og kultur*, Vol. 12, no. 1, (2022)

⁵¹ Ibid. pp. 294

ethnographic and feature films become evident, and it seems this is mainly due to a lack of self-representation. We cannot go back in time to the beginning of the film medium and introduce its practices to the Sámi, but it is at least possible to look at what happened when the Sámi started representing themselves on film, which will be looked at next.

5.2 Sámi made films, Sámi agency and self-representation

As previously mentioned, *Pathfinder* (1987) can be regarded as the first Sámi film, as it was the first feature length film made by a Sámi director, in a Sámi language, handling Sámi themes.⁵² Mecsei notes that

On 30 September 1987, the first Sámi feature film had its premiere in Norwegian cinema theatres. *Pathfinder*, by Sámi debut director and screen-writer Gaup, represents a significant contribution to the Sámi cultural revitalisation process. Regionally, *Pathfinder* can be related to the cultural and ethno-political awakening among active artists and musicians at that time, as well as to international activism and recognition of indigenous peoples.⁵³

However, before this, films were made that did not include all these factors in Sámi filmmaking. An early example of this is the Finnish film *Valkoinen peura* (English: *The White Reindeer*) from 1952. The folk horror film explores Sámi shamanism, and heavily features Sámi iconography and themes, but is not made by a Sámi director, nor does it feature any spoken Sámi language. There have been other films like this throughout Nordic film history, for instance *Terror in the Midnight Sun* (1959), and the tv series *Midnattssol* (2016, English: *Midnight Sun*), both handling Sámi culture and themes but without any real Sámi interference or agency.

Furthermore, Stine Agnete Sand elaborates on Sámi themed films in her article “‘Call the Norwegian embassy!’: The Alta conflict, Indigenous narrative and political change in the activist films *The Taking of Sámiland* and *Let the River Live*”.⁵⁴ Sand describes two documentary films, the ones included in the title of the article, from the 1970s and how they, despite being made by non-Sámi directors, still are heavily influenced by Sámi agency, for

⁵² Mecsei, Monica Kim. “CULTURAL STEREOTYPES AND NEGOTIATIONS IN SÁMI CINEMA.” In *Films on Ice: Cinemas of the Arctic*, edited by Scott MacKenzie and Anna Westerståhl Stenport, 72–83. Edinburgh University Press, 2015. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.3366/j.ctt14brwjm.11>. pp 75

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Sand, Stine Agnete. 2022. “‘Call the Norwegian Embassy!’: The Alta Conflict, Indigenous Narrative and Political Change in the Activist Films *The Taking of Sámiland* and *Let the River Live*.” *Journal of Scandinavian Cinema* 12 (1): 57–70. doi:10.1386/jsca_00064_1.

instance through Sámi producers.⁵⁵ Both documentaries, *Mo Sámi Valdēt* (English: *The Taking of Samiland*) and *La elva leve!* (English: *Let the River Live*) handle Sámi conflicts regarding land rights and environment from the era in which they were produced. However, Sand still notes that the films, which are nuanced documentaries, can be criticized for romanticism of the Sámi.⁵⁶ In the end, these films still stand as examples for early Sámi self-representation, as they have somewhat of a Sámi insider perspective. This also shines light on the discrepancies between Sámi documentaries and Sámi feature films. As the early ethnographic material is documentary, it seems safe to say that making documentaries about the Sámi people and Sámi issues were somewhat close at hand, especially when considering the first Sámi feature films weren't made until 1987.

5.3 The International Sámi Film Institute

An important factor in Sámi filmmaking during the last decade is the International Sámi Film Institute. Founded in 2009, the institute supports Sámi filmmakers through different means, such as funding and workshops, and is run by the Norwegian Sámi parliament as well as Guovdageaidnu Municipality.⁵⁷ The ISFI values, as stated on their website, consist of brave, positive and forward thinking, being proactive, borderless thinking, respect, collaboration, and seeking guidance.⁵⁸ On their website, they also note that “through our own stories and films, we fight for the survival of Sámi culture, values and languages. By telling our stories we create our future.”⁵⁹ ISFI has also published goals on the website, which clearly illustrates the aim and focus of the institute:

- “The Sámi people have a rich offer of quality films and digital stories in our own languages.
- Work for more Sámi content in all genres; feature films, drama series, animations and games for children and youth.
- Sámi children and youth productions in Sámi languages are a major priority.
- Sámi films are available and attractive on all platforms to all publics [audiences] in Sápmi and internationally.

⁵⁵ Sand, Stine Agnete. 2022. “‘Call the Norwegian Embassy!’: The Alta Conflict, Indigenous Narrative and Political Change in the Activist Films *The Taking of Samiland* and *Let the River Live*.” *Journal of Scandinavian Cinema* 12 (1): 57–70. doi:10.1386/jsca_00064_1.. pp 67

⁵⁶ Ibid. pp. 66

⁵⁷ “About”, International Sámi Film Institute, accessed 2025-04-24, <https://isfi.no/about/>

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

- Sámi people and culture have global value and we enrich diversity.⁶⁰

This highlights confidence in Sámi filmmaking and storytelling, as well as the need for visibility of the Sámi culture and languages. Furthermore, ISFI also runs the streaming service Sapmifilm, offering a wide selection of Sámi films (many of them documentaries and shorts) as well as other Indigenous and/or Arctic films.

Despite ISFI receiving funding from the Norwegian government, they finance films from the other Nordic countries as well. In many ways, ISFI's practices are as borderless as Sápmi itself. The majority of Sámi films are Nordic co-productions – for instance, *Sámi Blood* is a co-production between Sweden, Norway and Denmark, and the same goes for *The Kautokeino Rebellion*.⁶¹ Thus, the practices of ISFI reach a lot farther than Sápmi, as they in recent years are an important actor in the Nordic—or even international—film context in general. For instance, when Disney released *Frozen 2* in 2019, it was clear that the Northuldra people in the film were based on the Sámi.⁶² In order to avoid being insensitive, Disney collaborated and consulted with different Sámi actors—for instance Anne Lajla Utsi, the president of ISFI. Through this collaboration, Sámi representatives were present at the red carpet premiere of *Frozen 2* in Los Angeles. According to Marie Enoksson at The Swedish Sámi Parliament, this presence was a tool to show that the Sámi are real, and not fairytale characters.⁶³

6. Analyzing Sámi self-representation

Many Sámi share similar stories, due to the systematic oppression previously described. When watching and researching all Sámi feature films, some themes—both visual and narratological—come off as very clear. Some of the more clear themes I will look at here are ones of nature and language, however, some more discrete and surprising recurring themes will also be looked at, for instance, ones of family relations as well as death and burials. In this analysis, I will go through these themes one by one and illustrate in which films they occur and how, mainly by analysing specific scenes. When doing this, I will connect the films

⁶⁰ “About”, International Sámi Film Institute, accessed 2025-04-24, <https://isfi.no/about/>

⁶¹ “Kautokeino-upproret (2008)”, Svensk Filmdatabas, <https://www.svenskfilmdatabas.se/sv/item/?type=film&itemid=62464#companies>

⁶² Sunna, Anna. “Snart premiär för ovanligt filmsamarbete”, Sameradion, 2019-11-06, accessed 2025-04-25, <https://www.sverigesradio.se/artikel/7338005>

⁶³ Ibid.

to the notion of visual sovereignty, which will more clearly illustrate the themes present in Sámi self-representation. Naturally, much of these thematic categories overlap, and some of them are bound to aesthetic and visual depictions, while others are based on dialogue, narrative or sound.

6.1 Language and cultural identity: Abandonment and reclamation

The first theme I will be examining is the loss and reclamation of language. This can occur in both implicit and explicit ways; sometimes included in, as well as important to the plot, and sometimes mainly through the occurrence of the Sámi languages themselves in these films. It is important to note that the Sámi people speak several different Sámi languages. These languages are related to each other, but differ in many ways and are spoken by different amounts of speakers. North Sámi is the language with the most speakers, estimated to 15 - 20 000 people, mainly in Sweden, Norway and Finland. The rest of the Sámi languages are small and even threatened – Lule Sámi with an estimated 1 000 - 2 000 speakers (in Sweden and Norway), South Sámi with 500 speakers (in Sweden and Norway), Inari Sámi with around 400 speakers (in Finland), Skolt Sámi with 300 speakers (mainly in Finland), and Kildin Sámi with 600 speakers (in Russia). Ume Sámi and Pite Sámi are even smaller, with approximately 20 speakers each in Sweden and Norway, and other Sámi languages are extinct today.⁶⁴ With this in mind, if making films in a Sámi language is in fact an act of language reclamation, all these films participate in this act. Interestingly, making films in the Sámi languages mostly requires Sámi actors, making visible and creating creative spaces for indigenous actors and artists.

Starting off by delving into the first Sámi film *Pathfinder*, which is fully in North Sámi. The language in the film is never handled explicitly, but is just there as something obvious. Making a film in a minority language itself is notable, and *Pathfinder* was the first film made in a Sámi language. According to Skarðhamar, the film positively affected the self-esteem of the Sámi population.⁶⁵ The second Sámi film, *Minister of the State*, includes North Sámi, Swedish, Finnish, Norwegian and German. There, the languages are not really commented upon, but rather exist harmoniously, as most of the characters are bilingual or trilingual, which in reality does happen around Sápmi, as people grow up in close proximity to the different national borders.

⁶⁴ “North Sámi”, Ethnologue, accessed 2025-04-15, <https://www.ethnologue.com/language/sme/>

⁶⁵ Skardhamar, Anne-Kari. “Changes in Film Representations of Sami Culture and Identity”, Nordlit: Tidsskrift i litteratur og kultur, Vol. 12, no. 1, (2022) pp. 298

Notably, the Sámi films actively handling the subjects of language are still quite sparse. *The Kautokeino Rebellion* somewhat handles language conflicts by showcasing the divide between the Sámi in Guovdageaidnu (Kautokeino) and the local Norwegians and Swedes, something Adriana Margareta Dancus also notes.⁶⁶ The use of language in the film highlights the tight-knit Sámi community present in the film, and excludes for instance two of the antagonists of the film, who do not speak the language. The film mainly takes place in Norwegian Sápmi, but as the film is a Scandinavian co-production, it includes Swedish speakers (such as famous actors Mikael Persbrandt and Michael Nyqvist), and Danish actor Nikolaj Coster-Waldau, who speaks somewhat of a simple Danish. Due to the dynamics of the Nordic languages, everyone can understand each other with one exception: the Scandinavian language speakers do not understand Sámi. This notion strengthens the agency of the Sámi as a group, who can navigate with power in the landscape—both literally and metaphorically.

A film which more deeply handles issues concerning language is *Sámi Blood*. The film, which includes dialogues in both Swedish and South Sámi, takes place during the oppressive eugenic politics during the 1930s. The film follows main protagonist Elle Marja (Lene Cecilia Sparrok), a south Sámi girl, who gets sent to a nomadic school together with her younger sister Njenna (Mia Sparrok). There, they are forced to speak Swedish rather than South Sámi, something that Elle Marja excels at compared to many of the other children. She has to tell her sister to speak Swedish to avoid punishment from the teachers, and this type of discussion is present throughout the scenes at the nomadic school. Early on in the film, when Elle Marja and her sister Njenna sit in their classroom with other Sámi children, all wearing folk dresses, their Swedish teacher gives the Sámi boy Jávva the task of reading a christian text in Swedish out loud. He fails, and the teacher whips his hands with her stick. Njenna is terrified, looking at her older sister, saying in South Sámi that the teacher knows she cannot recite it either. Elle Marja tells her to be quiet, but the teacher who has heard them speak Sámi approaches them and exclaims that they must speak Swedish only. Consequently, she whips the hands of both sisters as well. She goes on to ask Elle Marja to recite the text, which she does perfectly. She looks proud, with a content smile on her lips, and the teacher tells the children that Elle Marja will be the one to greet the visitors from Uppsala which soon will

⁶⁶ Dancus, Adriana Margareta. "Ghosts Haunting the Norwegian House: Racialization in Norway and *The Kautokeino Rebellion*." *Framework: The Journal of Cinema and Media* 55, no. 1 (2014): 121–39. <https://doi.org/10.13110/framework.55.1.0121>. pp. 129

visit. This scene clearly illustrates the climate at schools during this era, where Sámi children were forbidden to speak their mother tongues.

Later, also at the nomadic school, Elle Marja and the other Sámi children are subjected to the realities of eugenics, as phrenologic researchers from Uppsala visit the school in order to examine the children. Elle Marja has her skull and face measured, and is forced to pose nude for photographs, in the name of science. Local boys peek at her through the window and she is abused and bullied by them for being Sámi. All of this, along with her reverence for her Swedish teacher Kristina and a budding adolescent love for a military boy from Uppsala stationed in Sápmi, makes Elle Marja leave her family, culture and language. She takes the name of Kristina, burns her traditional Sámi clothes and moves to Uppsala. Thus, she abandons her Sámi identity as well as native language in order to approach and embrace a Swedish identity. As Elle Marja comes to increasingly deny her Sámi identity, she also begins to speak more Swedish—looking up to her Swedish teacher and reading books about university life in Uppsala. When escaping to Uppsala, where she speaks only Swedish, her denial of her language becomes a relief to her, as she now rarely needs to face any abuse because of her cultural identity.

The issue of language is also a dominating theme in the 2023 film *Ellos eatnu - Let the River Flow*, which takes place in the Norwegian part of Sápmi in the 1970s. Depicting the protests in Alta against the construction of a new hydroelectric plant, the story follows the character of Ester (Ella Marie Hætta Isaksen), a Sámi girl who comes to rediscover her somewhat lost Sámi identity—despite her speaking fluent North Sámi.

The film starts off with Ester visiting her mother, stepfather and half brother in northern Norway. The family relations seem somewhat strained, and Ester and her mother mix both Norwegian and North Sámi when talking to each other. Later on, Ester is picked up by her cousin Mihkkal (Gard Emil Elvenes), who arrives in his car while wearing a North Sámi folk dress, making a point of speaking Sámi to his family members. Mihkkal engages Ester in the Alta protests, rendering Ester interested in her identity and family relations, as both Ester and her mother have become rather Norwegianized, in contrast to Mihkkal. Through her cousin, Ester is introduced to the protests taking place in Alta, and is thus introduced to a Sámi community in touch with both their language and culture. The Sámi language in the film, and how Ester approaches it more and more, represents a more general cultural reclamation, especially as her mother consistently denies her Sámi heritage and is reluctant to speak Sámi, as she wants to be left alone and not face any abuse for her cultural background.

Another film which centralizes the Sámi language, without necessarily mentioning much oppression directly, is the 2023 film *Je'vida*, directed by Skolt Sámi Katja Gauriloff. In many ways, *Je'vida* shares many plot elements with *Sámi Blood*, as both films handle female Sámi characters through different time periods, and who both struggle with their Sámi identities, families and languages due to systemic oppression and internalized shame. In *Je'vida*, we follow the main character of Je'vida/Iida during three different periods of her life: childhood (portrayed by Agafia Niemenmaa), young adulthood (Heidi U'lljan Gauriloff) and at an older age (Sanna-Kaisa Palo). The film follows the assimilation process of the main character, as she starts off as a small child helping her grandfather fish in the Finnish countryside in the 1940s or 1950s. After the death of her grandfather and her mother, and after going through Finnish boarding school, Je'vida abandons her Sámi identity more and more. After meeting a Finnish man as a young adult in the 1960s, Je'vida takes on the name Iida and moves south, she has effectively become a new version of herself. The film is cut back and forth to the present day, where Je'vida meets her estranged niece for the first time, and the two of them go back to the childhood home of Je'vida with the prospects of potentially selling it. Now, Je'vida, or Iida, is a bitter old woman, hiding and denying the family's Sámi identity to her niece. The dialogues in the film are in Skolt Sámi and Finnish, and as a child, Je'vida struggles to learn Finnish but is forced to do so in the unforgiving school system. Later on, as a young adult, Je'vida only speaks Skolt Sámi with her grandmother, and as an old woman, she only uses Finnish as she speaks to her niece. This way, the film illustrates the trajectory of many Sámi during these periods of time, without necessarily commenting on it in a clear way. Like in *Ellos Eatnu - Let the River Flow*, the Sámi language largely represents the Sámi culture in general, but in *Je'vida*, the language and culture disappear more and more. Both *Sámi Blood* and *Ellos Eatnu - Let the River Flow* comment on the issues of language and identity more candidly and distinctly.

Much like *Pathfinder*, *The Tundra Within Me* never really addresses the spoken North Sámi—the language is merely implicit, thus becoming an act of reclamation. Within these two films, language is simply a natural reality within the overall narrative. In *The Tundra Within Me*, directed by Sara Margrethe Oskal, North Sámi is the primary spoken language, apart from a few lines uttered by the son of the main character who is not fully used to speaking Sámi. The film takes place in a contemporary setting, and tells the story of Sámi artist Lena (Risten Anne Kvernmo Gaup), who revisits her native village together with her son. The aim of her stay is to create art based on the experiences of female reindeer herders. During her work process, she encounters reindeer herder Máhtte (Nils Ailu Kemi), and they

fall in love. Thus, the film differs slightly from the other films examined in this thesis, as it is more of a romantic drama. However, it still centers the North Sámi language, and as the ordeals the couple encounters are mainly due to Sámi livelihood, such as reindeer herding and economics connected to it, the film still becomes a clear commentary on Sámi contemporary issues.

Moreover, in *Stolen*, the language works much the same way as in *The Tundra Within Me*. The Sámi characters in the film switch freely between North Sámi and Swedish, and if anything, Sámi becomes normalized and almost unnoteworthy in the film. This normal and realistic way of including a Sámi language is somewhat relieving, as the rest of the elements of the film are many and serious. However, the theme of oppressive language policies are fleetingly described in a scene at the Sámi school, where the main character Elsa (Elin Kristina Oskal) works as a substitute teacher. During one lesson, Elsa notes that an important thing in Sámi history to remember is that they were not allowed to speak Sámi. One child mentions that his grandmother told him that she was sent to boarding school—to which Elsa elaborates, stating that the children of reindeer herders were sent there, where they had to learn Swedish. Another one of the children raises his hands, and tells the rest of that class “my grandfather says that if his teacher heard him speak Sámi, he would hit him with a ruler”.

Here, everything comes together, as we have now heard the voices of Sámi characters abused at boarding schools, as well as their grandchildren retelling their stories, generations later. The Sámi languages have in these films been handled through acts of reclamation, where the languages have been given attention due to the fact that the films have included those languages, but also through handling oppressive language policies and abuse. In terms of Raheja’s ideas on visual sovereignty, and referring to the ethnographic films, the Sámi self-made films handle similar elements, but instead of using a Swedish, Norwegian or Finnish narrator, the Sámi use their own language to express their own stories, which becomes particularly clear in the films in which Sámi languages are handled explicitly, such as *Sámi Blood*. As such, these filmmakers deconstruct ethnographic conventions, and use these different parts combined with new tools: here, the Sámi languages. But even where the matter of language is more implicitly handled, the process of visual sovereignty becomes central. This is due to other previous ethnographic elements being revisited, such as the iconography, which is conveyed in *The Tundra Within Me*. These ideas will be looked upon in the next chapter, which examines the Sámi iconography more deeply. In light of these acts of language reclamation, one could also ask what would happen to the old ethnographic

films, if the Sámi would have done their own narration, both back then and now—and how that would function within the framework of visual sovereignty.

6.2 Sámi iconography: The folk dress, the reindeer and nature

The Sámi iconography has historically been connected to reindeer, Arctic nature, traditional clothes and handicraft. Just like most cultures, the Sámi are involved in the majority society and the arts present to it. However, when looking upon contemporary Sámi art, music, literature and cinema, classic Sámi iconography is often present or even central. Just in the Swedish part of Sápmi, Sámi visual artists Britta Marakatt-Labba and Anders Sunna process Sámi political and cultural themes in their art, including imagery of reindeer, nature and folk dresses. While referring to the Sámi, Tom G. Svensson explains that

Clothing is also a means to communicate identity through shape and material used, ornamentation applied and sewing technique, which may indicate diverse levels of identity including sex, status, ethnicity and age. Specific costumes may serve as effective visual markers of ethnic distinctiveness, and in numerous contexts they are used internally to reaffirm a sense of belonging and of community. In external articulation particular clothing also symbolizes cultural identity, for example in the political arena in inter-ethnic confrontations of various kinds. Thus, we have to look for varying contexts in which clothing plays a communicative role.⁶⁷

These ideas highlight the intricate meaning of traditional clothes and folk dresses, which evidently have more value than the intrinsic functions of protection against the elements.

Furthermore, notable Sámi musical artists such as Sofia Jannok, Mari Boine, Hilda Länsman, and Maxida Mäarak—just to mention a few—involve yoik in their pop songs, and it is common for them to wear modern versions of folk dresses when performing. Sámi writers such as Ann-Hélén Laestadius and Linnea Axelsson write about present and historical Sámi issues in their popular literature, and their books often include classical Sámi themes such as reindeer, handicrafts and nature. Thus, it is not surprising that these themes are visually central in Sámi filmmaking.

As *Pathfinder* takes place in a historical setting, no contemporary culture is present, meaning the film is more or less based upon a more traditional Sámi iconography than the mentioned modern interpretations. The film takes place during winter, and all the characters are wearing Sámi fur clothes, and the snow-covered landscapes are thoroughly depicted.

⁶⁷ Svensson, Tom G. “Clothing in the Arctic: A Means of Protection, a Statement of Identity.” *Arctic* 45, no. 1 (1992): 62–73. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40511193>. pp. 62

However, the reindeer is present and important, but not as visually recurring as it is in other Sámi films, something which will be delved into more deeply as this thesis continues. Interestingly, as *Pathfinder* is a depiction of the Sámi during pre-Christian times, the Sámi traditional spiritualism emerges as a central factor. After Aigin (Mikkel Gaup) has been chased by the tjudes, the film cuts to images of a site belonging to another Sámi group. The men discuss how their hunting traps were found empty, and that the wolves had been there before them. Together they deliberate, and one of them mentions that Sierge (Sverre Porsanger), one of the men, has located *Darffot*. It is not yet explained that *Darffot* is, and when a child standing close to the men asks what it is, Siida-Isit (Nils-Aslak Valkeapää) answers “*Darffot* is not to be uttered by his true name. At least not right now”, with a grave look on his face. After this, the men gather in a *lávvu*, where one of the men, Raste (Nils Utsi), who is a *noaidi* (a Sámi shaman), performs a ritual with his traditional drum by the fire. After the ritual, the men commence their hunt for *Darffot*. As one of the men dig a hole in the snow, *Darffot* appears—he is a bear, awoken from hibernation. After an action-filled sequence, where the men wrestle and fight the bear, Raste ends up killing it. After killing it, the men perform a spiritual ritual with a necklace made of sharp teeth, and one of them utters “your body, *Darffot*—we promise to consume it with caution and honor. You may transfer to me your luminous heart”, as a *yoik* is performed in the background. The men bring the bear carcass back to their site, where one boy asks a woman where the man who killed the bear is. She answers that he should not ask, and they probably will not see him in three days. It is explained that the one who slays *Darffot*, receives a power dangerous to others, and that their gaze will burn through your eyes. This scene perfectly illustrates old Sámi iconography, where nature has spiritual connotations and is not only a backdrop to everyday life. However, Adriana Margareta Dancus notes that nature becomes an integral part of the film, while Sámi culture and identity work as novelties for marketing purposes internationally, and does not find it political.⁶⁸

Rather than just centering Sámi iconography, *Minister of the State* becomes a potpourri of North Sámi, Norwegian, and Swedish-Finnish culture and language. The film is a comedy, and takes place during World War II, in Sagojokk, a village seemingly located in proximity to *Golmma riikka urna* where Norway, Sweden and Finland all border. Dancus, while in some

⁶⁸ Dancus, Adriana Margareta. “Ghosts Haunting the Norwegian House: Racialization in Norway and *The Kautokeino Rebellion*.” *Framework: The Journal of Cinema and Media* 55, no. 1 (2014): 121–39. <https://doi.org/10.13110/framework.55.1.0121>. pp. 127

ways criticizing Nils Gaup for using Sámi iconography for marketability, views *Minister of the State* differently. She states that

Unlike Gaup, who uses Hollywood genre conventions to universalize a Sami legend from a mythical past, Simma resorts to self-irony to criticize the Sami's naiveté as well as to show the deep sores left by unresolved land and water rights between Norwegian settlers and indigenous Sami. In this film, the historical retrospective is therefore seen as an opportunity to mock Sami stereotypes and use the burlesque to call on both Norwegians and Sami.⁶⁹

In light of this, the Sámi iconography—such as the clothes—is just there, is not commented on, and is just a natural part of the people living in the area. For instance, the first shot of the Sámi character Marit (Sara Margrethe Oskal), shows her walking through the forest with a cow. In fact, she is not wearing any Sámi clothes and we only know about her Sámi background due to the fact that she later on speaks Sámi to other members of the village. In the forest, Marit and another woman find a wounded soldier, Seppo alias Pertti (Erik Kiviniemi), and the rest of the plot is based around the wrongful claim that he is a minister visiting. As the film is based during war time, the film does possess some somber elements—however, as described in the aforementioned quote, the film's Sámi self-irony strengthens its humour, something that will be looked upon more in the section about music and yoik. The river, the forest, the Sámi, the Norwegians, the German soldiers, and the different clothes (both Sámi and other time accurate costumes) all become one absurd blend, where in the end, everything seems to work out.

Similarly to *Pathfinder*, *The Kautokeino Rebellion* is a historical film, and thus also steps away from a more contemporary Sámi iconography. The Sámi are, once again, depicted in fur suits during winter, and tend to the reindeer close to their lávvus. Many parts of the film take place during sunny days, painting the mountainous tundra in its utmost beauty. However, as one of the main characters, Mathis (Aslat Mahtte Gaup), is in debt to the local merchants due to his drinking problem, he and his brother Aslak (Mikkel Gaup), need to hand over some of their reindeer to the merchants as payment. We also see the Sámi travel behind the reindeer on ackjas as a form of transportation. Both these images, together with the depictions of reindeer herding, illustrate the reindeer as an everyday agent, something that is

⁶⁹ Dancus, Adriana Margareta. "Ghosts Haunting the Norwegian House: Racialization in Norway and *The Kautokeino Rebellion*." *Framework: The Journal of Cinema and Media* 55, no. 1 (2014): 121–39. <https://doi.org/10.13110/framework.55.1.0121>. pp. 127

part of the daily routines, and not only an indistinct icon connected to Sámi culture. Monica Kim Mecsei further elaborates on this ideas thus:

The sáminess that is brought about in both films can be related to at least two historical narratives: first, the repetitions of Sámi iconography which disturb the colonial images, and second, self-representation and cultural revitalisation.⁷⁰

She also notes how the reindeer represent the emotions of the main character of Elen Skum, (Anni-Kristiina Juuso) in the film, as they behave calmly or more agitatedly when the film's narrative presents as such.

In *Sámi Blood*, the Sámi iconography is widely present, both as a background setting but also as objects to represent Elle Marja's narrative and emotion. The first scene featuring young Elle-Marja, she is located in the mountains, stroking the fur of a reindeer. She is wearing traditional South Sámi clothes, also known as a *gapta*, as well as reindeer herding tools such as a lasso and a knife. She, together with her sister, are marking a reindeer by cutting its ear, and are later called by their mother. They run to her, and the camera shot shows their Sámi clothes and shoes. They arrive at the *lávvu*, in which they currently reside, where their mother and grandparents await them. Stine Sand makes an interesting note regarding this type of image, stating that

The film is sometimes set in beautiful surroundings, but the camera does not dwell on these locations. This is a character-driven film where Elle Marja's subjective feelings are the most important, not the period or the locations.⁷¹

This is important to keep in mind while both watching and examining many of the Sámi films put this into effect.

In light of this, Njenna cries as her grandmother helps her dress in her finest *gapta* as they are about to leave for boarding school. The clothes and accessories are clearly shown close up during this scene, and the grandmother is also wearing her folk dress in blue and red. The sisters arrive in the nearby village and encounter some local Swedish boys, who laugh while calling the sister slurs. It is clear that the Sáminess of the sisters is obvious to the

⁷⁰ Mecsei, Monica Kim. "CULTURAL STEREOTYPES AND NEGOTIATIONS IN SÁMI CINEMA." In *Films on Ice: Cinemas of the Arctic*, edited by Scott MacKenzie and Anna Westerståhl Stenport, 72–83. Edinburgh University Press, 2015. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.3366/j.ctt14brwjm.11>. pp. 76

⁷¹ Sand, Stine. 2022. "Dealing with Racism: Colonial History and Colonization of the Mind in the Autoethnographic and Indigenous Film *Sami Blood*." *Journal of International and Intercultural Communication* 16 (3): 209–23. doi:10.1080/17513057.2022.2052156. pp. 6

villagers, mainly due to their traditional folk dresses, thus making them vulnerable to harassment in the local area.

At the school, all the children are wearing their Sámi folk dresses, and as the researchers from Uppsala arrive, one of the women in this company walks closely to the children, touching their clothes, jewelry and hair, noting how beautiful they are. This all happens before the previously described ethnographic photography session and Elle Marja being physically attacked by the local Swedish boys. Some time after this, on a beautiful sunny day, Elle Marja is hanging the laundry outside. She smells and touches a floral patterned dress, and when no one sees her, she puts it on. A few military officers stationed nearby see her by the laundry in her dress, and they shout at her to come to the local dance event happening. Elle Marja goes through a glade, where she hides her *gapta* and other Sámi accessories. As Elle Marja approaches the dance event, Njenna discovers her, asking what she is about to do. Njenna is wearing her full *gapta*, and as the sisters hear other people approaching, Elle Marja forces Njenna to lie down and hide in the forest. Forcefully hiding Njenna, wearing a *gapta*, metaphorically illustrates Elle Marja hiding her Sámi identity. During the dance, as she dances with a boy from Uppsala, wearing her floral dress, she is no longer visibly tied to her Sámi identity. When the boy asks her about her name, he guesses that it could be something exotic. Elle Marja contently denies that, and tells him her name is Kristina thus expanding the masking of her Sámi identity. This sequence of the film becomes the real trigger point of Elle Marja approaching Swedish culture and denying her Sámi heritage through leaving her *gapta* and forcing her sister, representing Sáminess, to hide. After Elle Marja and the boy kiss, Njenna enters the dance, wearing her *gapta*, speaking to Elle Marja in Sámi. The visitors at the dance watch Njenna with airs of surprise, and as she tries to talk to Elle Marja, she hisses to her sister not to speak to her, calling her a *lappjävel*.⁷² When Elle Marja comes back to the school, she is forced to put her *gapta* back on, and is also physically punished for her actions by her Swedish teacher. The importance of the Sámi iconography, that is the folk dress, becomes clear when looking upon these scenes.

As Elle Marja boards a train to Uppsala, in order to leave her school and Sámi identity behind her, she receives gazes from the other passengers, staring at her *gapta*. When one passenger is asleep, Elle Marja steals a dress from her luggage. As she arrives in Uppsala, she burns her *gapta*, thus eliminating her way of presenting her Sámi identity and finalizing her departure from Sámi culture. However, despite her attempts at fitting into her new Swedish

⁷² *Lappjävel* is a slur derived from the already derogatory word *lapp*, meaning something like “damn lapp”, or similar.

identity, she has a hard time fitting into the way of life in Uppsala, as it is all new to her. As she needs money in order to educate herself at Uppsala University, she travels back to her family. She walks over the mountains wearing her black dress, contrasting the scenes seen before of her walking over the same terrains wearing her colorful gapta. Sitting down on the ground, a few reindeer gather around Elle Marja, and she becomes clearly agitated, screaming at them and shooing them away, once again rejecting a central part of her culture. As she encounters her family, she stands out, as they all are still wearing their gaptas, looking at Elle Marja with distress and confusion. Elle Marja states to her mother that her name is not Elle Marja anymore, and that she would like to sell the reindeer she inherited from her late father, as well as his silver belt. This leads to an argument between Elle Marja and her mother, and we see a visibly livid Elle Marja leave and approach a flock of reindeer, one of which she ends up capturing with her lasso, killing it in a cathartic manner. Through the important symbol of the reindeer, and through the action of killing it, Elle Marja has killed her own Sámi identity. Njenna and their mother later find her next to the reindeer, and the mother looks at the scene with an air of disgust and sadness. The mother gives her the silver belt, and without saying anything, Njenna and their mother leave. This destruction of Sámi iconography, including the gapta and the reindeer, is depicted as a burdensome ordeal, and evidently illustrates the gravity of Sámi cultural matters. However, as an old woman, after attending the funeral of Njenna, Elle Marja runs to the Big Mountain in her black clothes, climbing it in front of beautiful natural landscapes. In the distance, she sees and hears the local Sámi group marking their reindeer calves, and during the last few shots of the film, she stands next to the lávvus and the herding dogs playing, she looks around the area with a grave look. In many ways, she is now back home.

Furthermore, *Ellos Eatnu - Let the River Flow* centers the use of the traditional Sámi folk dress. During the beginning of the film, Ester dresses in everyday clothes similar to what the average Norwegian wore in the 1970s. In contrast to this, as Mihkkal enters, he is dressed in his folk dress, or gákti, on an everyday basis, but pairs it with jeans. As Ester encounters the other Sámi activists protesting close to the river, they are all dressed in traditional gáktis, and she is offered to borrow a Sámi scarf from one of the Sámi women. As the story moves forward and Ester becomes more engaged in the Sámi activism, she more and more embraces not only her culture and language, but also the traditional Sámi clothing. While seeing her pupils making fun of the protests while playing in the school yard, and her Sámi pupil standing alone next to them, the principal of the school approaches Ester and asks her why the pupil wears his Sámi shoes to school—all without knowing that Ester is Sámi. After this

event, Ester goes to her mother's house and starts looking for her own gákti, which is stowed away. She asks her mother where the gákti is, and the mother questions what she is going to do with it, to which Ester declares that she is going to wear it while protesting. Ester takes the gákti to her grandmother who alters it to fit her as she has not worn it since her confirmation. Unlike Ester's mother, who does not wear any traditional clothing throughout most of the film, Ester's grandmother wears a modernized everyday version of the gákti. As Ester looks at herself in the mirror wearing her gákti, with her grandmother smiling behind her, she displays a look of pride together with a timid smile. After this moment in the film, Ester is often depicted wearing her gákti together with the other activists, including Mihkkal. They travel to Oslo, where they assemble a lávvu outside of the government where they will protest, thus literally bringing the Sámi iconography with them and centering it during the demonstration. This way, the Sámi visual symbols become powerful tools in terms of making the Sámi culture visible. As the Sámi often are depicted together wearing their gáktis, their presence as a group is enhanced and emphasized and thus becomes a tool which highlights the Sámi existence and resistance.

During the last protest sequence of the film, which takes place by the river, the Sámi iconography is once again heavily centered. The Sámi protesters are wearing their traditional winter clothes, including white or brown fur coats, scarves and accessories in red and blue, as well as winter shoes. The characters are depicted in front of lávvus, snow-covered nature, and the Sámi flag (which looked different in the 1970s) is present—which is brought and raised by Ester. This illustrates well a traditional Sámi iconography, where the characters are depicted as a united group, fighting the same battle.

As *Je'vida* is a Skolt-Sámi film, the Sámi iconography differs slightly from the other films, but still share some common factors with them. In one specific scene, *Je'vida*'s mother helps her take off her fur shoes that are fixed with woven ribbons—an image which will reoccur when examining some of the other Sámi films as well. At the boarding school, where *Je'vida* suffers from abuse by the adults, she is given a pair of leather boots to wear instead of her Sámi shoes. After putting her new shoes on, she burns her old Sámi fur shoes outside of the dormitories. Later on, when her mother dies, she inherits her Skolt-Sámi embroidered hat, which women usually wear under a scarf. However, she wraps it in a scarf, and stashes it in a chest inside their hut. After the burning of the shoes, and the hiding of the hat, the film cuts to a sequence of young adult *Je'vida*—who now more or less has hidden her Sámi identity. The only thing left tying her to her Sáminess as a young adult is her grandmother, who walks around town wearing her traditional hat and scarf, and speaks Skolt-Sámi to her. After putting

her grandmother into a nursing home, she has now cut all ties to her Sámi identity, as all the parts of the Sámi iconography are now hidden away.

The Sámi iconography in *The Tundra Within Me*, is significant in many ways, but as the film is a contemporary drama, the themes nature, folk dresses and reindeer are maneuvered in a unique way. The feminist art of the main character Lene handles themes of reindeer and female reindeer herders, and Máhtte is frequently depicted during his work as a reindeer herder, riding his snowmobile close to his reindeer in a wintery landscape. During these scenes, the reindeer, nature, and modern Sámi clothes become especially exposed and significant. However, unlike *Sámi Blood, Ellos Eatnu - Let the River Live* and *Je'vida*, the Sámi iconography is never commented on or problematized much by the characters. In an interview, when asked about the landscape itself as a backdrop in the film, the director herself, Sara Margrethe Oskal, answered thus:

I have always been more connected to the landscape than I had been aware of so it feels I really belong to the tundra – it allows me to breathe more easily. And in this movie, both lead characters lose themselves and then slowly find themselves again and they dare to find the strength to open themselves up to new things. They make decisions and dare to deal with the consequences. The tundra within is referring to that: to finding oneself. And I hope the audience will find the strength, in turn, to find the tundra within themselves as well. And it is important to treasure your heritage and to remain in touch with knowledge and landscape.⁷³

The nature, here the tundra, and Sáminess of the characters are not rejected, rather it is natural and a part of everyday life. The struggles Lena and Máhtte encounter are more internal within Sámi culture, such as issues within the reindeer herding community, and the tedious work of creating a basis for love and a relationship to work out. This displays a modern and inter-Sámi romantic relationship, something not so common in the other Sámi films.

In one scene of the film, Máhtte comes home to Lena after a day of herding reindeer. They kiss, but before they can go any further, they go through the tedious process of undressing Máhtte, who is wearing layers of functional winter clothes, a traditional belt for carrying tools, and Sámi shoes made out of reindeer fur. The shoes, which are fixed with meters of woven ribbon, take time to take off, making this romantic scene amusing and quite

⁷³ Holmqvist, Jytte. "In Conversation with Sara Margrethe Oskal – director of *The Tundra Within Me*", Australian Arts Review, 2024-07-25, accessed 2025-05-23 https://artsreview.com.au/in-conversation-with-sara-margrethe-oskal-director-of-the-tundra-within-me/#google_vignette

lighthearted. Here, the Sámi clothes are centered, but not in a political way, but rather in a normal, everyday manner, where perhaps Sámi audiences can relate to the tediousness of getting dressed and undressed during the freezing winters.

Just like *The Tundra Within Me*, the Sámi iconography is often depicted in a natural way in *Stolen*. However, the reindeer and nature are even more central, due to the plot handling the killing of reindeer and the problems surrounding this. The opening scene features reindeer walking in the snow-covered landscape. All of a sudden, a man with a rifle appears, and in the next shot a reindeer is seen through the telescopic sight of a rifle. In the camera shots after this, the trigger is pulled, and a reindeer falls dead to the ground. Frightened, the rest of the reindeer herd runs away. Then, the shooter pulls the dead reindeer away, leaving a trace of blood behind (where the title of *Stolen* appears), and loads it onto his snowmobile. In the next shot, a herd of reindeer are running in an almost symmetrical whorl pattern, as they often do. The next scene jumps to spring, where reindeer are walking across the mountains, and a young Elsa, wearing her gákti, wanders around the mountain, preparing for the marking of the reindeer calves. The images of reindeer—both alive and dead—remain significant throughout the film, and come to represent Sáminess, and the ordeals reindeer herders often face.

Furthermore, the Sámi folk dress is also present throughout *Stolen*, and is similarly to the nature and reindeer, mostly depicted as something normal. However, as Elsa and her friend Minna attend the Jokkmokk market, an American tourist approaches them, commenting on their beautiful clothes, asking to take a picture of them. Elsa is visibly uncomfortable, but Minna does not seem to mind. Mattias, who stands next to them, jokes that they should make the tourist pay 500 kr to get a photo of a real Sámi. After the market, most of the Sámi attend a dance party, traditional to the Jokkmokk market. There, they all wear their gáktis, together with intricate scarves and silver jewelry, all of which are centered in many of the camera shots. Elsa dances and flirts with Niila, a Sámi man she knows from earlier. They go home together, and the process of them helping each other getting undressed is thoroughly depicted, similarly to the romantic scene in *The Tundra Within Me*. Niila carefully removes Elsa's risku (North Sámi silver brooch), and the act of removing the belts, the woven ribbons, shoes and dress layers seems tedious, but is also depicted in an easygoing and heartfelt way. Just like in the scene with Lena and Máhtte, the process of removing the woven shoe ribbons is depicted with a sentiment of humour. Interestingly, this intimate scene does not take place in the book upon which it is based, proving that the filmmakers

consciously put this scene in the film, centering the undressing of the Sámi folk dress, accessories and shoes.

Evidently, the Sámi iconography is essential in Sámi-made films, and has been a crucial element while establishing visual sovereignty. These visual elements are reapproached and reclaimed in Sámi films—notably showcasing how resistant the Sámi visual culture has been throughout decades of oppression and external influence. The iconography has previously been depicted and explained by outside voices in the ethnographic films, and these images get other meanings when being processed by the ones to which they belong. Now, these images are processed and displayed by the Sámi on their own terms. It is also possible to see that clothes and other physical things used in Sámi tradition and way of life are not merely objects, but represent something greater, due to the politicization of them. When the Sámi filmmakers display the *gákti* as something normal as in *The Tundra Within Me* and *Stolen*, but also widely important regarding cultural identity, like in *Sámi Blood* and *Ellos Eatnu - Let the River Flow*, it grows into much more than the exotic ethnographic depictions previously produced. Thus, by reapproaching the *gákti* and recontextualizing it within the framework of filmmaking, the process of visual sovereignty becomes evident.

A similar process takes place regarding the imagery of reindeer and nature, more specifically the forest, mountains and the tundra. The iconography of reindeer and nature does not differ much from the ethnographic films, but once again, the context has been changed, and thus also the narrative. No longer are the landscapes a backdrop to exotic images of Sámi and reindeer husbandry. Rather, it is a frame, surrounding the narratives the Sámi have chosen themselves, thus becoming a canvas on which reality and Sámi agency are painted. Despite the majority of the Sámi not working directly with reindeer herding, the animal remains an important visual actor within the culture as a whole, and in the films mentioned, the death of a reindeer symbolizes something deep. In *Sámi Blood*, the killing of a reindeer represents her abandoning her culture. In *Stolen*, the dead reindeer are a visual representation of hate crime against the Sámi and the basis of the intrigue. Reclaiming the reindeer, and using it as a cultural symbol, or as a crucial plot point, are both acts of visual sovereignty, and the result becomes much more complex than the ethnographic depictions.

6.3 “I don’t want to be Sámi!”: Oppression from authorities and racial abuse

As mentioned before, the Fennoscandian countries all have similar histories of state oppression of the Sámi and other minority groups, and it seems as the Sámi way of handling these histories on film is to portray them honestly and candidly. Furthermore, the oppression has not only been the result of the nation states and other authorities, but many Sámi groups have faced abuse from non-Sámi everyday people, often living in their close proximity. Many Sámi films depict both of these different types of exposure to abuse, something which sets a somber tone regarding Sámi self-representation.

The first Sámi film, *Pathfinder*, based on a Sámi legend, centers brutal violence against Sámi by the hands of outsiders. The beginning of the film is rather grisly, as it starts off by the main character Aigin returning home after a hunt, and seeing his family being massacred by the so called *tjudes* or (also spelled *chudes*). The *tjudes*, the main antagonists of the film, are usually what is referred to as the enemy in the Sámi legends, as the word *tjude* or *čudde*, is a Sámi term for enemy.⁷⁴ Aigin is helped by another local Sámi tribe, and in the end, he lures the *tjudes* over a ridge, where they all fall to their death, but Aigin survives. The evil outside forces have now been beaten, and the Sámi group can live in peace. In light of this, Skarðhamar notes that in the film, the Sámi resist their oppressors, and do not give up.⁷⁵ She elaborates on this, accurately stating that

It [the film] conveys Sami culture as more than joik and throwing a lasso; it received international attention and contributed to strengthening Sami consciousness and their wish to preserve their traditional ideals. Simultaneously, the film undermined stereotypical conceptions of primitivism and marginality.⁷⁶

Thus, despite being a historical adventure, it is possible to see connotations to the abuse and discrimination the Sámi have faced ever since—and perhaps before—*Pathfinder* took place.

The Kautokeino Rebellion depicts the oppression of the state, the church and local non-Sámi characters during the 1800s. This film is based on the real historical event in Norwegian Sápmi, referred to as *Kautokeino-opprøret* in Norwegian, when a Sámi group in Guovdageaidnu (Kautokeino) rebelled against representatives of the Norwegian state and

⁷⁴ HATT, EMILIE DEMANT, and Barbara Sjöholm. “Russian Chudes and Other Enemies.” In *By the Fire: Sami Folktales and Legends*, 69–86. University of Minnesota Press, 2019. <https://doi.org/10.5749/j.ctvfjcx2d.10>.

⁷⁵ Skarðhamar, Anne-Kari. “Changes in Film Representations of Sami Culture and Identity”, *Nordlit: Tidsskrift i litteratur og kultur*, Vol. 12, no. 1, (2022) pp. 299

⁷⁶ *Ibid.* pp. 300

church. The plot of the film is based on the real event, however, some plot points move away from the historical accounts, and some sources and testimonies have been debated by historians in Norway.⁷⁷ The film mainly follows the protagonist of Elen Skum, who together with her husband Mathis, her brother-in-law Aslak, and other Sámi from her site in a way become radicalized. They follow the preachings of Lars Levi Laestadius, a priest from Sweden, whose anti-alcohol agenda appealed to many of the Sámi in the areas in which he traveled. The merchants in the village close to Elen's site do not approve of this, as the diminishing alcohol consumption affects their business negatively. As the church and the minister become involved, a full blown conflict is born, where most of the Sámi oppose the actions of the church and the local merchants. In the end, Aslak and his friend Mons end up beating the two merchants to death and burn down their house (where the local bar and trader are located). Followingly, they are sentenced to death by decapitation. While the film makes visible the violent historical past in Kautokeino, Monica Kim Mecsei also notes that

The Kautokeino Rebellion expressly addresses the colonial past and retells history from insiders' perspectives. The film makes an attempt to come to terms with the past in order to move on. By representing a distinct group identity and a long-lived homogeneous culture, with roots going back to the beginning of time, Gaup constructs a bridge between the past and the present. This gives the impression of cultural continuity and a sense of validity and genuineness. However, re-using Sámi iconography might create a division between 'real' and 'spurious' culture.⁷⁸

Thus, Mecsei highlights the obstacles of such a historical depiction, while still pointing towards efficient factors regarding visual sovereignty, where the story has been retold from the insider perspective.

Furthermore, *Sámi Blood* depicts oppression and abuse in several forms, mainly depicted by the experiences of the main character Elle Marja. Throughout the film, she is subjected both to oppression from authorities, but also from individuals she encounters in her everyday life. For instance, the boys who watch her while she is measured and photographed nude by the researchers from Uppsala, taunt her by telling her she smells bad and calling her *lapp*. Eventually, as Elle Marja speaks up against the boys, they attack her with a knife, cutting her ears the same way the Sámi mark the ears on their reindeer. In this scene, Elle

⁷⁷ Dancus, Adriana Margareta. "Ghosts Haunting the Norwegian House: Racialization in Norway and *The Kautokeino Rebellion*." *Framework: The Journal of Cinema and Media* 55, no. 1 (2014): 121–39. <https://doi.org/10.13110/framework.55.1.0121>

⁷⁸ Mecsei, Monica Kim. "CULTURAL STEREOTYPES AND NEGOTIATIONS IN SÁMI CINEMA." In *Films on Ice: Cinemas of the Arctic*, edited by Scott MacKenzie and Anna Westerståhl Stenport, 72–83. Edinburgh University Press, 2015. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.3366/j.ctt14brwjm.11>. pp. 78

Marja is in many ways reduced to an animal by the Swedish boys, and the word *cirkusdjur* (circus animal) recurs several times, first by Elle Marja being subjected to it, and then going on to using it herself to refer to her own identity and culture.

The scene with the aforementioned researchers from Uppsala also clearly depicts authoritarian violence and oppression in the name of “science”, as the act of forcefully undressing someone, measuring their body and photographing them in front of the other children would be an uncomfortable and fearsome experience for many. These emotions are mediated by the face and body language of Elle Marja, as she looks clearly uncomfortable as they measure her skull and examine her teeth. Throughout this process, she asks “what are you going to do?”, clearly worried about what is to come. As the researchers from Uppsala examine and record which skin color Elle Marja has, they ask her teacher if both her parents are *Lapps*. Then the researcher demands Elle Marja to undress and go to a bench, but for a few moments, she refuses, with a fearful but stoic look on her face. As she stands on the bench, with the camera in front of her, she still hesitates to take her clothes off, this is when she sees the local boys peeping outside of the window. Eventually, Elle Marja succumbs to the forceful orders and takes her clothes off—but standing there naked, she covers herself with the clothes she is holding in her hands. One of the researchers asks several times for her to put her hands behind her head for the pictures, but Elle Marja still refuses. Eventually, the researcher, who is male, angrily grabs her clothes from her grip, and as she proceeds to cover herself with her hands, the researcher angrily grabs her arms and puts them above her head. The camera closely focuses on Elle Marja’s distressed face, and after this, we see how the other Sámi children, including Njenna, are met with a similar fate. In the book *New Arctic Cinemas*, these scene are commented on in the chapter “Sámi Media Sovereignty and Interventionist Historiography”, where the authors note that

The film’s aesthetic register challenges voyeuristic ethnographic filmmaking, “empiricist” visual anthropology, and “impartial” scientific photography dominant during the period (all of which reflect the underlying racist endeavor), by focusing on the embodied experiences, not of the implied ethnographic viewer, but of the film’s protagonist, a young Sámi woman named Elle-Marja.⁷⁹

⁷⁹ MacKenzie, Scott, and Anna Westerståhl Stenport. “Sámi Media Sovereignty and Interventionist Historiography: ENVIRONMENTAL, EXPERIMENTAL, AND ARCHIVAL POLITICS.” In *New Arctic Cinemas: Media Sovereignty and the Climate Crisis*, 1st ed., 115–54. University of California Press, 2023. <https://doi.org/10.2307/jj.455897.9>. pp. 141

This way, the authors regard the film as historiographically interventionist, as it centers Elle-Marja and her struggles. In general, throughout the film, Elle Marja's denial of her Sámi culture is based upon all the oppression she encounters—everything from her Swedish teacher telling her that the Sámi would not be able to handle life in the cities, being forbidden to speak Sámi and to yoik, repeatedly hearing that she smells bad and not being able to attend university with a Sámi identity—all while being a young adult already figuring herself out. In the end, she is prepared to leave everything she knows, including her family, her culture and her home, in order to escape the everyday oppression she faces.

Furthermore, *Ellos Eatnu - Let the River Flow*, also handles authoritarian oppression and racial abuse in an explicit manner. The oppression from the state is embodied by the way the Alta protests are handled in the film, and the Norwegianization process is illustrated through Ester's mother. Throughout the film, as Ester and the others protest, they are met with resistance from the police and the government. When the protesters travel to Oslo, and read a letter to a governmental representative, they state that if the expansion of the Alta dam will not discontinue, they will go on a hunger strike. Their demands are not met, and they assemble their *lávvu* outside of the governmental building. According to the police, this is an act of civil disobedience, which can result in legal issues. The second day of the protest, the police arrive and as the Sámi protesters refuse to negotiate, the police decide to demolish the *lávvu*, which leads to an outcry from the people watching the protest take place. Mihkkal, and at least another protester, is carried away by the police and put in jail, but not for long. Mihkkal visits Ester—who after the hunger strike ends up in the hospital—and explains that they have assembled another *lávvu*, on the other side of the government this time. Everyone is tired and hungry, but we will not give up, Mihkkal proudly says. Eventually, the government declares to the protesters in a letter that the expansion in Alta will be paused until the Storting (Norwegian parliament) has handled the matter.

Later on, as Sámi activists' demands are denied once again, the Sámi group together, with other groups of activists, protests by the river. All the protesters have been prepared for measures by the government and the police. Ester encounters her friend, who with a smile states that “we were here first—and they are going to have to carry us away first”. The hundreds of protesters, which are both Sámi and Norwegian, prepare for the arrival of the police. Ester tells her Sámi friend that she thinks they are too few, who referring to the Kautokeino rebellion replies that “the last time we rebelled, they prosecuted us and chopped our heads off, no wonder people are not coming”. However, she is proven wrong, as the other local Sámi arrive. Many of these were at first skeptical and reluctant to participate in the

protests, as they were tired of being persecuted for their Sáminess by locals. Some of the protesters chain themselves to the area, but not the Sámi ones, as Ester's friend states that "we do not chain ourselves to our own land". The police march into the area, and demand the protesters to leave the area within two minutes. When the police, anonymously and militarily dressed, prepare to remove the protesters, the police chief tells them to "wait with [carrying away] the Sámi, it doesn't look good if we take them first". However, as Ester sees a policeman removing the Sámi flag that she got from Mihkkal, who at this point has passed away, she attacks the officer by pushing him to the ground. She screams while being carried away by four police officers, and cannot do anything but watch when her Sámi friends are met with the same fate.

When looking upon the Norweganization of the Sámi in *Ellos Eatnu - Let the River Flow*, Ester's mother Máret (Marie Kvernmo) comes to symbolize this process. At the beginning of the film, when Ester travels home to visit Máret and her Norwegian husband, it becomes clear that Ester and Máret are Sámi only when they start speaking their native language to each other. Máret is not dressed in Sámi clothes, and when Mihkkal comes to pick Ester up, he speaks Sámi to Ester, but Máret, Mihkkal's aunt, speaks Norwegian to him. However, after exchanging pleasantries about Mihkkahl's father, Máret's brother, Mihkkal tells Máret in North Sámi "you should visit Máze [their village] again, you haven't been home in a long time". While in the car with Ester, Mihkkal voices his surprise, stating that his aunt has become a Norwegian woman—a statement to which Ester does not reply.

A bit further on in the film, as Ester picks up her gákti at her grandmother's house, she visits the fishing hut where some of her late father's possessions remain—more or less completely hidden away. Somberly, Ester goes through his things, and she finds an old notebook from her father's school years. On the page, he has written the Norwegian names of animals, and there are a few dried, brown droplets on the paper, most likely blood, which clearly affects Ester. Máret arrives at the hut to see what is going on, and as they converse in Norwegian, Ester inquires into what happened to her father, mentioning that her mother never tells her anything. Máret explains that many different things happened—for instance, they were punished when not speaking Norwegian at the boarding school they attended. Ester keeps asking, and Máret notes that the different kinds of punishment included slaps on the hands and ears and beatings, and that the teachers could do whatever they liked, and the Norwegian children followed. Luckily for Máret, she learned fast, and they mostly left her alone. "Is this why you stopped wearing your folk dress? To be left alone? Dad always wore his folk dress", Ester says to her mother. Máret says that he did not always do that, and when

Ester tells her that is how she remembers him, Máret coldly replies with “yes, and you see how that went”, referring to his suicide. Lastly, referencing the protests, Máret says “the Sámi does not have a future anymore, Ester—that fight was lost a long time ago”.

After the protests in Oslo, Ester goes home to her mother, stepfather and half-brother to celebrate Christmas. An argument occurs between Ester and her stepfather about the protests, in which they do not see eye to eye. Upset, Ester exclaims to her stepfather that maybe the public opinion on the Alta matter has changed, that people have realised that there are Sámi in Norway, and that he himself has a Sámi wife and a Sámi son. Angrily, he replies saying Thomas, Ester’s half-brother is mostly Norwegian, that Ester was also born in Norway, even if she wants to be Sámi. Ester retires to her old bedroom, and Máret enters, trying to make peace, explaining to Ester that her stepfather does not mean any ill. When they later open the Christmas presents, Ester gives her father’s traditional Sámi hat to her brother. After a quick visit to her grandmother the same evening, Ester comes back home, and she is not able to find the hat she gave to her brother. As she is looking for the hat, Máret asks what she is doing, to which Ester shouts “why are you speaking Norwegian?” and if she has ever spoken Sámi to Thomas. Máret replies by rhetorically asking Ester if she wants Thomas to be bullied, to which Ester similarly and harshly asks if Máret wants him to become Norwegianized. A fight begins, where Máret accuses Ester of being a criminal due to her civil disobedience, and Ester confronts her mother, meaning that they have thrown the Sámi hat away. The way Ester behaves, that is why one becomes tired of everything Sámi, according to Máret, and hearing this makes Ester leave. A bit later, during Mihkkal’s funeral, which will be examined later, Máret attends in her full Sámi folk dress, and she and Ester reunite. This is the only time Máret truly embraces and displays her Sámi identity. Being at home, Ester enters the fishing hut and trashes it, repeatedly screaming “I don’t want to be Sámi!”. Hearing the commotion, Máret runs to Ester and comforts her. After this, as Ester gets ready to leave for the protest by the river, she gets her full blessing from her mother and stepfather. Thus, despite not embracing her own Sámi heritage, Máret understands and accepts her daughter’s reasons.

In *Je’vida*, the systemic oppression is most explicitly depicted during the scenes of Je’vida attending the boarding school where she is supposed to learn Finnish. At her first lesson, when the teachers ask them to open up their books, Je’vida asks the boy next to her what the teacher is saying, as she cannot understand him speaking Finnish. The boy hushes her, but the teacher has already heard them, telling them not to speak *Lappish* in the classroom. He approaches them, and the boy pees himself from fear and shame as the teacher preaches the great benefits of speaking the Finnish language. Later on, during school lunch,

Je'vida does not like the food and refuses to eat it. The lady working in the canteen asks why Je'vida does not eat, tells her to eat up and exclaims to all the children that no one can leave the canteen until Je'vida's plate is empty. This ordeal leads to the canteen lady force feeding Je'vida, pushing the food into her mouth while pinching her nose. All the other children watch as Je'vida vomits her food back into the plate, and is forced to eat that as well. As Je'vida looks at her plate with defeat, the lady asks her what her name is, to which she answers "Je'vida". "But that is not a name. Very well Iida, empty your plate. A Russky Lappish evacuee brat can hardly afford to refuse a meal", the lady states as she forces food mixed with vomit into Je'vida's mouth. As such, the cruelty of the scene not only emphasizes the oppression the Sámi has been facing, but similarly to *Sámi Blood*, the abuse of Sámi children is made visible, in a brutal manner. This type of abuse takes place on a more individual and personal level than the systematic one. Eventually, as Je'vida is a young adult, she moves south, leaving her Sámi life behind her. As an old woman, she is bitter, and seems like she does not want anything to do with her past life, and hides everything from her niece who keeps asking her about who they are and what happened to them.

Unlike the previously mentioned films, *Stolen* (2023), directed by Elle Márjá Eira, centers modern Sámi narratives rather than historical accounts. The film is based on the critically acclaimed novel by North Sámi author Ann-Helén Laestadius, and examines Sámi hardships in Sweden through the female Sámi protagonist Elsa, whom we follow both as a child and young adult. Early on in the film, the child Elsa is skiing through the forest, where she encounters a local man who is in the process of killing Elsa's reindeer calf. The man, who is known to Elsa, threatens her into silence. Throughout the film, reindeer are killed, and when Elsa and her reindeer herding family report the killings, they are frustratingly classified as theft by the Swedish police. The question of killings versus theft recurs throughout the film, as the man who killed Elsa's reindeer, Robert, keeps doing this systematically.

A scene particularly pointing out hate crime against the Sámi takes place right after the Jokkmokk market. Elsa and Minna encounter a scenario by the road, where police and journalists are located, as someone has installed reindeer heads right there. The set up is gruesome, as the heads of reindeer have been placed on sticks, looking like something out of a folk horror film. A journalist interviews a Swedish local, who condescendingly claims that the Sámi receive tax money for every killed reindeer, so they probably could have set this up themselves. This infuriates Elsa, who tells the journalist that she can tell her why their reindeer are being killed. "They kill them because they hate us. They want to hit us where it hurts the most. In our village, they've been shooting reindeer for at least 20 years. The police

do nothing. We've reported over 100 killings to the police", Elsa explains. The journalist asks why the police do not act, to which Elsa answers "a lot of people want us gone". Themes of oppression and abuse are very much explicitly handled in *Stolen*, and it is in many ways more pedagogical and direct compared to *Sámi Blood*, *Je'vida* and *Ellos Eatnu - Let the River Flow*. However, this examined scene highlights both the abuse and hatred from local individuals, such as Robert and other people killing reindeer, as well as the authoritarian issues depicted through the police.

Through processing these issues on their own terms, the Sámi filmmakers have highlighted which histories and narratives are especially important to share to wider audiences. This negotiates with, and contrasts the early ethnographic films, where these problems are not handled, and the Sámi are often shown as easygoing and simple, with their struggles mostly being related to reindeer husbandry. Here, the ideas of Fourth Cinema can be applied, as interventionist historiography seemingly is central to Sámi filmmaking, as we have seen through examining these films. Making visible traumatic historical events, such as the Kautokeino rebellion, the eugenics movement and the Alta conflict, some of which have remained in the dark for many years, is an effective act of interventionist history, as it also appeals emotionally to the audiences through the trajectory of the characters.

6.4 "If you can yoik it, it's like being home": Music and the yoik

In Fennoscandian Sámi culture, yoik is an essential form of artistic expression. A form of singing or chanting—it can be described as the "tradition of memory", and it has been said to be the oldest form of singing in Europe.⁸⁰ The practice of yoiking is old, and has from the start been connected to the Sámi natural religion—it is personal, emotional and spiritual, and often connected to people close to you, stories, animals or important places.⁸¹ The Sámi say that they do not yoik *about* something, but they rather yoik *something*, which further connects their being to the subject of the yoik.

Moreover, in 1609, the Norwegian-Danish king condemned the yoik, ordering people who practice Sámi 'witchcraft' to be sentenced to death. This is also connected to the church and its view on yoik as something unholy and sinful—a phenomenon that has lasted throughout history to present times.⁸² All this has led to many Sámi moving away from the practice of yoiking. It is also important to note that the yoik differs throughout the different

⁸⁰ "Jojken är minnets tradition", [samer.se](https://www.samer.se), accessed 2025-05-17, <https://www.samer.se/1188>

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid.

Sámi areas—in the South Sámi area yoik is called *vuollie* and the North Sámi call their yoik *luohiti*.⁸³ Due to this gloomy history of an important artistic and spiritual form of expression, it is understandable that the yoik would be central and significant in Sámi films, especially regarding cultural reclamation.

The first Sámi film, *Pathfinder*, naturally includes yoik in its soundtrack, and features none other than the famous North Sámi multiartist Nils-Aslak Valkeapää, also known as Áillohaš. He also acts in the film, portraying the character of Siida-Isit. Yoik permeates the film in many ways, as it is part of the whole soundtrack, and the opening sequence features a powerful non-diegetic yoik by Valkeapää. Yoiking also appears in a somewhat everyday manner in the film, but also in spiritual ways, as aforementioned in the section about Sámi iconography, where the Sámi pre-Christian religious elements of *Pathfinder* were examined. Towards the end of the film, where the Sámi group that helped Aigin believe he has sacrificed his life for them, all in order to get rid of the *tjudes*, they gather in a big *lávvu* for a ritual. They are sat around the fire, and over the sound of a diegetic yoik, one of the women utters a eulogy for Aigin. After a while, Aigin reappears and enters the *lávvu*, and the woman solemnly states that they have encountered a real pathfinder, or *ofelaš*.

In *Minister of the State*, notable North Sámi yoiker Wimme Saari portrays what can almost be described as the village troubadour, who while playing his accordion, yoiks and sings about the events in the village. For instance, when the whole village believe that they have been visited by a minister, Saari yoiks and sings in North Sámi, repeating the lines over over again in different combinations:

*We have received a gentleman
We have gotten our own minister
Sagojokk is the village, where everyone is an optimist
Everything will be better
The joy and happiness are ours*

Here, the yoik becomes part of the self-irony and humour, playing on the aforementioned burlesque elements, noted by Dancus.

The soundtrack of *The Kautokeino Rebellion* is heavily centered around yoik as it is made by the North Sámi musical artist Mari Boine. Similarly to *Pathfinder*, to which Nils-Aslak Valkeapää made the soundtrack, it is notable that another famous Sámi musician was featured in Gaup's second Sámi film. Yoik is not emphasized much diegetically, but

⁸³ "Jojken är minnets tradition", [samer.se](https://www.samer.se), accessed 2025-05-17, <https://www.samer.se/1188>

becomes a clear framework to the film, highlighting Sámi culture and music. This way, the viewer becomes immersed in Sámi culture and storytelling in a powerful way, as all the visual parts function well together with the yoik.

Sámi Blood features yoik in a more diegetic way, thus being more central to the characters and their emotions. When Elle Marja and Njenna travel to the boarding school, Njenna cries, and Elle Marja asks her to close her eyes and imagine the Støerre Vaerie (Big Mountain) in front of her. Elle Marja asks her “what does it sound like?”, to which Njenna answers that she cannot remember. Elle Marja explains to her younger sister that “if you can yoik something, it’s like being home”. After Njenna asks her to yoik it, Elle Marja does so, with a rather mellow look on her face. However, as she adds her South Sámi lyrics to the yoik, she lovingly mocks Njenna for crying, the both sisters smile. Then, with a stern expression, Elle Marja tells her sister not to yoik at the school.

Later on in the film, when Elle Marja is in Uppsala, she attends a dinner party where the guests find out she is from Lapland. A girl who studies anthropology asks Elle Marja to yoik in front of the whole group at the table. The scene is awkward and uncomfortable, and the situation seems to affect Elle Marja in the way that she realises that she cannot escape her cultural identity.

When Elle Marja returns to visit her family and to ask them for money, she goes for a swim in the river together with Njenna, sharing a moment of sisterly connection. After the swim, Njenna yoiks and laughs at the same time, feeling at peace with her older sister and the Sámi way of living. On the other hand, Elle Marja possesses a look of sentimental somberness, knowing that she is about to leave her Sámi life and family. Thus, this last yoik in the film indicates the emotional power and efficacy of the yoik, as it sparks several sensations, both for the characters and perhaps the viewer.

Similarly to the earlier film by Nils Gaup, *Ellos Eatnu - Let the River Flow* features Sámi music in its soundtrack, ranging from modern yoiks mixed with pop, all the way to more traditional yoiks. There is one song in particular in the film that is especially significant, which in fact does not include any yoik. The song, which Mihkkal puts on the radio in the car when picking up Ester is Goatto-ænan by Tanabreddens Ungdom (Deatnogátte Nuorat). The North Sámi lyrics included in the film can be translated as such:

*The warm, soft mother tongue,
has to give way to an strange language
Farewell, my homeland*

*Your paths have become thinner
Against my will, with heavy steps
must I leave my home town*

The lyrics are explicit in many ways, and go well with the trajectory of the main character Ester, as well as the political movement around Alta which the film emphasises.

Furthermore, early on in the film, as Ester is picking cloudberries with her grandmother out in nature, the grandmother starts to yoik. As Ester has been living away from home, it seems as if she is emotionally moved by the gesture. She asks her grandmother whose yoik it is, and her grandmother lovingly and jokingly wonders if Ester has forgotten her own yoik, and if no one out in the big world is yoiking for her. The grandmother explains that Ester's deceased father made the yoik, and she is clearly touched as this is explained.

Later on, when Ester and Mihkkal travel to Oslo to protest, when they and the other protesters assemble the lávvu outside of the Norwegian government, the hunger strike commences. During the night in the lávvu, Mihkkal yoiks. Ester tells him that she wants to yoik for Mihkkal, but she can not, it has been too long, she does not know how to. Towards the end of the film, when Ester and the other protesters gather by the Alta river and prepare for counteraction from the Norwegian authorities, one of the protesters yoiks for the rest of them, sitting around a fire. The yoik is suddenly interrupted, as the Norwegian authorities arrive. Followingly, at the end of the film, Ester visits one of her pupils at home—the Sámi pupil who does not speak Norwegian, and struggles at school. Before he goes to bed, he asks Ester to sing for him, as his mother used to yoik for him. She performs Mihkkal's yoik for her pupil, and is visibly affected as she does so, due to his sudden death. In fact, apart from being an actress, Ella Marie Hætta Isaksen, who portrays Ester, is a famous activist, singer and yoiker from the Norwegian side of Sápmi.⁸⁴ In light of this, it seems as the choice of Hætta Isaksen as the main character certainly is suitable, as both she and the character of Ester possess similar traits as activists and yoikers.

In *The Tundra Within Me*, just like with the Sámi iconography, yoik is depicted as something natural. Early on in the film, a yoik contest takes place at the local bar. Lena attends, and the bartender, who is an old friend of hers, asks her if she will take part in the competition, to which Lena answers “no chance!”, to which the bartender states that “a beer

⁸⁴ For instance, together with the Oslo yoik choir, Ella Marie Hætta Isaksen released a yoik for the children of Palestine in 2025, which she has performed at pro-Palestine protests in Norway. “Ella Marie med gripende joik til barna av Palestina”, Universal Music Norway, press statement, 2025-05-07, accessed 2025-05-20, <https://kommunikasjon.ntb.no/pressemedling/18518078/ella-marie-med-gripende-joik-til-barna-av-palestina?publisherId=6987388&lang=no>

will oil your yoik muscle”. After having had a few beers, and hearing people talking about her behind her back, and seeing Máhtte—who she already seems interested in—complementing local reindeer herder Biret after her yoik, Lena enters the stage and yoiks her late father. Afterwards, at home, Lena tells her mother about yoiking her father, mentioning how it felt like he was there during the yoik. The act of yoiking is also present rather casually throughout the film. For instance Lena’s mother yoiks for her grandson and Máhtte yoiks while preparing to herd his reindeer, thus showcasing the different functions and contexts of the yoik.

Furthermore, yoik is especially regular in the soundtrack of *Stolen*. The opening scene features a powerful yoik in combination with imagery of reindeer and mountains, sharply establishing the Sámi culture and themes. The act of yoiking is not widely depicted, perhaps due to other Sámi cultural practices and political issues being the focus of the film. However, the yoik, similarly to *The Kautokeino Rebellion*, acts more like a framework to the story through the soundtrack, which is particularly visible during the Jokkmokk market scenes. As the Sámi youth take the dancefloor, the music played is pop songs which include yoik. Mattias, Elsa’s brother, is intoxicated from drinking too much, and he goes on the stage next to the dancefloor and jokingly yoiks his sister, who in turn interrupts him, telling him he is too drunk and that it is embarrassing. As Elsa goes home with Niila, Mattias follows them, walking a few meters behind, once again yoiking his sister, to which Elsa and Niila laugh.

From the research and visual material I have seen, yoik has not been particularly present in ethnographic films. This can naturally be due to the fact that many of these films were produced during the silent film era, but the fact remains; yoik is lacking from these types of material. This makes it especially interesting, through the lens of visual sovereignty, to discover that yoik is so widely common in the Sámi self-made films. Similarly to images of nature and reindeer, the yoik and Sámi language music can act as a non-diegetic framework for the film through the soundtrack, but also be part of crucial plot points. It can be an act of deep emotions or a humorous element, displaying the variability of it as a tool for storytelling.

6.5 Highlighting the grim: Death, suicide and funerals

A more unexpected and somber theme found in the Sámi films were the one of death, suicide and funerals. As previously noted, much of the Sámi history is dark due to oppression, and loss of cultural identity. This year, 2025, a report was published in Sweden, stating that

almost every fifth young Sámi woman in Sweden has tried committing suicide, which is considerably more than other young women in Sweden.⁸⁵ The report also highlights the lack of knowledge of Sámi culture and issues in the general healthcare system in Sweden.⁸⁶ Earlier research has also shown that young reindeer herding men have a higher suicide rate than young men in Sweden.⁸⁷ These statistics are important to keep in mind while analysing the themes of death, suicide and funerals in Sámi film. Furthermore, as the Sámi have been christian for hundreds of years, all the funerals in the films take place in churches, but in Sámi language. This illustrates the integration between the Sámi and the church, which today share an important bond.

Even in the first Sámi film, *Pathfinder*, death and violence are clearly central. The opening scene, where Aigin comes home to their tent site to find his family being brutally massacred, is especially gruesome. We are met with images of the tjudes dragging his blood-covered dead family members, his younger sister with an arrow in her heart, leaving a trail of blood as she is being moved. The tjudes notice Aigin hiding behind trees and a pile of snow, and a chase scene takes place, in which Aigin narrowly escapes, having been shot at an injured by an arrow. Due to the film's action elements, violence and death remain present throughout the duration of the story, but this opening scene is depicted in a particularly harrowing manner.

Death and brutality both also occur in *The Kautokeino Rebellion*, as the film starts off by two Sámi men being brought to their executions. This beginning is merely a hint to what is about to come, as we are told the story of these men as the film proceeds. The killing of the merchants later on in the film is violent, and the sequence leading up to the execution of the Sámi rebels is particularly solemn as they do not ask for the forgiveness of Christ. In a way, the film is depicted as if the violent killings were inevitable, due to the built up frustration of the Sámi characters. This, somewhat reasonably, encourages the audiences to maintain empathy for the rebels, despite their heinous crime.

Sámi Blood starts off with old Elle Marja (at this point calling herself Kristina), going with her son and granddaughter to her sister Njenna's funeral. Wearing black and arriving late

⁸⁵ Suorra, Mattias Persson. "Rapport: Nästan var femte ung samisk kvinna har försökt ta sitt liv", Sameradion, 2025-03-07, accessed 2025-05-20

<https://www.sverigesradio.se/artikel/nastan-var-femte-ung-samisk-kvinna-har-forsokt-ta-sitt-liv>

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Jacobsson, Lars. Stoor, Jon Petter A. Eriksson, Anders. "Förhöjd suicidincidens hos renskötande samiska män", Läkartidningen, 2020-06-17, accessed 2025-05-25,

<https://lakartidningen.se/klinik-och-vetenskap-1/nya-ron/2020/06/forhojd-suicidincidens-hos-renskotande-samiska-man/>

to the church, Elle Marja, her son and her granddaughter stand out, as the rest of the funeral attendees are wearing their Sámi folk dresses, most of them blue. The funeral service takes place in South Sámi, and as the priest performs the eulogy, he explains how the loss of her sister was painful to her, and that yoiking became her way of surviving. The rest of the funeral visitors look at Elle Marja with skeptical eyes, and she is evidently uncomfortable. One man yoiks and Elle Marja refuses to approach the coffin with the others to leave a rose. As the crowd exits the church and a man starts talking to Elle Marja in South Sámi, she persistently claims not to understand him. At the end of the film, when she is all alone, Elle Marja revisits the church during nighttime and encounters again the coffin of Njenna. She touches her gapta, and as she leans closer to the body of Njenna, she whispers to her younger sister, in South Sámi, that she is sorry.

In *Ellos Eatnu - Let the River Flow*, the theme of suicide is implicated twice. Firstly, through the trajectory of Ester's father. The opening scene, where only a fishing hut is framed, we hear a conversation in North Sámi between two people, who seem to be Ester as a child, and her father. He tells her he is not fishing today, and that Ester should go back to her mother, and that he is going to stay by the hut. Later on in the film, it is implied to be the moment and place in which he took his life. Furthermore, throughout the film, as Ester becomes more involved within the Sámi activist movement, her cousin Mihkkal becomes more and more withdrawn. At the start, he is a driven activist teaching Ester about the Sámi issues, but as he seemingly feels that they are not making any difference, he gives up on the protest and hands his responsibilities and car over to Ester. Following this, Ester finds Mihkkal some time later in his flat, where he has hung himself in the bathroom, fully dressed in his Sámi clothes. The funeral following Mihkkal's death takes place in a church, with a North Sámi speaking priest, and the visitors wearing red and blue folk dresses, including Ester and her mother. The priest carefully asks if the treatment of the Sámi by the state has caused them mortal danger. After the funeral, Ester approaches her mother who states that she had wished to not have to experience this again, and she asks Ester to promise her never to do something like that.

In *Je'vida*, the notion of death is also exposed several times. As a child, Je'vida is particularly close to her grandfather, and after he dies, she encounters him as an apparition several times. The family members dress him during the wake, and Je'vida places his pipe in his stiff hands. As the Skolt Sámi are orthodox christians, the funeral follows those traditions and includes christian orthodox chants through the duration of the event. The attendees mostly consist of women wearing traditional Skolt-Sámi hats and floral scarves that cover

their hair, and Je'vida is holding a lit candle as she is looking at her grandfather in his coffin. After the funeral, Je'vida is depicted ice fishing—something she used to do together with her grandfather—but now, she is all alone.

Further illustrating the same theme, one particularly gruesome scene involves Je'vida and her pregnant mother, while they are out fishing on the lake. The mother visibly becomes in pain, and suffers as she sweats and screams. Je'vida rows them back to land, shouting for her grandmother as they approach. After medical help has arrived by plane on the lake, and as we see the hands of the grandmother covered in blood, the mother is carried out on a stretcher, all of this implying a gore-filled and painful death. “Je'vida, autumn has already come”, the grandmother says. Je'vida, herself only a small child, holds the baby—her younger sibling who is stillborn. She digs a pit and buries the dead baby in the forest, a scene rendering *Je'vida* particularly grievous.

Stolen also handles the theme of suicide and funerals in several ways. The film is a Netflix production, and thus includes a content warning of suicide, violence and animal abuse. As the film is based on a book and ambitiously attempt to adapt all the plotlines present in the book on which it is based, some of the themes, such as suicide, are rendered somewhat secondary. However, despite the themes of suicide and death becoming disregarded in a way throughout the film, the filmmakers decided to still include these occurrences of suicide in the film, probably because they are central to the intricate plot.

An example of this is the character Lasse, a relative and friend of Elsa. The film processes his mental health struggles through the perspective of a Sámi person in a modern capitalist setting. He is shown to be suffering mentally due to having to take a job in the mines in order to sustain himself economically, rather than devoting himself to reindeer herding. One day, he is found dead in the mine, having hung himself on a mining vehicle. The following funeral is in North Sámi, and similarly to the other films described here, the attendees are wearing their Sámi folk dresses.

In addition, Elsa is also worried about the mental state of her brother Mattias throughout the film, as he drinks too much alcohol and seems depressed. All of this due to the issues relating to being Sámi, including economic issues and having their reindeer killed. As a result of Lasse's death, it is also implied that Elsa is worried that her brother will do something similar. During the later parts of the film, in front of a sunny landscape covered in snow, Mattias stands next to his snowmobile, creating a noose out of the rope he uses to make lassos to capture reindeer. However, Mattias's apparent suicide is interrupted by a snowmobile chase involving Elsa and the antagonist Robert. After the chase, as Elsa meets

Mattias, she realizes what he has planned, and encourages him to seek help at SANKS—the Sámi national center for mental health and substance abuse in Norway. The center specialises in mental health care for Sámi people, where the employees possess the appropriate knowledge concerning Sámi living conditions, and where Sámi people can receive care in their native language.⁸⁸

6.6 Based on true stories and real accounts

Almost all Sámi films examined in this thesis are based on true stories or real accounts from different Sámi groups or families. Many of these accounts can be related to by people all over Sápmi—especially the history of discrimination and the loss of languages. Seeing that most of the Sámi films are based on these true stories and real accounts, one should take into consideration how this is connected to self-representation. Neither *Pathfinder* or *Minister of the State* are based on real stories, however, it is important to note how the former handles a Sámi oral legend, and that the latter includes themes of war stories that affected the region.

One of the films that is clearly based on true events is *The Kautokeino Rebellion*. As noted by Dancus, the actual historical events have been debated due to irregularities in the historical accounts and sources.⁸⁹ Importantly, the characters of the film possess the names of the real people on which the story is based. In fact, director Nils Gaup is himself a descendant of one of the Sámi people involved in the rebellion—more specifically Elen Skum—which renders the story personal to the director despite it taking place several generations back.⁹⁰

The rest of the films, *Sámi Blood*, *Ellos Eatnu - Let the River Flow*, *Je'vida*, and *Stolen* are all explicitly based on real accounts and stories from Sápmi. In an interview from 2017, *Sámi Blood* director Amanda Kernell explains that

There are elders in my family who strongly reject Sami people and speak quite badly about them. They are Sami themselves, but now they're Swedish, they want nothing to do with their past. They won't talk about it. And then, the rest of my family are Sami, most of them, and working reindeer herding today. So I grew up with both sides, and all these things that we can't talk about. And I always wondered, can you really become

⁸⁸ “Möjlighet till vård hos sanks i Norge”, 1177 Region Dalarna, <https://www.1177.se/Dalarna/sa-fungerar-varden/att-valja-vardmottagning/mojlighet-till-var-d-hos-sanks/>, accessed 2025-05-15

⁸⁹ Dancus, Adriana Margareta. “Ghosts Haunting the Norwegian House: Racialization in Norway and *The Kautokeino Rebellion*.” *Framework: The Journal of Cinema and Media* 55, no. 1 (2014): 121–39. <https://doi.org/10.13110/framework.55.1.0121>. pp. 230

⁹⁰ “Kautokeino-upproret”, Film pedagogik, The Swedish Film Institute, <https://www.filminstitutet.se/sv/fa-kunskap-om-film/filmpedagogik/filmhandledningar/kautokeino-upproret/>, accessed 2025-05-27

another person, and what happened to this generation? Because there were so many who left, and changed their name. Many, I think, didn't even tell their children where they were really from, so a lot of people might not even know that they have Sami parents or grandparents. And I wondered too what happens if you cut all ties with your family and your background, your culture. What does it do to you to grow up in a time where you were seen as an inferior race? How can you not internalize that, and how do you defend yourself against that, or keep your dignity in such a system?⁹¹ So the film is really like a declaration of love to this older generation, both sides, those who left everything, and those who stayed in reindeer herding and the more traditional lifestyle.⁹²

This clearly indicates how the film is not based on one specific life story, but rather is an amalgamation of many Sámi fates put together into one story through the characters of Elle Marja, Njenna and their family. This is something the director Amanda Kernell herself has called auto-ethnographic, something Stine Sand elaborates on by highlighting how the film is not supposed to be pedagogic or didactic, but still authentic.⁹³

Furthermore, the ideas regarding authenticity related to *Ellos Eatnu - Let the River Flow* can be interpreted as a mixture between *The Kautokeino Rebellion* and *Sámi Blood*. The film is based on a true historic event—the Alta controversy—but the characters and some of the details are fictional. Director Ole Giæver explained in an interview how it was important for him to, in the portrayal of a Sámi woman, expose her very human conflicts and the battle of being who you are, all of which are intriguing since Giæver himself was affected by the events in Alta as a child.⁹⁴ Giæver states that after the premiere of the film, he would be present to confront the audiences and their emotions, and stated that “everyone from Sápmi knows the Sámi pain and there are many that have been locked up”.⁹⁵

Similarly to *Sámi Blood*, *Je'vida* is largely based on real accounts from family members of director Katja Gauriloff's family. In an interview, she explains that

It's a huge problem in our community. There are all these people who moved away. Some didn't even know they were Sámi, because their parents hid it from them. My mother never spoke Sámi to me, but at least she told me the stories. She never let me

⁹¹ Swinson, Brock. “Nothing Fake: Amanda Kernell on Sami Blood”, Creative Screenwriting, 2017-06-20, accessed 2025-05-20, <https://www.creativescreenwriting.com/sami-blood/>

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Sand, Stine. 2022. “Dealing with Racism: Colonial History and Colonization of the Mind in the Autoethnographic and Indigenous Film *Sami Blood*.” *Journal of International and Intercultural Communication* 16 (3): 209–23. doi:10.1080/17513057.2022.2052156. pp. 5

⁹⁴ Partapuoli, A.C. Stenberg. Carlsson, Per. “Regissören Ole Giæver påverkades av Altakonflikten som barn”, SVT Sápmi, 2023-05-08, accessed 2025-05-21,

<https://www.svt.se/nyheter/sapmi/regissoren-viktigt-komma-nara-en-manniska-och-hennes-konflikter>

⁹⁵ Ibid.

forget. [...] This entire generation was so traumatized. For them, it was easier not to talk about it at all or deny anything bad has happened to them.⁹⁶

This is in many ways similar to what Amanda Kernell expressed regarding the testimonies inspiring *Sámi Blood*, proving the similar ideas and backgrounds to the narratives of their films.

Also akin to the aforementioned films, *Stolen* is based on true accounts, which is stated in the beginning of Laestadius' book on which the film is based. Here, the accounts are also accumulated into the trajectory of a young woman, in this case Elsa. The main theme and plot of the film centers around the killing of reindeer, something that has been reported in Sápmi throughout the years.⁹⁷ To both the director Elle Márjá Eira and lead actress Elin Oskal, the hate depicted in the film is to the highest degree real. During the shoot of the film, the reindeer herders who provided reindeer for the film had some of their reindeer killed, which according to Eira was rough to experience.⁹⁸ Both Eira and Oskal, together with much of the crew of the film, have personal reindeer herding backgrounds and experiences, something which according to Oskal was crucial in order to produce the film. Both women note that they feel a close connection to the protagonist of Elsa, and that many Sámi women can relate to her.⁹⁹

Clearly, many of the Sámi filmmakers have chosen to approach actual events in their films, be it through collecting stories and merging them into something new, or more directly depicting historical events, changing minor parts. Once again, the historical revisionism becomes distinct and of weight. As mentioned in the quotes in this section, the oppression of the Sámi has been—and still often is—kept in the dark, despite a collective pain. This way of constructing stories, establishing visual sovereignty and bringing these chosen histories to light, a process of healing and cultural self-awareness can commence. Thus, the effect and importance of these acts of self-representation, where true stories are pronounced, must not be underrated.

⁹⁶ Balaga, Marta. "Katja Gauriloff Makes History With 'Je'vida,' the First Feature Shot in the Skolt Sámi Language: 'My Mother Never Let Me Forget'", *Variety*, 2023-09-11, accessed 2025-05-20, <https://variety.com/2023/film/news/katja-gauriloff-jevida-toronto-1235719608/>

⁹⁷ "Dödade renar – ännu ett smärtsamt exempel på diskrimineringen av urfolk", *Amnesty International*, 2025-02-17, accessed 2025-05-25,

<https://www.amnesty.se/aktuellt/mordade-renar-exempel-pa-diskrimineringen-av-urfolk/>

This is just one recent example of killed reindeer being found, one can find similar accounts in other new stories from previous years as well.

⁹⁸ "Stöld"-regissören: Vi har upplevt rasismen", *TT, Aftonbladet*, 2024-04-12, accessed 2025-05-25,

<https://www.aftonbladet.se/nojesbladet/a/0Vjj5B/stold-regissoren-vi-har-upplevt-rasismen>

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

7. Conclusion and discussion

In this thesis, I have examined Sámi self-representation through the theory of visual sovereignty, while also briefly connecting it to the notion of Fourth Cinema. The aim has been to examine all Sámi feature films: *Pathfinder*, *Minister of the State*, *The Kautokeino Rebellion*, *Sámi Blood*, *Ellos Eatnu - Let the River Flow*, *Je'vida*, *The Tundra Within Me* and *Stolen*—more specifically asking what the Sámi self-representations looks like; what themes are present, both visual and narratological. Describing these six mutual themes found in the films—language, Sámi iconography, oppression and racial abuse, the yoik, death and funerals, as well as stories based on real accounts—highlights what stories the Sámi have chosen to tell, as well as in which way.

Researching these films, it has become clear that much of Sámi filmmaking involves elements of ethnographic films, mainly including the iconography, but through the reclamation of the narrative, the process of visual sovereignty is approached, as described by Raheja. Said ethnographic hallmarks are reclaimed, and recontextualized, and employed on the own terms of the Sami. In some cases, this also leads to practices of decolonial historical revisionism, something related to the notions of Fourth Cinema.

Despite commonalities and common themes, the Sámi filmmakers naturally process them in different ways—ways in which the Sámi language can be used explicitly or implicitly, or where the iconography can be used for abandoning, reclaiming or normalizing the Sámi culture, and where the yoik can be handled as something emotional or humorous. However, the themes of oppression and abuse, together with death, suicide and funerals, are most often deployed in more serious and dramatic manners—seemingly as these somber issues have remained in the dark for long, and need to be reclaimed and exposed to wider audiences, appealing on emotional factors of the viewer.

Consequently, rather than rejecting the medium that historically has hurt the collected image of them, The Sámi have approached it, reclaimed their histories, establishing historical interventionism and visual sovereignty.

All this functions well in relation to the accounts I have heard from family members—including stories of measuring skulls, abuse at schools for not speaking Swedish, and the abandonment of the native Sámi languages. Accordingly, these personal narratives have also remained in the dark—mainly due to shame and a lack of teaching children about

these issues at school—but seeing said narratives and issues being depicted on film has sparked discussions, interest and inquiries into what actually happened. This way the films become properties of information and healing, and will perhaps help someone wear their gákti with pride.

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