Decolonizing music education research and the (im)possibility of methodological responsibility

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Abstract
Whilst increasing attention is paid to decolonizing music education practice in the classroom, the research processes by which scholars identify, understand, and evaluate anti-colonial or decolonizing work are often entrenched in colonial logics themselves. The politics of knowledge and knowledge production between indigenous epistemes and the Academy thus raise questions as to the methodological responsibility of music education research in indigenous settings, particularly when conducted by non-indigenous researchers. Drawing upon a recent music education study conducted together with indigenous Sámi peoples in Finland, this article argues that despite the good intentions of music education scholars methodological responsibility may well be an unachievable goal. However, if we understand research ethics as more than the procedural accountability to institutional review boards or funding committees, methodological responsibility may better be understood as a condition of possibility found in relation with others. Thus, in order to decolonize music education practice, researchers are challenged to step outside of their epistemic and methodological comfort zones, and to consider how we may also decolonize music education research.

Keywords
decolonizing, indigenous peoples, methodology, music education, research ethics, responsibility, Sámi

Unless Western knowledge orthodoxies are interrogated, the basis of their power will continue to reproduce the colonised as a fixed reality, including the subtext of Indigenous Intellectual nullius.
(Rigney, 2001, p. 10)

Calls to decolonize music education are increasing in number and volume internationally. Music education researchers have achieved considerable ground in highlighting the violences of coloniality that permeate music curricula, pedagogical approaches, teacher education and

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music education philosophies, among other aspects of the profession (e.g., Bradley, 2012; Herbst, Nzewi, & Agawu, 2003; Hess, 2018; Rosabal-Coto, 2014). Yet, what decolonization means in specific contexts, both conceptually and in practice, leaves many scholars and educators scratching their heads (e.g., Locke & Prentice, 2016). Furthermore, the research processes by which scholars identify, understand, and evaluate anti-colonial or decolonizing music education policies and practices are often entrenched in colonial logics themselves (see Tricoire, 2017). Indeed, leading decolonization theorist Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999) has argued that research is “inextricably linked to European imperialism and colonialism” (p. 1, emphasis added), raising questions as to how scholars, and perhaps particularly non-indigenous scholars, can conduct music education research in indigenous settings whilst upholding the central principle of research ethics, do no harm.

These questions are not new. Indeed, over three decades ago Geertz (1988) was writing of the limits of ethnography as “a task at which no one ever does more than not utterly fail” (p. 143). However, in this article, my critique of my own research process is not only focused on the failures of method, but also an exploration of the epistemological limits and challenges of “cross-cultural” research. As Lather (2001) has argued, “embracing epistemological insufficiency can generate practices of knowing that put the rationalistic and evidentiary structures of science under suspicion in order to address how science betrays our investment in it” (p. 478). With this in mind, I reflexively attend to the ethics and politics of research practice through a critical examination of my recent investigation of Indigenous Sámi experiences of inequality in the publicly funded Finnish extracurricular arts education system (see Kallio & Länsman 2018). This system is predicated upon the principle that any child, regardless of geographical location, socio-economic background, race, or gender, should have the opportunity to learn music (Jakkusihvonen & Kuusela, 2002). The Sámi are the only recognized indigenous peoples of Europe, with homelands (Sápmi) spanning across Northern Norway, Sweden, Finland and the Russian Kola Peninsula. As a non-indigenous scholar and immigrant to Finland, I was cognizant that I am very much an outsider to Sámi society, cultures, musics, languages and pedagogies. Taking into consideration the state-funded arts education I was researching (from a position in a state-funded university) and the marginalization or exclusion many Sámi artists, educators, and learners experienced from such systems, I was also aware of the politics of knowledge at play that support and reproduce “certain systems of thought and knowledge, and certain structures and conventions, that rarely reflect or represent indigenous worldviews” (Kuokkanen, 2007, p. 1). Understanding that “there are conflicts inherent to a meeting of two minds, such as Western thinkers and Indigenous ways of being and knowing” (Stewart, 2009, p. 59), the ethical dimensions of this research practice warrant further examination.

The potentials for onto-epistemological conflicts as part of this research raise additional questions with regard to my own authority and abilities to engage in this critical process, and I write this article well aware of Andrea Smith’s (2013) critique of self-reflexivity in the Academy as a means to reinstate the centrality of the White majority subject. Such concerns raised by others, and myself, have given rise to a number of lengthy pauses throughout this process. However, as education scholar Leigh Patel (2016) advises,

[t]hose pauses and shifts should not be seen as reasons to abstain from interacting but rather should shape how we read and understand all writing as temporally located. This stance, itself, is counter to coloniality and its myth of universal truth. (p. 6)

I also acknowledge that my position in a state-funded university and publication of this text in an academic journal risk sustaining the very systems of oppression I am opposing. However, I
do not believe that this “double bind of whiteness” (Ellsworth, 1997) can serve as an excuse to disengage, leaving the burden of decolonizing scholarship to Indigenous researchers alone. It is vital to share our shortcomings and learnings within the forums that are the most colonized, as “a way to keep moving in order to produce and learn from ruptures, failures, breaks and refusals” (Lather, 2001, p. 482) and promote a “dialogue of collaborative community growth” (Battiste, 2011, p. xxvi). Thus, the question I pose to my earlier research in this article ought to also be asked again of the reflexive work in this text, and again of the work that will follow it: is it possible to be methodologically responsible when navigating different, and at times conflicting, worldviews in music education research?

My own story in-relation

The research ethics I am concerned with, in the scope of this article are not those set by institutional committees or funding boards, but those that arise relationally during the course of research (Kuntz, 2016). Accordingly, I begin this article by sharing something of my own identity and history as a means for readers to locate me within the relational work described and analysed in this article. My own story is in many ways very different to many of those that were shared with me as part of this research study. Whereas in many Sámi societies it is common to identify oneself in relation to one’s matriarchal or patriarchal family, often referencing numerous generations (Balto, 2005, p. 91), my knowledge of my family history is relatively limited. I am a first-generation Anglo-Australian, born to White South African parents. The nationality and homelands of my grandparents and more distant ancestors similarly varies throughout generations, but mostly centres around Scotland, England, France and Germany. Both my maternal grandmother, and paternal grandfather were orphaned at an early age, leaving many family stories untold and unclear. Perhaps consequently, I have never felt a particularly strong connection to a place or a national/cultural identity, but I have also enjoyed the privilege of never needing to.

As a child in the 1980s, Indigenous Australian cultures and politics were relatively familiar, even in the overwhelmingly White suburbs of Sydney. My memories of media reports of the tens of thousands of people marching in Sydney on Australia/Survival Day in 1988 are as distinct as those of receiving a commemorative coin in celebration of the Bicentennial anniversary of the arrival of the first fleet of British convict ships in Sydney Harbour. Knowledge about the colonial removal and governance of peoples and Indigenous land rights claims were woven into my childhood soundtrack through artists such as Yothu Yindi, Goanna, and Midnight Oil. Whilst I did not fully understand what these events entailed, I do remember vehemently agreeing with the principle of the recurrent chorus that “the time has come, to say fair’s fair” (Midnight Oil, 1987).

At nine years old, my family moved to Hong Kong. Attending an international school meant that at least 20 ethnic backgrounds, nationalities or languages were represented in my class of approximately 30 children. These “intensified encounters with difference” (Gaztambide-Fernández, 2012, p. 42) were manifest through school celebrations of countless national or religious holidays through various foods, musics, rituals, or activities. It was not out of place to hear English, Scottish, American or Australian accents intermingling with Cantonese, Mandarin, Tagalog, Hindi, Korean, Japanese, French, German, and other languages in the hallways, and I thought nothing remarkable of events such as the school’s Welsh Boys Choir performing alongside Bollywood dancers and rock bands at the annual Diwali festival. This said, many years later I realize that although my peers and I all went through complex negotiations as to our sociocultural identities, as a young White teenager I was not required to navigate the same power structures and cultural/racial hierarchies that many others faced. While
internationalism was often honoured amongst the school community, there were also distinct divides between our diverse community, locals, and mainland Chinese families that I did not fully appreciate. Of course, as an expatriate child my experiences of Hong Kong were from a naïve and sheltered perspective. However, the engagements and lasting friendships I formed with peoples of different backgrounds and worldviews have developed and deepened as we have grown older and served as an important starting point for how I live and work as an adult. At very least, these experiences instilled in me a sense of comfort in not always (or perhaps ever) understanding everything or everyone.

After completing my high school and undergraduate degrees back in Sydney, Australia, I moved to Helsinki, Finland in 2009. It was here I pursued doctoral studies in music education, which were not focused on Indigeneity or decolonization but democratic participation, social justice, and inclusion more broadly (see Kallio 2015). However, these aspects of Finnish life were raised by school music teachers participating in my project, and through other teaching opportunities in Finnish schools and my university. It was through an interest in these brief mentions of Sámi culture and music (by non-Sámi teachers) that I found myself employed as the only music education researcher to work specifically with Sámi communities in a large-scale research project focused on arts education and equality. Not having worked in Indigenous settings (in any capacity) before, I anticipated that I would have a lot to learn—a process which is, evidently, ongoing.

The responsibility of acknowledging and engaging with the indigenous episteme

Historically, academic research about the indigenous Other has conceptualized knowledge as a possession to be discovered, extracted, appropriated, commodified and distributed (e.g., L. T. Smith, 1999). Non-indigenous researchers have long investigated various “indigenous problems” in ways that have benefitted “academic and political careers, economic and professional gain, [and] the profitable use of indigenous territories, natural resources and indigenous knowledge” and have given “very little or nothing back to indigenous peoples” (Porsanger, 2004, p. 108). Moreover, the foundational paradigms and onto-epistemologies of the Academy have been noted to be grounded in assumptions that the knowledge and history of the West are the universal norm to which others can be understood and positioned (Battiste, 2011; Porsanger, 2004). Such hegemonic paradigms have delimited which processes count as research, how research ought to be conducted, and what counts as legitimate (scientific) knowledge—as opposed to mere belief, folklore or superstition. Calls to decolonize research methodologies (e.g., Battiste, 2011; Patel, 2016) have critiqued these logics of coloniality and Western “regimes of truth”, highlighting the imperative for scholars to have “a more critical understanding of the underlying assumptions, motivations and values that inform research practices” (L. T. Smith, 1999, p. 20).

Interrogating the role of the Academy with regard to the politics of knowledge and knowledge production, Professor of Arctic Indigenous Politics Rauna Kuokkanen (2010, 2017) has called for non-indigenous scholars to acknowledge and engage with the indigenous episteme. She draws upon Foucault’s (1972) definition of an episteme as “the total set of relations that unite, at a given period, the discursive practices that give rise to epistemological figures, sciences, and possibly formalized systems” (p. 191) as a “mode of social reality” into which individuals are socialized (Kuokkanen, 2017, p. 315). Although it is impossible to define a single indigenous, or Sámi, episteme, many researchers have noted commonalities between Indigenous worldviews,
that emphasize the importance of relationships, reciprocity, and interdependence between people, communities, land, and the spiritual world (Hart, 2010; Kuokkanen, 2007). Kuokkanen 2017 has argued that as a consequence of (neo)colonialism in the Academy and research practice, the academic world is often ignorant or indifferent towards the indigenous episteme, reflecting processes of “epistemological marginalization” (p. 317). Turning to the work of Gayatri Spivak, she understands this marginalization of the indigenous episteme as not only a means to reinstate the legitimacy and boundaries of a White Western centre of the Academy, but also as a means to constitute the subject occupying the margin in a way that “repeats the rhythms of colonization” (Spivak, 1993, p. 58). This results in a “sanctioned epistemic ignorance” (Kuokkanen, 2010, p. 63) that in turn fosters (or even rewards) an inability to hear indigenous voices “even when they are welcomed to the institution and given the opportunity to express their views” (Kuokkanen, 2007, p. 6). When legitimized and institutionalized through research and higher education, this ignorance can be understood as more than innocent “not knowing”. As Kuokkanen (2017) suggests, sanctioned epistemic ignorance represents “a form of subtle violence. When other than dominant epistemes and forms of knowing are not seen or recognized, they disappear” (p. 317).

Countering such ignorance and acknowledging the existence of indigenous epistemes begins with an acknowledgement of the existence of indigenous peoples, which is followed by a critical interrogation of one’s own scholar episteme in the White, Western Academy (Kuokkanen, 2010). This development of reflexive, critical awareness is not to draw a “binary or moral evaluation between good (Indigenous) and bad (conventional/Western) knowledges” (Dei, 2000, p. 113) or replace one episteme with another, but rather to “reimagine and rearticulate power, change, and knowledge through a multiplicity of epistemologies, ontologies and axiologies” (Sium, Desai, & Ritskes, 2012, p. iii). In this way, “[r]esponsibility is not a calculation to be performed. It is a relation... an iterative (re)opening up to, an enabling responsiveness” (Barad, 2012, p. 34). Such a perspective of research as relational presents “responsibility [as] always partial—never particular” demanding that we “foreground ethical deliberations... to inquiry [sic] differently, to refuse the constraint of the status quo” (Kuntz, 2016, p. 88–89). In other words, to conduct research that is responsible to indigenous epistemes, cultures, and peoples, scholars need to “abandon the path of least resistance” (Gorsky, 2008, p. 524) and step outside of the epistemic (and perhaps other) comfort zones of the Academy. As noted by Derrida (1992) (among others), “there is no responsibility without a dissident and inventive rupture with respect to tradition, authority, orthodoxy, rule, or doctrine” (p. 27).

The beginnings of learning methodological responsibility: Three epistemic ruptures

Leaving one’s academic comfort zone and engaging with the indigenous episteme is necessarily discomforting work, yet not necessarily straightforward. In this section of the article I present three instances that occurred early on in my own research study that served as ruptures to my own academic episteme, and as “ethically important moments” (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004, p. 261). These moments highlighted my limitations as a scholar in relation to the Sámi artists, arts educators, community leaders and scholars that I was working with, and were the impetus for methodological innovations in seeking a more relational, responsible research practice. I share these moments through a narrative re-storying approach (Reissman, 1993), preceding each narrative account with excerpts from my researcher journal as an additional means to illustrate this learning process. The first narrative is from the initial planning stages of the
project, when I first realized that my methodological and ethical assumptions were insufficient. The second narrative outlines learning that took place through research collaboration with a Sámi musician and educator that brought to light my epistemic ignorance. The third narrative I share in this article is from a discussion I had with a Sámi visual artist, which served as a turning point and ethical imperative to seriously reconsider the methodological design of the study from a relational, ethical perspective.

From procedural ethics to ethics in practice

I know nothing of Sámi people, history, or culture. I have a Sámi friend, but it’s not like we sit around discussing his Sáminess. There is part of me that knows that there are cultural differences that I don’t see. Many of the people that I try to contact do not respond, or they respond with wariness. I remember reading something about the Sámi being the most researched people in Europe. I wonder what that feels like. How do I establish a relationship upon such a backdrop? Should I? I’m concerned that I am contributing towards something negative that I’m not even aware of. Something I don’t even know to avoid. This is hard.

(Researcher journal, 23 February 2016)

Having anticipated a steep learning curve in this project, I was conscious to keep as much of the research plan as simple as possible. I planned to lean on well-established, legitimized qualitative approaches such as semi-structured interviews, followed by a thematic analysis (e.g., as described by Braun & Clarke, 2006). Immersing myself in indigenous methods literature, I was also increasingly aware that research conducted in Indigenous settings comes with particular ethical dimensions, and I was committed to ensuring that my research was not “used as a tool of colonization and as a way of exploiting indigenous peoples by taking (or as it is often put, stealing) their knowledge without ever giving anything back in return” (Kuokkanen, 2010, p. 67). As neither my university institution, nor Finland, has clear ethical guidelines for Sámi research,2 I turned to two contexts in which there are national systems in place to promote the ethical conduct of research with Indigenous peoples: the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies’ (AIATSIS, 2012) Guidelines for Ethical Research in Australian Indigenous Studies and the Government of Canada’s Tri-Council Policy Statement for the Ethical Conduct for Research Involving the First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples of Canada (Panel on Research Ethics, 2014). Both of these documents emphasize the importance of community engagement and participation throughout the research process. For instance, the AIATSIS (2012) guidelines recommend that researchers “hold preliminary meetings to discuss the proposed research and reach agreements” (p. 10). I heeded this advice and arranged a meeting before the project officially began with a number of Sámi community leaders and others who they felt might be interested in the study to discuss how we might work together.

In this meeting, it was clear that despite adopting a collaborative approach to planning and implementation, the study faced ethical challenges from the onset. As part of a broader research project, the study was initiated by non-indigenous concerns and interests, rather than arising out of an expression of need or interest by Sámi peoples themselves. The participants of the meeting requested detailed information as to how the overarching project had been planned, and how it was going to give back to the Sámi communities whose stories I planned to take. Furthermore, they asked me questions such as,

What topics will you focus on in your interviews?
How do you know that those are the answers that we need?

Whilst music education scholarship has implored researchers to “consider the colonial history of research and carefully reflect upon benefits and risks to participants” (Hess, 2018, p. 9), it was clear to me that enacting these ethical guidelines in practice required me to move beyond the well-worn trope of “nothing about us, without us” and also extend the boundaries of my own self-reflexivity. If I was to consider the Academy itself (and accordingly myself) as part of broader (neo)colonial structuring, the methodological authorities I had placed my trust in were now on shaky ground. I realized that I could not design semi-structured interview questions without imposing my own epistemic understandings of what was important, what constituted equality, or experience, or even what music (education) was. Whilst the discussions during this meeting did not necessarily provide me with any answers, they did unsettle my assumptions of what I could take for granted.

Towards working in-relation

I was just having dinner with a young woman who is participating in my research. She was wearing gákti. At the end of our meal the waiter came over to our table and mentioned that his girlfriend was coming to town and asked whether she could recommend somewhere he could take his girlfriend to buy a Sámi dress—at a reasonable price. She froze. I froze.

We engaged in a lively discussion about what we should have said after he left. Should we have chastised him for his ignorance while working in a town that is the centre of Sámi politics and culture? Was it her responsibility to educate him that gákti is laden with symbolism and meaning? Did I have the authority to educate him as a non-Sámi? Did the encounter encourage him to educate himself? I am still not sure what I should have done as a non-Sámi researcher, though I keep running through different scenarios in my head. Each of them is better than saying nothing.

(Researcher journal, 4 April 2016)

The second ethically important moment was before a conference paper that I was presenting together with a Sámi rock musician and music educator in his mid-20s. We had taken a number of months to carefully craft our presentation, introducing the research study in relation to Sámi music education as it was coordinated and experienced on the ground in Sápmi. Prior to our presentation, I noticed a number of influential Sámi scholars in the crowd, who I had not yet had the opportunity to meet. I instantly felt nervous and terribly ill-qualified to speak on Sámi issues in front of not only Sámi people, but “insider” experts on Sámi culture and research. I discussed these feelings with my co-author, who looked at me quite puzzled. He told me, in a very kind way, that if I was afraid of disagreeing with people, I should probably just stay in my office.

My co-author’s comment alerted me to my attempts at working along what educational methodologist Aaron Kuntz (2016) terms a logic of extraction, privileging “discrete, fully knowable entities that remain consistent across time and space, absent the immediacy of material context” (p. 44). This focus on “data” I could “obtain” had thus far allowed me to position myself as operating “from a distanced perspective, where the inquirer stands decidedly outside that which s/he inquirers into” (p. 45, emphasis orig.). As a non-indigenous scholar, I felt that I did not have the right to speak on Sámi experience or issues. However, this veil of political correctness also resulted in drawing a divide between myself and those involved in the research foreclosing “other ontological, epistemological, and methodological practices” (Kuntz, 2016, p. 45).
Such appeals to political correctness have been noted to serve as a justification for epistemic ignorance (Kuokkanen, 2017, 2010). Rauna Kuokkanen (2017) notes that these excuses allow scholars to disengage, reinforcing the barriers of the academic episteme and one’s comfort zones. As Spivak (1990) explains, excusing oneself by saying that “‘I won’t criticize’ is salvaging your conscience, and allowing you to not do any homework” (pp. 62–63), indeed, the attempt “to benevolently try and step down from one’s position of authority... is often a reinforcement of privilege, not a disavowal of it” (Kapoor, 2004, p. 641). My co-author’s comment served to remind me that I had a lot to learn—not as a rebuke, but a “call to a relationship” (Spivak, Landry, & Maclean, 1996, p. 5).

New landscapes of meaning

I feel paralyzed. I can’t analyse these stories out of context, and I don’t see how I will ever understand this context. They should have hired a Sámi researcher for this project.

(Researcher journal, 3 July 2016)

The third ethically important moment that served to rupture my academic episteme is perhaps the easiest to describe succinctly, but one that I have returned to again and again, and that continues to unsettle my thinking and assumptions. Having abandoned my initial research plan of conducting semi-structured interviews, I had decided upon unstructured discussions as the basis for learning about Sámi artists, arts educators, community leaders and scholars’ experiences of equality in Finland’s extracurricular arts education system. The very first meeting that I had organized as part of this learning process was with an established Sámi visual artist. In our discussion, she made a comment in passing which made me pause. She explained,

When people go to Lapland, they see this vast wilderness. You see this picture of Lapland everywhere, in art history, in tourism. There are no buildings or structures, so you can assume that it is empty. Let me assure you, it is not empty. It is full. I see that same landscape, and I literally see the stories of the land. I literally see the paths that my ancestors have walked, I hear the joiks. I literally see the cultural history. It is full.

(Meeting, 18 March 2016)

I wondered how her description translated to the landscape of research practice: How could I analyse the stories and ideas shared with me, if I literally could not hear what was said? If, looking at the same transcripts, I saw emptiness, when they were full of meaning?

Aiming towards responsibility through methodological innovation

It was clear that in order to engage with Sámi knowledge and experiences on Sámi terms, I had some homework to do (Spivak, 1990). In addition to better familiarizing myself with the academic literature on Indigenous and Sámi research methods and pedagogy, I invited 22-year-old Northern Sámi joik artist and musician, Hildá Länsman as a salaried co-researcher in the project. Hildá and I had been in close contact during the research process thus far, often discussing recent Sámi events, news, and culture. Yet, her role in the research project was much more than cultural translator. Hildá had completed some tertiary studies in Sámi pedagogy, which, importantly, are different studies than those required to qualify as a school or university teacher in the Finnish education system. In addition, Hildá is also an active joiker and musician. Her
expertise in the Northern Sámi vocal tradition of *luohti* is inherited and has been nurtured within her family for generations. Joik has been described as extremely challenging for White scholars to comprehend (Jouste, 2009; Ramnarine, 2009), as it aligns with a wholly different episteme to music or song. For instance, rather than joiking *about* someone or something, as one might do in Western song, the joiker *joiks* the person or object as a means to encompass and express them, yet, it is not necessarily a representational tradition either (Ramnarine, 2009). Finally, and perhaps most importantly for our working relationship in this study, Hildá had no first-hand experience or training in scientific research.

Describing the research process to Hildá thus far, we began to discuss ideas for how we might work together. She asked me again and again *why* I did things the way I did, and when either of us felt that my answer was insufficient, we considered how we might do things differently. With consent from the Sámi experts I had already met with, and identifying information removed from the transcripts of discussions, Hildá and I met regularly to think *with and through* the stories that had been shared with me earlier. Our partnership was one of relational solidarity (Gaztambide-Fernández, 2012), foregrounding critical reflection and creating a space for uncertainty, disagreement, contradiction, and creativity. As we discussed how to analyse and communicate the stories, Hildá drew connections between research practice and Sámi pedagogy, understanding story as a means to learn and teach (e.g., Balto, 2005). Together, we abandoned the idea of methodological simplicity and turned to narrative analysis (Reissman, 1993) whereby stories are produced from descriptive data. Weaving together the voices and narrative threads of people I had met with, I crafted a composite character, Áile. In close consultation with Hildá and others participating in the research, Áile’s story was told through the first person, in a way that retained a sense of the emotional and political so often pasteurized from academic work.

As I had crafted a composite character, Hildá suggested that she could joik her. Áile’s joik is the result of Hildá’s embodied, holistic, reflective *being-with* the stories shared with us through a uniquely Sámi art form. Áile’s joik was seen as a way to “give back” to the Sámi experts who had participated in the study in the sense that joik is a gift. Literature scholar Vuokko Hirvonen (2010) has noted that you cannot craft a joik for yourself but that you “must get it as a gift from someone else” (p. 94). In this sense, Áile’s joik was a gift to those who had gifted their stories to us as researchers. Analysing Sámi stories through joik was also a political decision, as joik has played an important role in the revival of Sámi cultures, after having been forbidden in many assimilatory public settings such as schools and churches for decades (Huuki & Juutilainen, 2016). (Re)telling Áile’s story through such a politicized art form, and in a way that is not wholly accessible within the hegemonic episteme of the Academy, was thus seen as a way to challenge and transform the methodologies, and methods of mainstream research as well as express solidarity with Sámi peoples and cultures.

Through narrative analysis aligning with some principles of storytelling and sharing in Sámi pedagogy, and through incorporating joik as part of the knowledge-production and communication process, Hildá and I were aiming towards a more ethical approach than my initial research plans would have afforded. In terms of methodological responsibility, we hoped that our work could establish a relational space upon “the liminal and intellectual borderlands where indigenous and non-indigenous scholars encounter one another, working to remember, redefine, and reverse the devastation of the original colonialist encounter” (Grande, 2016, p. 135).

**Reconsidering (ir)responsibility**

Whilst turning to narrative and joik as research approaches were decisions with ethical and political aims to decolonize research practice, these choices did not necessarily result in wholly
responsible research. In this section of the article I take the opportunity to (re)consider my own role as non-indigenous researcher in relation to the many Sámi experts I met with as part of this study and Indigenous research methods, interrogating the responsibility, the “strategic concessions” (Kovach, 2009) and the ethical shortcomings of this relational work. The aspects of (ir)responsibility that I attend to here are: interpretation and authorship; voice; and the (mis)appropriation of joik.

Working between two different, and at times conflicting, epistemes of course raises questions with regards to interpretation. This is particularly the case for narrative work involving a non-indigenous researcher (re)storying indigenous stories. Whilst Áile’s narrative is grounded in the stories that were shared during the discussions I had with Sámi artists, arts educators, scholars and community leaders, often incorporating exact phrases and terms, her character was also re-storied in a way that formulates the story of the research. As the researcher weaving together various perspectives and experiences, I made decisions as to what was meaningful, important, and/or relevant to the research task in selecting voices to highlight and others to de-emphasize. This unsettles me, in terms of what aspects of this landscape may remain overlooked or unheard and also in terms of authorial authority. As the researcher responsible for crafting Áile’s narrative, her character is constrained through the necessary linguistic and epistemic interpretations and translations of working in-relation. At times, this may be similar to any research context involving other people, their lives, experiences and beliefs. However, at other times, the consequences of interpretation and translation may result in irresponsible, (neo)colonial research practice. For instance, one element of Áile’s story that was muddled through the process of crafting a composite character was that of place. As the voices of Northern Sámi, Inari Sámi and Skolt Sámi were interwoven, the specificity of each was lost. Furthermore, Áile’s joik is in the Northern Sámi vocal tradition luohti, rather than Inari Sámi live or Skolt Sámi leu’dd, potentially further minoritizing already minoritized groups within Finland and Sámi society. Downplaying the importance and specificity of land, place, and culture to each community and individual participating in this research is indeed irresponsible. Interpreting Áile as landless and placeless arguably subjects her to the same anthropological and colonial forces that I have claimed to be critical of—as Tuck and Yang (2012) caution, decolonization is not a metaphor.

In addition to these concerns of interpretation and authorship, I continue to hold serious reservations about writing Áile’s voice in the first person. This approach was decided upon with the encouragement of all Sámi experts involved in this research, most of whom felt that a first-person voice was vital in retaining the emotionality and immediacy of their own lived experiences. In many ways, this first-person approach also disrupts hegemonic methodological norms that mine data from communities in order to speak about or for them. This is in line with Kuntz’s (2016) suggestion that “in order to make new realities possible—new possibilities for being, knowing, and inquiring—we need newly risky methodological approaches that do not operate on such logics of extraction” (p. 57). Yet, the political and ethical risks associated with speaking not about or for indigenous peoples, but as an indigenous person walks a fine line between working relationally, and together with, and colonial acts of “ventriloquism” (lisa hunter, Emerald, & Martin, 2013, p. 137).

Such “risky methodological approaches” (Kuntz, 2016, p. 57) also warrant consideration with regard to Áile’s joik. Sámi law scholar and joiker Ánde Somby (1995) has drawn connections between joik and research. He writes,

In a manner of speaking, a yoik has no object. In fact, it is altogether impossible to envision yoik in terms of subject and object. The yoiker may perhaps be considered an integral part of the yoik, and this has interesting connotations for the debate about objectivity in research. To what extent is the researcher a part of his research, and how far is the research part of the researcher? (p. 1)
Many Sámi believe that non-Sámi should not joik (at very least, not all joiks)—and even some believe that Sámi without a family history of joiking should not joik. However, understood through Somby’s parallel between joik and research, although it is not me joiking Áile on the recording, I am most definitely part of her joik. With joik serving as a powerful expression of Sámi identity and a means to situate oneself and others within Sámi society, my incorporation of joik in the research process—although in-relation, may well be read as an imposition in a space I am not entitled to be. Furthermore, incorporating joik as part of the analysis approach of the study may be read not as a decolonization of the research process, but the misappropriation—not of resources or knowledges, but of knowledge-production systems. This is particularly the case if we consider the publication of Áile’s narrative and joik in a scholarly journal. Hildá and I both acknowledge that the publication is an achievement, not only as personal academic gains but also in decolonizing and transforming what is generally accepted as scientific research. However, again, there is a fine line between conducting responsible research that ensures that “academic knowledge, practices and research are no longer used as a tool of colonization and as a way of exploiting indigenous peoples” and inclusion as “a form of enclosure” that domesticates decolonization (Tuck & Yang, 2012, p. 3). Each of these methodological concerns warrants critical reflection as part of the “journey of academic contradiction”, along which the Academy has the potential to contribute (at times simultaneously) towards both indigenous oppression and emancipation (Rigney, 2001).

The (im)possibility of methodological responsibility: Impasse or invitation?

In upholding the research ethics principle of do no harm, music education researchers working in indigenous contexts ought to not only be “respectful, or ‘culturally sensitive’” but work with research practices that are “based in approaches and processes that are parts of [indigenous peoples’ own] cultures” (Hart, 2010, p. 1). As illustrated by my own research experiences, this is not easy work and requires new and discomforting learnings. However, despite our “good intentions” (Gorsky, 2007, p. 515) to be methodologically responsible in indigenous settings, I argue in this paper that this may well be an impossible goal. Given that colonial logics continue to structure scholarly societies and institutions such as the Academy, one might ask whether it is at all possible for such spaces and practices to include indigenous peoples and epistemes on their own terms. This is perhaps particularly the case for educational research which has long “played a deleterious role in perpetuating and refreshing colonial relationships among people, practices, and land” (Patel, 2016, p. 12). The academic episteme is thus always insufficient with regards to indigenous epistemes, cultures, and wisdoms. Furthermore, if research is relational, there can be “no one source for blame, no absolute claim for who or what is responsible for particular effects/impacts” (Kuntz, 2016, p. 89). Responsibility, through such perspectives, may well seem like an incommensurable impasse.

However, this impasse does not mean that we can resign ourselves to ignorance and disengage from indigenous peoples or concerns altogether. Indeed, if we consider that coloniality does not reside within individuals, but is a pervasive structure that shapes institutions, and how we come into relation with one another (Patel, 2016), the responsibility to decolonize methodologies is firmly on the shoulders of those already working within the Academy as we work in relation with others. As Kuntz (2016) writes, “because I am forever in-relation, I have a responsibility to engage; I am never free to pretend a disassociated stance” (p. 73, emphasis in original). Accordingly, music education scholars do not only need to learn about indigenous epistemes and knowledges, but also have “an additional responsibility for interrogating [our] own justification[s] for the
claims [we] make—[we] cannot rest on the laurels of some fixed procedure for coming to know” (Kuntz, 2016, p. 73). This hyper-self-reflexivity (Kapoor, 2004) is necessarily discomforting as it requires unsettling our own privileges and acknowledging our own complicity in order to rupture the familiar traditions, authorities, orthodoxies, rules or doctrines that guide our thinking and research practice (Derrida, 1992). As such, doing decolonizing, responsible research is not necessarily about learning about indigenous peoples or indigenous epistemes, but more about “learning to learn” (Kuokkanen, 2007, p. 97) and learning to reside within, and seek out such discomforting ruptures. In seeking to conduct responsible research, the ethics that concern our work as music education scholars are “not just a problem of knowledge, but a call to a relationship” (Spivak, 1993, p. 32). As we engage with various, changing, learning individuals and social groups, this uncomfortable learning—and our homework with regard to indigenous epistemes—is, by definition, ongoing. Methodological responsibility is thus not an end destination to achieve, but a condition of possibility “where a failed account occasions new kinds of positionings” (Lather, 2001, p. 483). Positionings in and through which we research at the limits, move towards our discomfort, learn, and decolonize music education research together.

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**Notes**

1. Yet, it is also important to note that not all indigenous peoples hold an indigenous worldview, and that different epistemes do not exist in total isolation from one another.
2. Discussions on research ethics in Sámi contexts have mainly taken place in Norway and are arguably the least developed in Finland. As yet, although the topic is raised more and more frequently among Sámi scholars and others engaged with Sámi communities, there are still no agreed upon guidelines for ethical research in Sápmi (see Drugge, 2016).
3. Sámi traditional dress.
4. “joik” is a term often used to refer broadly to the Northern Sámi vocal tradition of *luohti*, the Inari Sámi vocal tradition of *livde*, and the Skolt Sámi vocal tradition of *leu’dd*. Each of these traditions varies considerably from one another. For instance, whereas *luohti* is expressed predominantly through syllabization rather than words, long epic tales are often shared through *leu’dd*.
5. Of the approximately 10,000 Sámi living within Finland’s national borders, there are around 2000 Northern Sámi language speakers, 450 Inari Sámi speakers, and 350 Skolt Sámi speakers. In addition, each Sámi group has a different history in relation to the Finnish state and neighbouring countries, which has also affected their current linguistic, cultural, social, economic (etc.) wellbeing.
6. “yoik” is the anglicized version of *joik*, referring to *luohti*, *livde*, and *leu’dd* and the specific forms within each of these genres.

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