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Beyond Borders – A thousand years of resilience

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When I arrived at the Indigenous Writing Retreat in Gilbbesjávri (Kilpisjärvi), I crossed the border between Norway and Finland just a few kilometers from the shore of Lake Gilbbesjávri in Rounala-siida. I have crossed this border hundreds of times, like some of the other national borders in Sápmi. Sometimes I barely notice the borders. In other situations, I reflect more over the formation of the national borders, the borders of the ancient Sámi siida or sijd-institution, and the ways that national borders impact my life as a Sámi in Sápmi. While at the writing retreat, we discussed themes for narrations or articles, and the theme of borders was a natural choice for me.

During the stay in Gilbbesjávri, I was reminded of the very first time I passed this place. I was a child on a family trip. We had driven from our home village of Johkanjárga (Elvenes) in Norway which bordered the Soviet Union and where the Paččjokk (Pasvik) River has its outlet in Báhčaveajvuonna (Bøkfjorden). We hadn't decided where we would go, we just travelled like people used to back in the days before chartered trips and cell phones. We had a tent and sleeping bags in the car and were all dressed up in our comfortable jumpsuits. We just wanted to look around and see how things were in other places. Then we stopped for a break by the shore of Gilbbesjávri, and I remember that it was a nice place with a view over the lake and a steep hill going down from the coffee shop to the lake. I was not used to such high mountains in my home village and was surprised when the majestic mountains suddenly surrounded us in the valley on the Norwegian side of the border.

It was familiar for me to be in Finland, as we often went to shop in Njauddâm-sijd on the Finnish side of the border. When we visited áhkku-rohkki (late grandmother), Ádjoš-Biret-Ánná in Buolbmát (Polmak), we crossed the Deatnu (Tana River) to shop in Rádjá ("The Border") or Njuorggán (Nuorgam). Both sides of the river had been a part of Ohcejohka-siida (Hansen & Olsen 2004, 272–273). Further upstream in the same river valley was Deantu-siida and Ávjovárri-siida. My ancestors had been reindeer herders in Ávjovárri (today's

Kárášjohka/Karasjok municipality) before my great-great-grandparents drove their reindeer stock to the mountains surrounding the lower part of Deatnu (Tana River) in Deanodat-siida. Their son, Ádjoš-Sámmol, took his reindeer with him over the mountain to Unjárga (Nesseby) in Várjjat-siida (Varanger) where he married my great-grandmother Bumbbáš-Liise. Her father Bumbbáš-Máhtte had migrated from Soađegilli-siida (Sodankylä) in Finland to the shores of Várjavuonna (Varangerfjorden) where he married a local Sámi woman and settled down and established a farm and local shop. In the population records, he is registered as a Kven who lived like a Sámi. He was part of a large wave of migration from Finland to Northern Norway, were people of Finnish descent are called Kvens. However, his family was Kemi Sámi because from at least the seventeenth century, they had been living on the same *lapp* tax land in Soađegilli as other Kemi Sámi (Enbuske 2008, 341; Hoppula 2006, 19; Rasmussen 2007b).

When we came to Gáivuotna (Kåfjord) on the Norwegian side of the border, my mother (eadni-rohkki, Biret-Ánná Gunvor) said we knew some people there. It was a man who had been a teacher in our neighboring village and his family. She asked people along the road where they lived, and soon we had found the little farm that belonged to the teacher's mother. They were happy to see us, and we were welcomed to camp on the large lawn in front of the house. We stayed there for some days and helped the family with the hay. I remember mum spoke Sámi with the old woman, and when we left mum brought home a woven woolen *rátnu* (carpet/rug) that she bought from the old woman. It was white wool and had stripes in different naturally-dyed colors. In the car, we talked about the very nice *rátnu* and I said to mum that I'd read about this old tradition in the region, but that it was Sámi women who wove them. Mum said, "but the old woman is a Sámi." I felt both confused and at the same time, ashamed. I was confused because I realized that we were also Sámi, along with many of our relatives and neighbors. We had never spoken about it, even though my mother, grandparents, and other relatives spoke Sámi, I didn't think they *were* Sámi. I felt ashamed because I hadn't known or understood the truth of our own family's Sámi belonging. To me, the Sámi were reindeer herders living in the mountains, so I'd learned in school. I had also heard about the Skolt Sámi who used to live in Boris Gleb across the Russian border, which was only a few kilometers from our home. The Skolt Sámi would have their fishing camps on the Norwegian side of the border in the summer. But that was a long time ago. The way the Skolt Sámi had worshipped an icon in Saint Trifon's cave, and how they put miniature tools on top of the graves of their

departed was like a fairytale. Sometimes we visited the cave in our village, and three graves were still visible next to my father's childhood home in Ruovdevuonna (Jarfjord), but the icon and the miniature tools disappeared after the Second War World, just as the Skolt Sámi had. As a child I didn't realize how close to my own time they had lived in their ancient siida, or that some of their descendants still lived in our municipality.

However, my own family stories were not fairytales, they were real to me. Áddjá-rohkki (late grandfather), Áslat-Ovllá, died when I was seven years old and for some winters áhkku stayed with us. After school she told stories about her life and our family. She had been through three major traumas: when her older brother Sámmol died at just eight years old, when her father disappeared in the mountains while herding his reindeer—as a consequence they lost their reindeer stock—and when the Nazi-Germans burned down their home in the Second World War. Several of her stories were about those three tragic events. Those stories have always been a part of me. I grew up with them, and they are an integrated part of me – my mind, body, and soul.

Why didn't I understand that I had a Sámi family? I grew up during the period of the Norwegianization policy. This was an official policy carried out by the Norwegian government from the early 1850s until the late 1980s (Minde 2003, 121). Some say it lasted only until the 1960s, but it depends on what you emphasize as its ending, either the work implemented by the Sámi committee of 1959 or the establishment of the Sámi parliament in 1989. The target of the policy was to assimilate the Sámi population into an ethnically and culturally uniform Norwegian population. Nevertheless, I don't think the truth was intentionally hidden from me. My mother wasn't ashamed of her Sámi background, and she spoke Sámi openly with others who spoke the language. It was more that being a Sámi was so natural that nobody even thought about actually saying that we were Sámi. Anyway, I remember schoolmates who didn't know their parents spoke Sámi. Even today, there are adults who have just learned about their Sámi background, as shown in the documentary film *Familiebildet* (*My Family Portrait*) made by Yvonne Thomassen (2013). In the film the younger aunt of the director, says she didn't know they were Sámi, while her older sister always knew. Another story from recent media was 90-year-old Agnete Lorås who hide her Sámi heritage from her own children for 70 years (Oskal & Aslaksen 2018), much like my colleague, Ellen Marie Jensen – who also is a contributor to this special issue – has mentioned from her own family history in another article (2016). I think

it’s almost impossible for people who haven’t experienced the Norwegianization period and its consequences, or a similar policy in other countries, to understand the full impact of it: all the pain, shame, self-contempt, alcoholism, sexual abuse, and lateral violence. And then there is the silence, the unspoken. There are people who don’t know their roots, who are unfamiliar with the culture and can’t speak the language. Today, people are trying to take back what was stolen from them. Recently, we’ve gotten a Truth and Reconciliation Commission in Norway, and we’re invited to tell our personal stories to the commission. But not all of us are even able to tell our stories, like the people who committed suicide, were killed, or were bullied so severely that they suffer from mental illness. Who tells their stories? Who tells the collective story?

The policy of assimilation lasted for over a hundred years, but the negative “othering” of the Sámi started already back in the Middle Ages when the Norwegians converted to Christianity. Suddenly, the Sámi were regarded as dangerous sorcerers and idolaters, which was the opposite of pre-Christian times when the Norse and Sámi practiced quite similar religions (Hansen & Olsen 2004, 62–64). The Sámi have never been an isolated people; cooperation and trading with neighboring peoples was a part of life going far back in time. The export of furs, dried fish, blubber oil, and other products from Sápmi was a crucial part of the economy of the Viking Age’s chieftains in Northern Norway, and later of the Norwegian kingdom (Hansen & Olsen 2004, 60–61, 65–75, 153). Although Sámi kings are mentioned in Nordic medieval sources, Sápmi has never been a state of its own. In the High Middle Ages (1200–1300s), the Scandinavian kings made agreements with Novgorod about which territories each state had for trading and taxation rights. In these huge territories, two or even all three states claimed these rights (Hansen & Olsen 2004, 170–173). That situation lasted for many hundreds of years, until Sápmi was finally divided between the neighboring states through several peace and border treaties in the period from the 1590s to the 1820s (Hansen & Olsen 2004, 261–273, 282). Even the 1920- and 1944-border regulations between Finland and Soviet Union affected the Sámi in the region. Christian influences reached Sápmi in medieval times, in the east by the Russian Orthodox Church, and in west by the Roman Catholic Church. The Skolt Sámi were converted by the Russian monk Trifon in the mid-1500s. After the Lutheran Reformation in the 1520–1530s, the Roman Catholic Church was replaced by churches ruled by the Scandinavian kings (Hansen & Olsen 2004, 318–320, Rasmussen 2016, 165–166, 169–175).

When the witch hunts expanded into northern areas in seventeenth century Europe, the small fishing communities along the northern shores of Várjavuonna were dramatically impacted. Despite an order from the Danish-Norwegian king, Christian IV, to pursue Sámi sorcerers "with no mercy" (Hagen 2012, 8), most of the accused were, in fact, Norwegian women. Several claimed, however, that they had learned the witchcraft from Sámi people (Hagen 2012, 6–7). By this time, most of the Sámi had been baptized, so officially they were Christians. However, their Indigenous religion was still practiced outside the sphere of the church, or they had adapted the Christian faith to their traditional worldview. The Lutheran pietists worried about the fate of the Sámi souls, and a special Sámi mission lasting for a hundred years was established in the early 1700s. In some periods, the Sámi languages were viewed as necessary to bring the gospel to the Sámi; in other periods, Danish and Norwegian had to be used in both the church and schools (Steen 1954, 198–241, 263–274, 327–371). When the Norwegianization policy started in the mid-1800s, the Sámi had already been under pressure for a long time. It became even worse in the late 1800s and early 1900s due to the development and intensification of Norwegian nationalism, social Darwinism, racism, and security policy (Minde 2003, 123–124; Pedersen 2008, 498–502). The coastal Sámi were looked upon as a degenerated tribe, while the reindeer herding Sámi were regarded as the "real Sámi." At the bottom of the ranking, were the Skolt Sámi. Needless to say, the Norwegians considered themselves to be at the top of the list, with Kven being in second place. Thus, our ancestors learned that their language and culture had no value. During the Norwegianization period, the language and many aspects of the culture vanished or diminished in many Sámi communities.

In the early 1900s, Sámi people in both the north and south opposed the Norwegianization policy. Because of active suppression of them on the part of local and national authorities, in addition to financial and organizational reasons, opposition to the policy died out after a few decades (Jernsletten 1998, 152; Johansen 2015, 145–151; Zachariassen 2012, 334).

After the Second War World, when the people in the northern parts of Sápmi had to rebuild their homes, they were weary from the war and evacuation, and the youth looked forward to a new modern life. The old material life was gone, burned by the Nazis' scorched earth policy. The immaterial life had already been under pressure for hundreds of years. In order to be able to manage in this new life, one had to speak and write Norwegian, otherwise you and your family would face great challenges; the solution was so easy, yet so difficult. Parents decided

to only teach their children Norwegian. The experts said it was best for the brain of the child, stating that two or more languages would confuse the child (Johansen 2007, 244). My mother was lucky because she was born many years before the war and grew up in her grandmother's house where they spoke Sámi. As a student at the teacher training college in Romsa (Tromsø) in the 1950s, she and some other Sámi students were taught to read and write in the North Sámi language. Her student project was in handicraft, using woven samples of Sámi belts. In the introduction to this work, which we found after her death in 2017, she writes that she's proud of Sámi duodji (handicraft) and that she wants to teach the young Sámi girls duodji and encourage them to make traditional clothes.

Unfortunately, my mother never got the opportunity to teach young girls duodji. Her first job after college was in Ruovdevuonna (Jarfjord) in Mátta-Várjjat (Sør-Varanger) municipality, where she met my father. He was from a Norwegian family who had been encouraged by the government to settle there shortly after the region became a full part of Norway in 1826. Lured by free land, they, like many others without their own land, emigrated from the overpopulated farming districts in the south. During my childhood, I often listened to the story about those brave people. The bravery of our Sámi family was never brought up, like how they managed to live in a tent year around, trying to keep the predators away from their reindeer stock, or how they were fishing from small open boats in storms in the cold dark winter. My great grandfather's parents planned to emigrate to North America, as almost one million Norwegians. For those who couldn't afford the tickets to cross the ocean, northern Norway was a cheaper alternative, often called "the poor-man's America." My relatives gave up their emigration plans due to sea sickness; instead, they ended up by the border to the Czarist Russian Empire, where they settled by Karpelva (Siidejohka) in Ruovdevuonna, a small river named after a Skolt Sámi man called Karp. Skolt Sámi families had their summer sites along this fjord, in the winter they lived on the Russian side of the border. In addition to the Norwegian immigration, Northern Sámi, Kemi Sámi, and Kven populated this area. Thus, the nineteenth century Ruovdevuonna became a melting pot of those ethnic groups. Marriages across the ethnic borders increased in the next century, although they were not always accepted by their families. (Since the Northern Sámi make up the majority of the Sámi, I will refer to this group using the term Sámi in the following text, unless otherwise clearly expressed.)

When my mother moved to Ruovdevuonna in the late 1950s, the children didn't speak Sámi or Kven anymore, only Norwegian. A Sámi man I interviewed about his school days at the same school in the early 1950s, told how the headmaster always said in a harsh tone "Speak Norwegian" if someone spoke Sámi. He told about how badly the headmaster generally treated the Sámi children: "We Sámi kids had no value in the headmaster's eyes" (Rasmussen 2007a, 304). In an interview with my mother's first cousin from Jurangohppi (Ropelv) in Báhčaveajvuonna, she told a similar story about their headmasters and teachers. On the bus to Girkonjárga (Kirkenes), the nearby industry town with a Norwegian majority, the Sámi youngsters switched languages from Sámi to Norwegian in an attempt to protect themselves; but it was useless, they couldn't hide their origin and they were harassed by other youth, and even by adults (Rasmussen 2005, 409). Another woman, who had a Sámi mother and a Norwegian father, told me how their own Norwegian granduncle bullied her brother and her, shouting "finnunga" after them, a term of abuse used as a pejorative for Sámi children. In these environments, it wasn't possible for my mother to teach the girls in duodji and make them proud of their Sámi heritage. Nobody even used Sámi clothes anymore, except for *nuvttahat* (reindeer fur shoes) on cold winter days. When I was a toddler, my grandmother sent me a *gákti* (Sámi traditional garment). By then we lived in the town of Girkonjárga, and my mother was married into a Norwegian family. There was no way she could dress me in Sámi clothes. She sold it to a neighbor family who had a little girl, they came from southern Norway and for them the *gákti* was exotic folklore. My mother kept her *gákti* in the cupboard for nearly twenty years, she didn't wear it again until my confirmation.

In the late 1970s, the winds of change began to blow, and suddenly there was a hurricane: the Alta controversy. Several Sámi-led demonstrations against the building of a dam and power plant in the Áltá-Guovdageaidnu River took hold in 1979 and lasted until 1982. This was the most controversial hydropower development in Norway. This Sámi movement arose as a protest against the building of the plant in an area that was important both for reindeer herding and salmon fishing. The demonstrations grew rapidly into a movement which concerned the entire situation for the Sámi people as an Indigenous people, which even impacted the Sámi in the other countries as well as other Indigenous peoples. In the end, the plant was built but the government policy toward the Sámi fundamentally changed. As a result of the movement, the Sámi parliament in Norway was founded in 1989 (Zachariassen 2019). The time of the Alta

controversy was difficult for both Sámi and other people in the north, even for my own family. Although we were not personally involved in the controversy, it felt like an awakening for us. My mother studied the Sámi language again, and my two siblings and I educated ourselves on subjects regarding Sámi culture, history, art history, and language. From then on, my Sámi identity slowly grew stronger, I got a *gákti* and started to learn the Sámi language. For the last thirty years, the history of the Sámi people has been an essential part of my life. Through teaching, research, and writing, I wanted to impart knowledge of the Sámi past to both the Sámi community and society at large.

Since the summer trip in the 1970s, I've driven through Gilbbesjávri often, and I've spent some weekends there together with my husband and children, who have ancestors from this region. The area is also a part of my academic studies. A decade ago, I lived for some years further downstream in this same waterway. In other words, the place for the Indigenous Studies Writing Retreat was familiar to me, but the concept of a writing retreat was new. I liked the way it was organized with plenty of time to write my own text, the daily talks by the mentors, the discussions for the whole group, and the focus on Indigenous methodology. My main research field is Sámi communities in the 1600s and 1700s, thus, written texts found in archives or old books are my most important source materials. In my works, I've tried to reveal Sámi agency and voices in the texts. In articles about our recent Sámi history, I've included interviews with Sámi people. However, I've never integrated my own family history into my work before. While at the writing retreat, I've learned more about this methodology, thus, I was encouraged to use it in my narrative (see for example Kovach 2009 (2012), 109–117). Suddenly, I realized how I could tell the history of Sápmi through my own family history. Even the more informal conversations around the dinner table and on the hiking trips in the mountains inspired me. Those trips gave me the possibility to learn more about the other participants, and their projects, as well to share with them the history of the Sámi people, and particularly the history of the Gilppesjávri-region or the old Rounala-siida. Today, this region is known as the land of three national borders, Finland, Norway, and Sweden, like my own childhood region where the borders of Finland, Norway, and Russia meet.

I grew up during the Cold War, in the shadow of the warm war. Even though the houses were rebuilt, and we lived in a democratic welfare society, people still had trauma caused by the warm war, that is, World War II. The Cold War refers to the tense relationship between the

Western bloc (the United States and their allies) and the Eastern bloc (the Soviet Union and their allied), after World War II. In our community, we lived as members of the Western bloc and NATO, next to the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact. We could look over the border, but it was strictly forbidden to cross it. We were surrounded by borders, and border restrictions. The Cold War had separated us from the people on the other side of the border. We didn't know them anymore; the people who used to live there were forced to leave, and new people from all over the Soviet Union moved into the area. Further east on the Kola Peninsula, Sámi, Norwegians, and Finns had been separated from their relatives to the west already after the Russian Revolution in 1917; in the years to follow, several were deported, executed, or died of starvation (Berg-Nordlie 2015, 46–48; Jentoft 2001 (2005), 55–57, 109– 114, 278–292; Leinonen 2008, 67–71). Only after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, could we get to know each other again.

Some centuries ago, there were no national borders in Sápmi. However, it wasn't a borderless land as many people say; there were siida borders. The siida is the oldest form of Sámi community we know about (Lehtola 2002, 186). The Northern Sámi siida corresponds with sijd in Skolt Sámi language. The core of each siida was a water system, a river, a large lake, or a fjord. The siida boundaries did not go along the waterways, but on the mountain ridges, on marsh land, and in the deep forests. In contrast, the national borders were drawn in the middle of the rivers, straight through some of the siidas, as I will illustrate in what follows.

The Sámi historian, Veli-Pekka Lehtola, has described the siida-concept in this way:

> A siida was both a hunting group responsible for community affairs, as well as the siida's hunting territory. The siida owned clearly defined territory, along with that territory's land and water. Use rights within the siida territory were distributed among various families, large and small. This right of distribution was the siida's exclusively right, although common lands were agreed upon separately. There was a clear division of territory within each siida and among siidas (Lehtola 2002, 186).

The old siida-system, developed during the time of the hunting economy, was challenged by colonialism and adaptation to new livelihoods, like farming and reindeer nomadism. In the Skolt Sámi sijds, the ancient way of organizing the communities was maintained until the early twentieth century, while the siida-system in the west broke down in the previous centuries, first

in the coastal districts and then later in the east and in the inland (Hansen & Olsen 2004, 175–185, 253–257). The development of nomadic reindeer herding in the early modern period changed the way Sámi people used the territory. People started to follow their domesticated reindeer stock to the coast in the spring and return back again in autumn, which continues today. Even the term siida changed to mean a group of cooperating reindeer owners and their reindeer stock. The "finneodel" institution, or Sámi allodial property, of the coastal Sámi in the 1600s and 1700s may have been left over from the old siida-system. At a time when all land was owned by the king, the noblemen, or other wealthy peoples, Sámi farms weren't registered in the land register and they didn't pay any rent for the land. The Sámi regarded it as their own property, since it could be bought, sold, and inherited for themselves (Hansen & Olsen 298–305). The "finneodel" institution was quite similar to the tax land institution ("lapp" tax lands, tax mountains) in Swedish-Finnish parts of Sápmi (Hansen & Olsen 284–292). Both those institutions were cancelled by the authorities, who asserted that the king was the owner of the land. Several Sámi farmers left their old farms, which were hired or bought by Norwegians who moved into the Sámi fjords. Even Swedish authorities welcomed non-Sámi colonists to Sápmi. In the southern parts of the Kemi Sámi area, like in Soađegilli where my ancestors had a tax land, Finnish settlers soon became the majority, and the Indigenous people became the minority (Lehtola 2002, 188–189).

The first formal border that was established was the border between Norway and Sweden-Finland in 1751. The supplement of the border treaty, the so-called Lapp Codicil, is often described as "the Magna Charta of the Sámi." This codicil protected the reindeer herding Sámi who had grazing land on both sides of the border, but also other rights like fishing, hunting, and trade (Hansen & Olsen 2004, 273–276; Lantto 2010, 545–546; Pedersen 2008, 21, 30, 36–38, 152–157). The Rounala-Sámi, for example, moved every spring to the Norwegian shore with their reindeer and back again in the autumn to the mountain region on the Swedish side. Nevertheless, they had to choose citizenship in the country where they had their winter pastures, usually in Sweden. Although the intention was not to split Sámi communities, it still happened along the Deatnu River where the old Deatnu and Ohcejohka-siidas were divided between a Norwegian and a Swedish (Finnish) part (Hansen & Olsen 2004, 276; Pedersen 2008, 108–110).

The next establishment of a national border was between Sweden and Finland. It was established in 1809 when Sweden lost Finland to Russia, and Finland became an autonomous Grand Duchy of Russia. The new border was drawn straight through the old siidas of Rounala and Suonttavaara, along Lake Gilbbesjávri, following Geaggáneatnu-Muoná-Duortnus River (Könkämä-Muonio-Tornio River) to the Gulf of Bothnia (Pedersen 2008, 164–165, 180).

At the same time, the northernmost part of Norway got a border to the Russian Grand Duchy of Finland, instead of the border to the kingdom of Sweden (Pedersen 2008, 158). Five years later, Norway was separated from Denmark and went into union with Sweden. The borders remained, nevertheless, and the Sámi continued to use both sides of the border (Pedersen 2008, 152, 157). But the political climate between the states changed, and in 1852 the Norwegian-Finnish border was closed. Russia denied the Sámi from Norway to use the pastures on the Finnish side of the border, while Sámi from Finland weren't allowed to fish in Norway (Pedersen 2008, 405, 460–461). This was a crisis for the reindeer herders who had too little grazing land on the Norwegian side for their large reindeer stocks. The solution for some of them was to move to less populated areas, like Mátta-Várjjat. Others moved over the national borders, to Finland or Russia. This was the reason for my ancestors' migration from Ávjovárri to the lower Deatnu district, as I wrote about in the beginning of this narrative. The border closing caused enormous problems for the Sámi, including internal conflicts about the grazing land. While some kept on as nomadic reindeer herders, others had to adapt to a coastal Sámi livelihood with fishing, farming, and often a little reindeer stock (Pedersen 2008, 470; Solbakk 2001, 107–108).

The Sámi in Guovdageaidnu-siida found another solution, they moved to the Swedish side and became Swedish citizens, thus they could still use the pastures in Finland since the border between the two states was still open. But this didn't last for long, from 1889 it was forbidden to cross the Swedish-Finnish border with reindeer (Marainen 1982, 68). By this time, it had become really crowded with people and reindeer in the old siidas of Rounala and Suonttavaara. Summer pastures were on the Norwegian coast, just as they used to be, but it was also crowded there. More Norwegians had settled along the fjords and in the inland. The authorities favored the Norwegian farmers in these areas, as they did in the border areas to Russia. In 1905, Norway broke out of the union with Sweden, which had lasted from 1814. From then on, reindeer herders with Swedish citizenship were looked upon as foreigners by the Norwegian authorities.

People who had had their summer pastures for generations on the Norwegian side of the border, were denied access to their grazing lands, according to the Convention of 1919 (Marainen 1982, 68–69). Only a smaller group of nomadic Sámi kept their summer pastures in this region. Swedish authorities solved this problem by forcing a large group of Northern Sámi to move further south into the Swedish part of Sápmi, which then crossed the boundaries of the old siidas into lands with another Sámi language and way of reindeer herding. This is often called a voluntary relocation, but indeed neither the "relocated" nor the Sámi in their new land, had any choice (Labba 2020, 9–19; Marainen 1982, 69–70; Simma 2019). Other reindeer herding families found new pastures for their reindeer in Muona (Muonio), Kolari, Gihttil (Kittilä) and Soađegilli (Enbuske 2008, 425–437; Rasmussen 2008, 22–29). Best known is the migration of Northern Sámi to the Kemi Sámi Soađegilli. However, even Muona and Kolari had a living Sámi society in the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century, with together 15–20 families (Rasmussen 2008, 22–29).

The last border is the Norwegian-Russian border from 1826. All together there were seven Skolt Sámi sijds: Njauddâm, Paččjokk, Peäccam, Suõ′nn'jel, Mue′tǩǩ, Nuõ′ttjäu′rr, and Sââ′rvesjäu′rr. Peäccam (Petsjenga), Paččjok (Pasvik) and Njauddâm (Neiden) were still a common taxation territory for Russia and Norway, as they had been from the Middle Ages, but as Orthodox Christians they were regarded as Russian Sámi. According to the border treaty of 1826, Peäccam-sijd became Russian, while the other two sijds were divided between a Norwegian and a Russian part. The Sámi in Njauddâm-sijd became Norwegian citizens, and the Sámi in Paččjokk sijd chose Russian citizenship. The border line was drawn along Paččjokk River, the core of this siida (Andresen 1989, 44–45). From time immemorial, those semi-nomadic Sámi had used the territories of their siida for fishing, hunting and reindeer herding. Their winter and autumn lands were in the inland, while in the spring and summer they lived in Boris Gleb by the outlet of the river and in the fjords of Báhčaveajvuonna and Ruovdevuonna. After the border treaty of 1826, they retained fishing rights on the Norwegian side. One hundred years later, they were ultimately excluded from their ancient lands (Andresen 1989, 20–26, 164). In fact, many families had lost their rights a long time before due to the increasing immigration to the area and the infringement of rights on the part of the Norwegian government. Others had stopped using the fishing camps because of the hostile attitudes of the settlers. In the period of 1920-1944, the east side of Paččjokk River was a part

of Finnish Petsamo, and the Skolt Sámi fishing rights were sold for 12,000 gold money to the Finnish state (Andresen 1989, 81–84, 157–164, 167–169). The reason which the state maintained was most important for terminating the Skolt Sámi fishing rights was the need for hydropower for the newly established mining company. Norwegian authorities had tried to get rid of the Indigenous people from this region for a long time and sought to relocate them far away from the border area. According to the Norwegian government's way of thinking, as a "dying people" at a "low stage of development," they could cause serious harm if they mixed with Norwegians and Kvens (Andresen 1989, 111, 154–155). After the Second World War, Petsamo became a subject of the Soviet Union and the Skolt Sámi fled to Finland, where they received new homes by Aanaarjävri (Lake Inari) where the Paččjokk River has its headwaters.

When I was growing up during the Cold War, the Soviet or other side of the Paččjokk River was a completely strange world, and I couldn't even imaging that the border would one day open up again. Later, I lived both by the Norwegian-Finnish border and the Finnish-Swedish border. Thus, the national borders have always been a part of my daily life. Although those two borders are open borders with few restrictions, the concept of the national border and the national state still define the culture and languages of both the Sámi and other ethnic groups in this borderland. In our daily lives, we usually don't think much about the borders, but in the spring of 2020, we realized that we are living in different national states. Due to the Corona virus, border restrictions were introduced in the Nordic countries, which of course also included us Sámi. The national borders affect us in many ways, both in our daily lives, and in academic life. Even scholars of Sámi subjects – both Sámi and non-Sámi – tend to study Sámi society, history, language, etc. from within their own national borders.

The division of Sápmi that started several hundred years ago affected our ancestors and it still affects people today, both Sámi and others. The assimilation policy resulted in generations who have lost the Sámi language and culture. The establishment of borders and the closing of borders resulted in intense relocations of Sámi people, forcibly or through so-called "voluntary relocation." These actions have created wounds within and between Sámi communities, as well as in relation to the majority. The history of the Sámi and Sápmi is still more or less unknown to the Nordic majorities, and even for many Sámi themselves. Others have a romantic view about the past when the Sámi lived in harmony and peace, without any interruptions from the neighboring peoples. That past has never existed. The Sámi are human, just like everyone else,

and like other peoples, there are both good and bad elements of the culture, in the past and today. We can blame the authorities or other people for past discrimination of the Sámi people, but we can't change that history. We can change the way that history is told, and we Sámi can contribute to that project by telling our own history, from a Sámi point of view.

The conception of suppression is often a prominent theme in the history of the Sámi people, as I may have given an impression of in this narrative. But I would rather like to use another conception to describe the Sámi people: resilience. If we're regarding the short version of the history of the Sámi, we'll see how the Sámi adapted to different livelihoods, languages, states, border restrictions, relocations, jurisdictions, religions and trading systems, in addition to assimilation, colonization, taxation, wars and witch hunting. It's more like a miracle that we're still here, thanks to our ancestors' ability to adapt and for their struggle for Sámi rights. We can change the present and the future. In order to do that we need history to better understand how we came to the present and how we can transform the future for the better. This has been a totally new way for me to tell some parts of the larger history of the Sámi people, that is, through my own family stories. My mission is to tell our history, as a Sámi and from a Sámi point of view.

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