Becoming an Ally: Beginning to Decolonise My Mind

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I certify that the work submitted herewith is my own and that I have duly acknowledged any quotation from the published or unpublished work of other persons.

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Abstract

The aim of this project is to investigate how decolonial research can be conducted in practice when the researcher is a member of the majority population. I ask: what does it mean to be an ally as well as an academic? Through autoethnography and Participatory Action Research (PAR) I am attempting to “decolonise my mind” in order to unlearn oppressive systems of knowledge and I am using academic disobedience as an intentional strategy to disrupt colonial epistemic hegemonies. Following feminist and other critical theory traditions and using decolonial and indigenous research ethics I am criticising the remnants of positivist research structures that exist within the social sciences and the colonising, racialised, gendered and classed way in which knowledge is traditionally constructed.

I am also attempting to position PAR as a decolonising research methodology. Because a PAR animator does not have an automatic right to write up and disseminate the knowledge that has been collectively constructed by the co-researchers, however, I am inserting myself into the narrative in order to disrupt the traditional academic voice. I attempt to question critically how I (auto) act in relation to my own culture and Sámi culture (ethno) through the process of reflective writing and analysis (graphy) – in other words, autoethnography.

I set out to conduct a PAR project within a Sámi organisation in Stockholm but despite my efforts the project never really got off the ground. So apart from exploring my own positionality relative to the Sámi, and apart from constructing an argument for decolonial research and allyship, this essay also offers my thoughts on why the project didn’t happen and my journey into learning how to be a better academic ally.
# Table of Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Title Page</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgements</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table of Contents</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Main Body</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My Piece</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Bigger Piece</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Other Piece</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Closing Thoughts</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix 1: Dictionary</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix 2: Decolonising My Mind</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>References</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
When somebody says “It’s academic”, they mean that it is purely theoretical and as such lacks value in the real world. But it shouldn’t be that way. Knowledge is power and as the receptacle of much knowledge as well as the institution that trains academics, I believe that the academy has real power. But I also believe that the way in which the Western academy is currently structured and the way that research is conducted means that knowledge is colonised. Like many others before me (cf. Said, 1978; Tuhiwai Smith, 2012), I have been thinking about research and what it really means. If we take the world itself: Research = re-search = look again/search again. The word can be compared to the Swedish “undersöka” or the German “untersuchen”. That is, untersuchen = unter-suchen = under/below-searching – search underneath/search from below. What these words have in common is the idea of not looking at the surface but underneath and again – to not simply accept already known or common sense understandings.

My aim with this project is to investigate how decolonial research can be conducted in practice when the researcher is a member of the majority population. I ask: what does it mean to be an ally as well as an academic? Through autoethnography and Participatory Action Research (PAR) I am attempting to “decolonise my mind” in order to unlearn oppressive systems of knowledge and I am using academic disobedience as an intentional strategy to disrupt colonial epistemic hegemonies. As Megoran et al. (2012, p.366) say, academic disobedience encourages us to ‘….awaken the gene of resistance and the dormant decolonial sensibility, to make us question the grounds of our own scholarly research and the provinciality of disciplinary knowledge.’ I am following the tradition of feminist and other critical theory scholars in critiquing the remnants of positivist research that exists within the social sciences and the colonising, racialised, gendered and classed way in which knowledge is traditionally constructed. I have also been thinking about the rules and laws that exist within academia, including within my own program, with regards to what is expected of academic writing and I have chosen to be disobedient to those rules I see as oppressive or those I see as counter to decolonial and indigenous research ethics.

I am also attempting to position PAR as a de-colonising methodology. Because PAR is fundamentally concerned with power and the distribution thereof, there are a number of ethical issues present within the PAR paradigm that are not necessarily of ethical concern in other research methodologies. One of these is the idea of the power that lies within representation (Manzo & Brightbill, 2009). Because of this, a PAR animator does not have an automatic right to represent or disseminate the research of their co-researchers. Therefore, in this project, instead of writing about our collective learning, and as an intentional decolonising strategy, I am inserting myself into the narrative in order to disrupt the academic discourse (Pathak, 2010). I am using my position of privilege to look at how my self is related to the Other. It is my attempt to question critically how I (auto) act in relation to my own culture and Sámi
culture (ethno) through the process of reflective writing and analysis (graphy). I am interested in what happens if we make doubt, self-consciousness, uncertainty and contradiction part of, not only the research process, but the writing process. I want to make the “mess” of academic research visible (Law, 2004). Autoethnography viewed in this way is not navel-gazing but a deliberate attempt to disrupt Western/colonial knowledge production by recognising the validity of embodied knowledge and “life experience”.

What I really wanted to learn – though it took me some time and some prompting from my supervisors to realise that this is what I was doing – was how to become an ally. I thought for a while about calling myself an “accomplice” (a word suggested by my fieldwork supervisor May-Britt) instead of "ally". What does “accomplice” mean? It means someone who is operating outside of the law in collaboration with others. An ally also operates in collaboration with others, but to me it is a more passive word. You cannot be a passive accomplice and whilst you may stop being an ally, once an accomplice, always an accomplice. It also recognises that there is a kind of violence inherent in this struggle and that it’s impossible to be neutral. Thus, an academic accomplice operates outside the rules and laws of the academy and is intentionally disobedient to those rules and laws. In the end, however, I chose to stick with the word “ally”. Partly because the literature all speaks of “allies” so I decided that sticking with a more conventional term might make it more readable and useful to others. But also because my privilege means that I can choose when to be an ally and when not to be. In this sense, I am unreliable (Bishop, 2015) and thus I think I cannot claim the identity of an accomplice.

With this in mind, I set out to initiate a PAR project within a Sámi organisation in Stockholm, Sweden. I was welcomed into the organisation, I met with several people who expressed interest in doing a project, we met a few times but in the end the project never really got off the ground. So apart from exploring my own positionality relative to the Sámi, and apart from constructing an argument for decolonial research and allyship, this essay also offers my thoughts on why the project didn’t happen.

Why is this dissertation laid out like this?

This essay is also an experiment in writing. I have been asking myself to what extent I should “play the game” academically. Do I take a radical outsider stance or do I use “the game” in order to subvert from the inside? How can I play with academic tradition in order to show also in my writing how I can decolonise? Should I adhere to conventions in my writing in the hope that my work will be taken more seriously or should I turn my back on it in order to more fully explore the assumptions I hold about knowledge, its construction and its value(s)?

I think I have landed somewhere in between. This essay is not conventionally structured and is not split into subsections. It does not follow a traditional academic narrative. But I believe it does what a dissertation should, even if it is implicit, not explicit. It delivers new knowledge; it situates this knowledge in an academic and cultural context by drawing on what has come before and shows why there is a need for my research; it explains how the research was conducted. The essay also develops an argument. However, in the interest of decolonisation and academic disobedience,
this argument does not always follow a clear trajectory. Instead, I want to take the reader on a journey similar to the one I have been on in the hope that it may help challenge some of the assumptions that academics who intend to conduct research with indigenous and other colonised populations may hold. It may seem jumbled at times but that is because that is just how stuff happens – things are *messy* (Law, 2004). I think that trying to structure the account too much means that you make choices that have a bearing on the truth of the account.

The essay is split into three sections. The first section, *My Piece*, describes my own journey into trying to understand my individual, national and cultural positionality also in relation to the Sámi. The second, *The Bigger Piece*, is my attempt to draw from the culture around me and on previous knowledge, it is the context of the other two pieces. Finally, *The Other Piece* is a series of reflections on trying to conduct decolonial research in practice, being academically disobedient and my role as an ally. I want the pieces to be read together as three pieces of a puzzle that begin to form a larger picture.

But this account is not complete. Haraway (1988) argues that all knowledge is partial and situated and to pretend to see everything from nowhere is a “god trick”. I occupy multiple positions, I’m contradictory. I choose to be both and all. I reject fixing my identity in one place or standpoint. I am an insider and an outsider. This is an ongoing reflexive process and not one which I will ever “finish”. As Bishop (2015) argues, one cannot *be* an ally, one is always *becoming* one.

Finally, a quick note about language. I think that language can also be colonising and sometimes within academic writing the language becomes so impenetrable as to become nearly meaningless. Mills (2000) argues, however, that sometimes technical language is appropriate and even necessary, but that it should be for reasons of clarity not obscurity. Because of this, I have used informal and conversational language throughout. However, there are a number of words that I deem useful in the discussion because of their specific meanings and histories. These include “discourse”, “hegemony”, “epistemology” and “essentialism”. For the purpose of accessibility and to help break down this linguistic barrier, I have included short definitions of these and other words in Appendix 1 so as to encourage understanding also outside the academy.
Where do I “stand”? Do I really “stand” in Sweden? I participate in the Swedish imagined community. I speak the language. I follow certain traditions. I claim its history as part of mine. I participate in the culture. I have personally been very much a part of Sweden’s current colonial project through having lived in Malaysia as a result of my mother’s work for a large, international company. I see myself as different to British, for example, or French. Or Sámi. But I don’t really relate to Swedishness as an identity. Through this project, however, I am, in fact, solidifying and privileging my Swedish identity in a way which doesn’t really reflect how I feel about myself. Maybe this is evidence that I don’t really “stand” in Sweden?

I refuse to “fix” my identity. In true anti-essentialist spirit, I see myself as fluid, inconsistent and contradictory. This includes the way I look at my personal and my national identity. But I am aware that this is also evidence of a privileged position. I am able to reject my “national identity” because it has neither been the reason for my oppression nor my diaspora. I have not been forced to

Anderson (2006) argues that all nations are imagined as communities. This is because not even in the smallest country will every person ever know every other person, ‘yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion’ (ibid, p.6). The idea of nation, then, originates in a discourse built on a collective identity and a collective frame of reference based on what is seen as a shared history, people, culture and geographic area. Ethnic identities, further, are built on a simplification of the past. It is the unreflexive making of assumptions about groups of people which thereby reproduce a discourse where present ethnic identities become the foundation on which questions about and divisions of life and the world in prehistoric times are presented as fact (Hagström Yamamoto, 2010). But these ethnicities are not fixed and have changed drastically over time.

Like all identities, national identities must be created in opposition to the Other; that is after all how any identity is created (Hall & du Gay, 1996). Identities need an Other to become meaningful. In essence, both

I am motivated to do this research for a number of varied, and sometimes even contradictory, reasons. First and foremost I am an activist as well as an academic. I want to work for social justice. I see that way that Sámi people have been colonised and are still colonised and I do not think it is just, so I want to be an ally in their struggle.

I am motivated to do this research because I do not think that research belongs to the Academy. By the Academy I mean the institutions engaged in academic study such as universities and research institutes as well as their mouthpieces, like peer reviewed journals, that have developed structures for what is considered knowledge, how it is constructed, who is allowed to have knowledge and what type of knowledge is valued. But I also mean the individuals that uphold and perpetuate these rules through their actions which includes myself. My own internalised understandings and assumptions with regards to academia and knowledge – which, I argue, stem from
migrate; it was, and remains, entirely a free choice on my part. Equally, I have never, to my knowledge, been oppressed because of my particular nationality and as such have never had to defend it.

Of course, what I am speaking about here are cultural stereotypes. I feel this tension between anti-essentialism and anti anti-essentialism. I do not believe that these cultural stereotypes are true (anti-essentialism). On the other hand, they become true as they are part of our experience of the world (anti anti-essentialism). They are also essential in forming the narrative of the nation and therefore the foundation for national belonging. But I think it’s important to remember that just like minority populations, majority populations are also not homogeneous. Though people might share what they think of as cultural traits and see a connection with people from the same geographical area, this does not mean that they are all essentially the same.

I have also been thinking about essentialism with regards to my individual positionality. On the one hand, of course I am not just a white, middle-class, woman and academic and I have lots of experiences that fall outside of these stereotypes. On the other hand, it is equally national and individual identities are not so much what you are but what you are not. In many countries, such as the UK and France, the idea of national identity was first cemented during the colonial era. Institutions such as museums and universities were used as tools to create a sense of us and them, where we were civilised and the Others were primitive (Anderson, 2006). Sweden’s history, however, is often constructed as very different from other countries that engaged in large-scale colonial projects. Instead of being seen as exploitative, Sweden’s colonial history is often constructed – even by academics – as benign and that their ‘interactions with the encountered peoples…were gentler and based on collaboration rather than extortion and subjugation’ (Naum & Nordin, 2013, p.4). Historical evidence shows, however, that Sweden’s attitude to “natives” was no less paternalistic and oppressive than in other colonising nations (ibid.; Öhman, 2008).

Fur (2013) argues that what really distinguishes Sweden from other colonising nations is that there was never a moment of decolonisation. She argues that this has led to a lack of knowledge and interest in the ways in which Swedish citizens still benefit from colonialism through trade and various other forms of exploitation. She argues further that this has resulted in a situation a colonial epistemic hegemony – clearly affect the way that I view knowledge.

I am motivated by trying to “dig where I stand”. It means that as a researcher, as an activist, as an ally, I look around me where I am and begin there. The concept was first developed by Sven Lindqvist (1979) as a way to look at expertise as something which comes from lived experience: experts may be experts in their particular field but you are the expert on your situation. I am digging where I see myself standing geographically, culturally and ethnically but I am also digging where I stand academically.

I am motivated by my “outsider”-status in Sweden. Having lived for many years abroad, I feel as though I can look at this country with an outsider’s gaze. I am horrified by the silence that exists with regards to its history and the violence it has committed at home and abroad. I disagree with the prevalent view of Sweden as a “good” country that “helps” people around the world.

I am motivated by my desire for learning. I realised I, like most people from the South of Sweden,
obvious to me that my background – and perhaps my academic one in particular in relation to this project – means that I will make certain assumptions and that these assumptions are somewhat similar to those of others from similar backgrounds and with similar experiences. Is this an essentialising position to take?

I'm not sure. At the end of the day I do think that the “essentialised” social groups to which I belong have at least some bearing on who I am as a person. By saying that, I do not mean that these “identity categories” have genetically predisposed me to certain attitudes but I mean precisely that because they are socially constructed they have influenced me. My privilege as white and middle-class, for example, has obviously informed the assumptions that I make and the way that I look at the world. But at the same time I am not arguing that these categories are all I am nor that they are in fact real. Only that they affect how I am treated and the experiences and opportunities I have had.

I would like to write a little about my grandfather. His passing during the time of this project has, of course, made me reflect on who he was and who I am in relation to him. There is so much I am thinking about. I think where Sweden has managed to emerge ‘untainted by colonialism’ (ibid., p.26) and has allowed for an ‘adoption of postcolonial and decolonial theories of coloniality and modernity to contemporary Swedish society without having to deal with, either theoretically or empirically, a longer history of expansion and conflict’ (ibid.). As such, Sweden has become a leading voice on the world stage as a supporter of decolonisation and champion of justice, gender equality and social development without ever having to deal with its own colonial past. It constructs ‘itself as a colour-blind country…thereby transforming racism into a non-Swedish issue’ (Hübinette & Lundström, 2011, p.44).

What also remains hidden in this discourse is Sweden's colonisation of Sápmi. Colonialism is not just the occupation of land but a discourse based on racial biology, racist ideology and capitalist exploitation. But, …these Swedish encroachments in Sápmi are rarely considered to be a case of imperial colonialism. These efforts are understood in much milder terms of agricultural expansion, or internal colonisation, thus [the] asymmetrical character of colonial power relationships such [an] expansion entailed is pushed to the

knew very little about Sámi people, their culture, history and the issues that affect them. Sámi history and culture is not taught in schools in Sweden, is not part of the curriculum, and my own ignorance is vast. I have prejudices. I remember a documentary I saw years ago about young Sámi man who was pictured as living in a traditional Sámi hut in the snow in the middle of the winter, following his reindeer. And I remember that he was asked what sort of woman he wanted and after some time he replied, “One who knows how to make good shoes.” That was my clearest image of Sámi people – a colonialis view that constructs Sámi people as primitive, ignorant, and naïve. I felt shame because of my own ignorance. I desired to learn more.

I wanted to learn a different history and break the silence.

What is interesting, I think, is that my experience of trying to do this project is a little symptomatic of the parts of academia that I am proposing to critique. It's so rigid in its' processes that trying to do something different is difficult. I wanted, for example, to begin the PAR part of the project long before I
about how my grandfather and grandmother came to Sweden as refugees when they were teenagers but how they, or at least he, was a refugee all of his life. How my mother is the daughter of refugees and how they’ve all “done good”. How I “pass” for Swedish, how even my mother “passes” for Swedish. I think about how I don’t see myself as Swedish, how I would rather speak English, how I don’t really understand this place or these cold people. How I would rather see myself as “Other” here. But also how I am seen by others, how I am told that the language I speak (badly) and the school I attended (briefly) must have had such an influence on me. They probably did but at the moment I can’t see it. At the moment the refugeeness looms large. The guilt I feel that I “pass”, that I am accepted in a way my grandfather did not feel. I weep. I think about how this guilt is suffocating me. How my awareness of my own privilege is suffocating me. And I think about how that is good. How it is good that I know – deeply – that I am not welcome everywhere. That my voice, my opinion, might not count everywhere. That my feelings and my desires are not the point all the time. I imagine that is what “Others” feel and so it is good that I feel it too. But I also think about how this cannot be the point. It should not be this hard. Because if it is, if this is what it is, why would anyone attempt it?

background (Lindmark, 2013, p.132). Sámi people, further, were and are not constructed as essentially different to other indigenous (read: “primitive”) peoples and still to this day suffer from a politics which constructs them as racially inferior (Öhman, 2016).

One of the most powerful and lasting effects of colonialism around the world – and in Sápmi – is the creation of the Western epistemic hegemony. This hegemony of knowledge has its origin in the Cartesian split between the subject and the object in research and is the foundation of positivist academic tradition (Heshusius, 1994 cited in Bishop, 2005). This tradition articulated knowledge as rational, mechanistic and neutral (Pathak, 2010). The privileging of detached and empirical knowledge also served to demote what Foucault (1980 cited in Muncey, 2010, p.44) termed ‘subjugated knowledges…[including] the local, regional, vernacular, naïve knowledges at the bottom of the hierarchy – the low Other of science.’ Thus, knowledge was split into two forms, science and folklore, where only the former was seen in its supposed objectivity to have any merit.

This view of knowledge construction also created a gendered and racialised privileging of certain knowledges actually did, but I was hampered by the structure of the course. I was not allowed to submit an ethics proposal before I had a supervisor and I couldn’t get a supervisor before I had written a dissertation proposal. But how could I write a dissertation proposal before I had met with my co-researchers to discuss what we wanted to research? I do, of course, understand the reason for this but the experience left me feeling frustrated and unmotivated. This also meant that through this process I was forced to make all kinds of decisions about the research before I had even met with and spoken to my co-researchers which I do not feel is either ethical nor consistent with decolonising methodologies or PAR.

So I decided to opt for academic disobedience as a strategy. But what does this mean in practice? Originally I thought of it mostly in terms of the way I would write my dissertation (in terms of structure, language, etc.) because it is, after all, the most public outcome of this whole project and thus the place where people can “see” my disobedience. But I began to think that perhaps I needed to think deeper about it. Where else can I be disobedient? What rules do I not think are “worth” following,
Why would we not all just choose our safe little privileged bubble? Why should I be punished – why should I punish myself – for trying to be better? Clearly, in this thought process, I do not also, at the same time, imagine myself as oppressed…

And I worry… I worry that this is too hard… I worry that this is unimportant, uninteresting, unhelpful…

Is it important to be vulnerable in autoethnography? In decolonising methodologies? I think that vulnerability can be a decolonising strategy. Just as “originality” is a requirement of Western academia, so is certainty. Opening up my writing to uncertainty and vulnerability is a strategy to disrupt this oppressive script. It is oppressive because it perpetuates academic barriers. You cannot say you are knowledgeable unless you know something for sure. On the contrary, I think that being unsure may be just as valuable. We are not always certain. I am not.

But I also ask myself who my search for knowledge is for … is it for the academy or is it my own desire to know the world and the ways in which I impact upon it (and it on me) better? What is my contribution here? I want to “turn the gaze”. It is always Sámi people who (Hall, 1992). This hegemony of knowledge has been criticised, not least in feminist and postcolonial theory, since “…contemporary articulations of knowledge reinforce dominant male, colonialist ideology despite not naming these defining characteristics of knowledge’ (Pathak, 2010, p.4). Further, this hegemony creates a “…false binary belief that knowledge is either of the body (experiential/anecdotal) or of the mind (intellectual/abstracted, theoretical), and [a] false belief that knowledge can and should be apolitical’ (ibid., p.3). The idea that embodied knowledge is less than intellectual knowledge can be seen as a deeply colonialist perspective which completely erases and silences Othered knowledges including indigenous, feminine and minority voices (ibid.). Ellis and Bochner (2006, p.442) calls it “the male paradigm” which is characterised by “impersonal abstraction” [the purpose of which] is to develop context-free, universalistic “yard sticks” that can be applied to particular cases.’ Thus, what is considered knowledge within the academy has traditionally been the prerogative of the very few and the very elite.

But knowledge is power. Foucault (1990 cited in Pérez, 1999, p.xvi) argues further that ‘…discourse is where power and knowledge are joined.’ Because a do I think are colonial or just for ticking boxes? If I choose to not challenge these practices, will my dissertation be truly decolonial?

My first disobedient decision was to submit an incomplete ethics proposal. Instead of answering all the questions, I left some intentionally blank in order to leave space for negotiating these issues with my future co-researchers. I felt that questions of informed consent and anonymity, for example, were not something I could decide on my own. Informed consent should not simply be a piece of paper to be signed by participants in order to protect the university from legislative action. It is an important part of the research process as a whole. Participants have a right to co-negotiate the parameters of the research and how data and results will be collected and disseminated. In addition, within participatory and community research projects, anonymity is not something that can either be guaranteed nor, indeed, always desirable. Evans (2004 cited in Cahill et al., 2007, p.310) argues that, ‘…participants have the moral right to be recognised as sources of information as well as to accrue any benefits for their communities coming out of research.’ It
are being studied and they who must relate to Swedishness and not the other way around. As such, what I should really be focusing on is how I as a Swedish person relate to the Sámi. I think also that the journey I have been on is not new. It is one that many academics and researchers have been on before me. What is new, I think, is writing about it in this very specific context and exposing my own lack of knowledge, my own uncertainties and my own vulnerabilities. By challenging myself, I hope to challenge also other non-Sámi scholars who wish to do research within the Sámi community.

There is a certain amount of guilt here too. I recognise myself as a relatively privileged person in most areas of life. I recognise this privilege as undeserved, by which I mean that I have done nothing in particular to warrant it but instead it is just an accident of birth. The guilt of this drives me to try to lessen the impact of my undeserved privilege upon the world by attempting to deny the scripts that uphold it. Some argue that guilt is a paralysing feeling but I do not believe that it is. They argue, instead, that shame is more productive. I think about it this way: If I have done something that I know is wrong, I feel guilt. Because my conscience does not allow me to live with this guilt, it drives me to try to repair the damage in whatever discourse is a construct that allows signs to have meaning it is a system of thinking, speaking or writing about a certain concept or thing. Thus there is power there. The barriers to accessing this power are held artificially high by the academy through means of language, of prestige, of finance. When academics use impenetrable language, for example, this language is not just a barrier to knowledge but a racist, sexist and classist expression of power, as noted by Tuhiiwai Smith (2012) and other indigenous and decolonial scholars. But if we look at knowledge not as a possession but as a process, how does it relate to power? Power, say some, is also a process and is only visible when it is being exercised. The academy, then, is a site of an immense amount of potential power, but only communities can put it into action thereby transforming the potential power into active power.

The position of knowledge as it exists within the academy has also been criticised from a decolonial viewpoint. Mignolo (2011), for example, sees knowledge and subjectivity as one axes in the colonial matrix of power (see Figure 1). He (ibid., p.xv-xvi) argues that,

The decolonial option starts from the analytic assumption that such hierarchies are constructed ....and specifically that they have been con-
way I can. I may need to apologise, for example. But admitting I have wronged is not easy and the act of doing so causes me to feel shame. But it is not the shame that has caused the action, it is the guilt. So in this way, can guilt somehow be a force for good?

At one point, I receive an email from my fieldwork supervisor. I am told that I need to focus my reading more on the Sámi. She says I must have a better understanding of Sámi culture, history and politics as well as Sámi decolonial questions – the ones brought forward by Sámi scholars. My immediate feeling is one of frustration, though I am not at first sure of the source of it. I think about telling her how difficult it is to get any decent academic articles from where I am in the UK and that I don’t know where to begin looking. I think about telling her that I can’t afford to buy any more books, and that I’m spending lots of money and time on requesting inter-library loans, the only way I can get access to the reading I need because there is only one book – a “cultural encyclopaedia” – in my university library about the Sámi and my university doesn’t subscribe to the academic journals I need. (Though the library does contain several books and subscribes to several academic journals that deal with extra-European indigenous peoples.) I know that these sound like excuses.

I see working with her as an integral part of the decolonising research process and for my own development as an academic ally.

May-Britt suggested that I use what I had learned through my journey into searching for an alternative to the master narrative with regards to Sámi history, culture and issues (Appendix 2) as an introduction of myself to my co-researchers. This was in order so that I do not perpetuate oppression and potential re-traumatisation by forcing my co-researchers to (again) have to explain their situation to an outsider. I wanted to show that I have (now) taken responsibility for my own learning, that I take seriously the importance of learning about Sámi culture and that I do not expect them to teach me. It is embarrassing to admit now, but not so long ago it was my plan to stay sort of intentionally ignorant of Sámi history and issues in order that I could ask my co-researchers what it was important for them that I knew. Then I saw it as a strategy to share the power

Chilisa (2012, p.14) argues that decoloniality is ‘…a process of conducting research in such a way that the worldviews of those who have suffered a long history of oppression and marginalisation are given space to communicate from their frames of reference.’ However, in many arenas, including in Sápmi, the worldviews of colonised peoples have rarely been taken into account in research.

Decoloniality shall dispel the myth of universality grounded on theo- and ego-politics of knowledge.
I know it wouldn’t help to say that I am planning on doing most of that reading once I am in place in “the field” and can access these books through Swedish universities. So I don’t say anything.

Later I am glad I stayed silent as I begin to realise that this isn’t about not having access. Not really. It’s about not realising until now that this is my responsibility as an academic ally. Before the start of this project I did not myself own a single book about Sámi culture or history either. I had not, to my knowledge, read any books by Sámi authors. The fault is not entirely mine, it is partly to do with the colonial education system that erases Sámi history and culture from the majority-culture (Ohman, 2016). But by assuming the role of an ally I must also assume responsibility for correcting this within myself. I have understood that now.

Thus, I embark on a new journey to try to deepen my understanding of Sámi history, culture, identity but also Swedish history, culture, identity: the two are intertwined, entirely dependent on each other and cannot be separated. My mind has been colonised (Chilisa, 2012) and in order to resist this, I need to go through a process of “decolonising the mind”. I attempt to do this by rejecting established that an “expert” naturally holds, but now I know that had I done that I would have, in fact, been guilty of the very thing I am criticising.

So, I spent a number of weeks reading and keeping a diary of my reflections on what I read. Eventually, I sat down with my co-researchers and I presented to them my thoughts. I felt afterwards like it had been a good idea and that it had helped to build trust within our small group. However, I also later realised that no matter how much I read on a subject, my privilege can sometimes prevent me from really understanding.

Later, I had a conversation with one of my co-researchers where I was telling her about some of my thoughts about research. We were speaking Swedish and as I mentioned the word forskning (research), she interrupts me. She says that when she hears the word she has a physical reaction, like a tightening of her chest (she motioned towards her chest and throat, making constricting movements with her hands). I listen to what she is saying, and we speak about it for a moment. The history between Sámi people and the academy is not simple nor unproblematic
accounts of history and instead focus on history from below. I try to unveil my mind from the discourses which form an integral part of colonisation. I focus on accounts that follow a non-positivist and “messy” trajectory, often of a personal nature. I also read books and articles by Sámi academics and academic allies. I try to read and reflect in an open and honest manner whilst remaining critical so that I do not simply romanticise indigenous knowledge. What follows are extracts from my reflective journey (a complete account can be found in Appendix 2).

*****

I read TechnoVisions of a Sámi Cyborg by May-Britt Öhman (2016). I understand that Sápmi is a land colonised, a land with a complicated history, a land filled with trauma. A land built on the backs of those who died and are still dying for their right to live their own culture or because they cannot. I understand the importance of reclaiming Sámi history in its own right but also as a part of Swedish history.

In understand that there is a trauma that comes from colonisation in the form of the loss of land, the loss of language, the destruction of religion/spirituality, the loss of identity, the brutal violence of racial

up? How will its results be disseminated?
To me, the most important of these questions is who benefits from the research: the academic/the academy or the community in which the research is conducted? It should be the latter.

The idea of decoloniality is not unproblematic, however. Some, like Graham Smith (2003) and Harald Gaski (2013), argue that instead of being proactive it is reactive and should be replaced with the idea of conscientisation. Smith (ibid., p.3) writes how decolonisation ‘immediately puts the colonizer and the history of colonization back at the “centre”.’ He argues further that it contributes to what he calls a “politics of distraction” which is the ‘colonizing process of being kept busy by the colonizer, of always being on the “back-foot”, “responding”, “engaging”, “accounting”, “following” and “explaining”’ (ibid., p.2, my emphasis). To always have to explain the situation or your people to the majority-population, for example, is a “politics of distraction” away from the real issues and forms an integral part of the colonial matrix of power. Nevertheless, I choose to use the term decolonial, however limited and reactive it may be, as I believe it to be useful still. As Mignolo (2011) argues, it should be one option amongst many.

and has often been exploitative and its connection to racial biology is traumatic. I know that. But at the same time I again begin to realise the extent of my own ignorance. Or forgetfulness. Out of sight, out of mind.

On this particular day I have also asked someone to put up a message on the organisations intraweb inviting everyone to this meeting. This co-researcher and I are the only ones who have turned up. I go back and check the message I have asked to be posted online. Sure enough, I have written that we are a small group engaged in forskning (research) about Sámi identity. Is it this – my carelessness, my ignorance – which has resulted in nobody else turning up? I knew “research” was a dirty word to many Sámi from reading about it, but I feel as though I hadn’t really understood, or understood how dirty, until this conversation. I think that despite my attempt to read extensively about Sámi history, culture and questions, including questions regarding academic research with Sámi people, I had not really taken this in. The knowledge had not become embodied, it had not become part of my experience, until this moment.
biology, the shame. But also the re-traumatisation that comes from having to re-live these traumas in order to educate and force the majority population to accept this history.

I understand that my own identity is partly created in opposition to the Sámi. I understand, for example, that my belief in animal rights and the protection of all animals – including predators – from intrusion and destruction of habitats is in opposition to Sámi concerns for their livelihoods. I understand that my desire for renewable energy sources in the form of hydro- and wind-power causes destruction of lives and livelihoods in Sápmi. I understand that my pride in being a “good” person, as I see myself in relation to the environment, is not unproblematic.

I understand that these are complicated, contradictory issues. I understand that my feelings about these issues are also complicated and contradictory.

I read From Research as Colonisation to Reclaiming Autonomy by Rauna Kuokkanen (2008) and I understand that research is a colonising tool. That researchers can no longer enter indigenous spaces, take the knowledge they need and “run away”. That research not only decides what is knowledge/knowable but also who is considered human. That this is colonising.

A further problematic is that the very idea of indigeneity can be essentializing. Green (2008) argues, however, that the indigenous identity is, like all identities, a social construct. This does not mean, she points out, that these identities are somehow false:

The constructedness inherent in all ethnic identity processes does not mean that that identity is “faked” in any way, only that it is flexible and that a specific mode of ethnic identity will only continue to exist as long as there is a purpose that needs to be filled (ibid., p.34).

But the discourse around indigenous rights is problematic in that it sometimes reifies nationalistic discourses, the very discourses indigenous peoples are fighting against (Kuper, 2003). Further, basing membership of the indigenous group on blood ties utilises ideas based in racial biology and acts exclusionary (Åhren, 2008). Hagström Yamamoto (2010) points out, however, that though indigenous identities can be essentialising, it is wrong to blame indigenous people for this problematic, and citing Ramos (2003 cited in ibid, p.177) ‘blame[s] the conquered for the conquerors bad language’.

But wait… Do I really mean decolonising research or do I mean indigenous research? These two terms seem

At another time, I am having a phone conversation with one of the co-researchers. We have this conversation several weeks into the PAR project, though we have only managed to meet up twice and I am asking her what she thinks the reason is for this. “Can’t you just interview me instead?” she asks. “Well, no”, I say, “That isn’t the point. This isn’t my project, it’s yours”. The emphasis betrays my frustration and impatience.

I cannot forget about the trauma and thus the deep distrust that exists with regards to research and academics within the Sámi community. And that non-participation is, in some way, not just a reaction but active resistance to this legacy. It might not be conscious or explicit, but it might be an act of resistance nevertheless. I think it’s also important to acknowledge, as this co-researcher confirmed later, that this was an attempt to help me and showed an amount of trust in me and my ability to represent what she said within my writing. She felt that she had made a commitment to me and she wanted to honour that. I experienced frustration that people did not understand the benefits of this methodology and its potential to enact real social change. But when
I understand that “intellectual self-determination” is imperative and includes the right for Sámi people to decide what they consider valid knowledge and the right to reclaim their own systems of knowledge.

I read Försvenskning av Sverige by Ehn, Frykman and Löfgren (1993) and I understand that the building of a nation is a very deliberate project to make the imaginary and arbitrary real, constant and ancient. I understand that its borders are meaningless without the Other. I’m thinking that the Sámi were integral to the demarcation of Swedish borders. There must be our Sámi and their Sámi. I also think that in the idea of the Swedish nation where nature becomes an increasingly important patriotic object, the Sámi are seen as being part of this nature, not of society or the nation.

I read Det Rena Landet: om konsten att uppfinna sina förfärder by Maja Hagerman (2007) and I understand that Sweden’s racist history that began with Linnaeus’ obsessive classification systems and culminated in the Institute for Racial Biology at Uppsala University is traumatic. I understand further that this trauma is continuing when the left-overs of this particular part of Sweden’s history are still visible and part of our to be often conflated in literature but they are not the same. All indigenous research should be decolonising but not all decolonising research is indigenous. Both, I think, are non-exploitative, participative, give back to the community and gives the community in which the researcher studies the control of the direction of study and the collection, analysis and dissemination of data. The methods for the collection and analysis of data depends on the locality in which the study takes place. If it is in an indigenous community, it should be based on indigenous construction of knowledge. Is it, then, perhaps better to think of decolonising research, not as a separate field but as a different perspective that should be injected into mainstream practices? Because there is such a blurred line between these concepts in the literature, however, I am also guilty of using them almost interchangeably.

Just like decolonial methodologies, Participatory Action Research (PAR) has ‘developed out of a concern with the link between knowledge and power, with the way knowledge is generated and used to perpetuate the control and authority of some groups over others’ (Chataway, 1997, p.750). The goal of PAR is to democratise the construction of knowledge at the same time as prioritising action which affects social change (Moore, 2004). PAR there is such a strong legacy of a particular kind of research that people would rather be interviewed and thereby give the power back to the researcher, I think that is significant.

If you have a legacy of mistrusting researchers and being cynical about what research can achieve, how can you understand how “good” research can be, both as an experience and in terms of positive social action? I begin to think that perhaps PAR (especially when coupled with the rigid processes and expectations of a taught Masters) isn’t always a good idea; not the way I have been looking at it, anyway. So perhaps one of the reasons the project didn’t happen as I had planned it, is that PAR is perhaps not always the most appropriate methodology in a particular decolonial project? Critics of participatory approaches argue that they are based on vague assumptions about why people choose or choose not to participate as well as the benefits they will receive from participating (Cooke & Kothari, 2001). Most decolonial theorists advocate participation by research “objects” as a means of ensuring that the research is, in fact, decolonial, but does it have to be participatory in the PAR sense? And what happens if,
most influential institutions in the form of universities and museums.

I read Är Jag en Riktig Same by Christina Åhren (2008) and I understand that identities within Sámi society are complex and carry with them particular histories often based on past and current legislation. I understand that this has often created conflict within Sámi society.

I understand that Sámi identities are just as multifaceted, complex and contradictory as those of the majority-population and that issues of gender and sexuality are as challenging in Sápmi as they are elsewhere. I understand that the Sámi identity is often essentialised not just as reindeer herders but as straight and cis.

I weep when I read that sometimes these issues become so difficult that individuals choose to end their lives.

I watch Åvdåsvásstádus - Symposium at the University of Uppsala (University of Uppsala, 2015). I listen to the general discussion and I understand that trauma, sorrow and shame are aspects of contemporary Sámi identity that people need to process both privately and collectively. Someone argues that shame is at the root of apathy and that it is paralysing. She argues that in order to stop being paralysed by shame, is a type of research that privileges personal narratives and knowledge which comes from lived experience: both embodied and intellectual knowledge (Baum et al., 2006; Collie et al., 2010; Fine & Torres, 2004). It is based on Freire’s (1996/1970) idea of “conscientisation” – the very idea that Smith (2003) and Gaski (2013), among others, argue should replace the idea of decolonisation – in which co-researchers move from a state of “magical consciousness” through “naïve consciousness” and finally to “critical consciousness.” Gaski (2013) argues also that conscientisation must be followed with “transformative praxis” and that this requires “change agents”. He says they are, ‘…people who use their time working towards the goal of greater independence in questions of research and education’ (ibid, p.118). In other words: academic allies.

Participatory Action Research, as Maguire (1987) argues, is inherently political. It actively seeks to affect positive social change. Decolonial and indigenous research methods, too, have political and social justice goals. In essence, then, it is activism. I am an activist. And an academic. Another way to describe this is that I am an ally – an academic ally. An ally is someone who recognises and takes responsibility for their overt and covert complicitness to oppression and acts in solidarity for example, you are working with archive material? Can you not then perform decolonial research?

I think that you can. I think that decolonial research is at once a methodology and an ethical framework which can be employed when conducting research with people but it is also a larger discursive field, a way of thinking about an issue, which can be employed in many different ways. One must be able to work also with archives or purely theoretically. In this sense what I think it means is the ability to look through a decolonial lens, so to speak. Remember that archives and historical documents are by themselves colonial, for example. Re-write and re-right history through them. Or, as I am doing, by conducting autoethnography which is in and of itself not participatory but at the same time develop other strategies, such as sharing my work at a draft stage with my coresearchers and other people with whom I have come into contact throughout this project and listening to and incorporating their comments. Again, it’s about creating options. I think that also in non-decolonial/non-postcolonial fields of study, these ethical frameworks are useful and allow for
there needs to be a genuine apology as part of a reconciliation process so that Sámi people can know that it was not their fault.

Someone else argues that it is not the Sámi who should feel shame but majority-Swedes. I agree. And I do feel shame.

I read När jag var åtta år lämnade jag mitt hem och jag har ännu inte kommit tillbaka edited by Kaisa Huuva and Ellacarin Blind (2016) and I understand many things but it also makes me question others.

I understand that the trauma of the physical separation from parents and families and the psychological separation from language and culture is real. Importantly, through these stories, I understand these experiences in the words of those who experienced them.

Their anger jumps off the pages and into my head and heart.

I understand that in some ways the “nomad school” is not just the cause of the loss of language, culture and identity for many tens of thousands but that it is perhaps also (one of) the cause(s) of the animosity and mistrust that exists today between different “types” of Sámi. Those who kept their culture, traditions and language and those who “chose” to assimilate in different ways.

with the oppressed group(s) for the benefit of all. The idea comes originally from critical whiteness and critical race theory and is also common in queer theory. An ally, as Bishop (2015, p.103) argues, ‘is not an identity, but an endless unfolding struggle for equity…One cannot be an ally, but is always becoming one.’

If an ally does not demonstrate a commitment to allyship, oppressive attitudes will prevail. Reason et al (2005, p.58) argue that to ‘remain unaware of privilege is a privilege in itself.’ They call this epistemic privilege. Recognising one’s own oppressive attitudes, however, can result in feelings of guilt and defensiveness, feelings which must be worked through lest they hinder action (Bishop, 2015). But Bishop (ibid, p.95) argues further that allies must learn ‘to separate guilt from responsibility. Guilt is appropriate in situation where we have personally made bad choices or done harm…Responsibility, on the other hand, means accepting your share of the challenge of changing the situation.’ Thus, perhaps the point isn’t that privileged people become allies to oppressed people but that we all make a commitment to become allies to each other. That is, we recognise that at one time or another we are all oppressed and all privileged in relation to others, and that all these systems of oppression (Hill Collins, 1991) a less exploitative, more democratic and human construction of knowledge.

But I ask myself again why this project never got off the ground? Are people not interested? Am I pushing too hard? Not hard enough? The people I speak to seem to be interested but they don’t seem to want to commit. What should this tell me? That people don’t think this is important? That I’m the wrong person to be doing this, perhaps? I mentioned in one of my interim presentations for this project that part of the role of the ally is to listen … am I hearing that there is no interest or need for this project? I also mentioned at this presentation that one of the co-researchers had asked if I couldn’t interview her instead. Someone challenged me and asked if perhaps what I was hearing was that they were interested in the project but not in the way I want to do it. Am I, in fact, not really listening and instead holding on to my own objectives too much? And, if they are telling me they want to do this in a more “traditional” way, is it OK for me to “break” my own ethics? PAR is important to me but is my attachment to this methodology in effect making me “deaf”? Listening is not just about hearing
I understand that the idea of “nomad schools” is based on social Darwinism and racist views of Sámi people. But I also think that these accounts are not entirely unproblematic. It is clear that many children experienced real trauma from being separated from their families. But they are not the only children in the world to be so and in many places boarding schools for children even from a very young age are common. Do these children also suffer from this “collective” trauma? Equally, many talked about the work they were forced to do at the schools but this also was and still is common for children in many parts of the world. Do these children also suffer from this “collective” trauma? Equally, many talked about the work they were forced to do at the schools but this also was and still is common for children in many parts of the world. Does the trauma come from the comparative hardship, then, between Sámi and majority-Swedish children?

And when it comes to the trauma of racial biology and eugenics, Sámi people were not the only people who were victims. Others included Roma, the (undeserving) poor and the mentally ill. Whilst still recognising this trauma as real, I think that perhaps, in a way, this focus on trauma also serves a different purpose. A sort of Strategic Trauma (as related to Strategic Essentialism [Spivak, 1998]). It is strategic in the sense that it allows Sámi people to unite around a common past and in a common purpose. Thus a united front is formed outwards and solidarity is formed inside. Instead of acting paralysing it promotes action.

are linked and interdependent. That is not to say that all oppressions are the same. As Bishop (2015, p.9) says, ‘I have found it difficult, when speaking in public, to say that all oppressions have one root, without my audience hearing me say that all oppressions are the same, or equal. …equality means nothing in this context.’ It is important to remember, then, that these systems operate differently in different arenas and so we must act differently in different arenas.

Alcoff (1998, p.24) recognises the ‘intense anxiety, hysteria, and depression’ that can arise once one becomes aware of one’s privilege and one’s status as an oppressor. Becoming an ally is not easy. It requires deep reflection and constant vigilance on how one’s privilege affects one’s opportunities and one’s relationships with others. I think that it’s important to recognise that fighting your own privilege is an uphill-battle with very few personal rewards. It can be traumatic, even. Alcoff (ibid., p.25.), speaking of anti-racist allies, argues for a double consciousness which she says,

…requires an ever present acknowledgment of the historical legacy of white identity constructions in the persistent structures of inequality and exploitation, as well as a newly what is being said but what is not. But how can I really know what this is?

I can’t, I can only make conjectures from what I have heard. When I speak to my co-researcher they all mention one reason for non-participation – bad timing. The time of the year I have chosen to conduct this study is perhaps the busiest time of the year for reindeer-owning Sámi people. There is the spring migration, the birth of new calves that need to be protected from predators, and the calf-marking later in the summer. The timing was partly due to the structure of my course but mostly it was due to my own ignorance. I simply didn’t know anything about the Sámi calendar and I hadn’t realised that so many people who live in Stockholm are still obligated to go back up North to help out during the busiest times.

I also mentioned once to my supervisor that I hadn’t suspected that working with adults would be more difficult than working with young people, with whom I had conducted PAR projects previously. He pointed out that PAR is a methodology that was originally developed in rural South America where
I think that this trauma can in some ways also produce a kind of nostalgia. Horowitz (2012 cited in Arnold-de Simine, 2013, p.62) argues that trauma can act to ‘reassert a present sense of communal values, a lost unity, a shared moral and cultural centre.’ Boulter (2004 cited in ibid., p.63) further argues that traumatic nostalgia is when ‘the desire to transcend trauma is coupled with an equally strong desire to “keep that trauma fixed in a continual and paradoxically static past.”’ Is the way in which the trauma of the nomad schools is being used for a political purpose also nostalgic?

But then I think: Am I asking the wrong (colonising) questions? Am I even “allowed” to have an opinion here? I may not understand, but maybe I don’t have to. Maybe I never will. This is not my trauma.

By observing something you change it. I think this is definitely true when you look at yourself. This autoethnography has allowed me to scrutinise myself which has inspired action. So by observing myself I have changed myself. By using a decolonial gaze, which is aware of its place in time and space, I am attempting to decolonise the way that I think and act. I have attempted awakened memory of the many traitors to white privilege who have struggled to contribute to the building of an inclusive human community.

I like this idea of double consciousness, the idea that it is possible to hold two – even contradictory – positions at the same time. Recognising that it is traumatic for white people to realise the extent of their racism, for example, does not detract from the much larger trauma of being the victims of racism. But one idea does not exclude the other. It is possible to hold both in the mind at the same time.

It is important, however, to know that it is not the responsibility of oppressed peoples to help their “allies” to feel better. It is also not the responsibility of oppressed peoples to teach allies about their oppression. An ally must take responsibility for their own learning. As Graham Smith (2003) stated previously in this essay, forcing oppressed people to constantly explain their situation – which is exhausting and re-traumatising – is a “politics of distraction”. As Bishop (2016) argues, the responsibility of the ally, then, is to,

Learn everything you can about the oppression – read, ask questions, listen. Your ignorance is part of the oppression…When you are in the people are very tied to a geography. In some ways, he said, young people mimic this “captive audience” of rural villages and communities. People in Stockholm, however, whether they are Sámi or not, live complex urban lives with a lot of commitments and time pressures.

So, whether out of inertia, or busy-ness, or politics, or geography, or other time pressures the co-researchers decided that they didn’t want to do the project in the end and thus have show agency which is both participatory and an action. I think it is also important to remember the distrust that exists towards academics and that this may have been another reason why so few people were even interested in the project to begin with. This, to me, is completely understandable. Given the history between Sámi peoples and researchers, it is not unsurprising that people might be reluctant to share. They don’t trust my motives and they don’t understand what I want. In addition, the legacy of the academy means, I think, that such a relatively radically different way of looking at research might be difficult for people to comprehend in the rather short time during which I had planned to conduct
to re-learn history as it pertains to Sámi people in Sweden by focusing on history from below and by rejecting the master narrative. This has changed me. It has changed how I look at Swedishness and at Sáminess. It has convinced me that it is important to re-write and re-right history also in my daily life. That this is how I become an ally. But my privilege sometimes makes invisible to me the ways in which I am privileged by others. And my privilege also means that I can choose when I want to enact it and when I choose to reject it. Therefore, I will always be an unreliable ally (Bishop, 2015).

ally role, you have privileges and comfort in your life that members of the oppressed group do not have because of the oppression; they may not want to also give you their time and energy so that you can learn about them.

Finally, Fine (1994, p.75, paraphrasing bell hooks, Joan Scott and Gayatri Spivak) argues that researchers should ‘stop trying to know the Other or give voice to the Other… and listen, instead, to the plural voices of those Othered, as constructions and agents of knowledge.’ That, I believe, is what decolonising and participatory research does and how one can become an academic ally.
Traditionally, the conclusion is where you draw your arguments together and universalise the results of your experience. In the interest of decoloniality and academic disobedience I have resisted drawing my thoughts together in this way. As Law (2004, p.9) argues, in order to subvert the academic tradition we, …will need to unmake many of our methodological habits, including: the desire for certainty; the expectation that we can usually arrive at more or less stable conclusions about the way things really are; the belief that as social scientists we have special insights that allow us to see further than others into certain parts of social reality; and the expectations of generality that are wrapped up in what is often called ‘universalism.’

Thus, instead, I offer here some further thoughts and reflections on the process and on the future.

I want to begin my closing thoughts by writing a quick note about conducting this project from within the academy. My experience is that conducting non-traditional, indigenous and decolonial research within the parameters of a taught Masters has been challenging. But I think it shouldn’t be. Because if we are serious about democratising research, if that is our goal (as I believe it should be) we need to train potential researchers in democratic research much earlier. We cannot wait until they have reached PhD level. I think we need to get students to think about ethics (because both PAR and decolonial research, I think, are more than anything ethical frameworks) at a much earlier stage. As it is now, ethics is often tagged onto courses that teaches research methods. But should it not be the other way around, perhaps? Research methods could instead be explored through the lenses of varying ethical frameworks?

As I said before, this is not a project that didn’t work. All that has come out of it has been participatory and has shown agency. This project has also resulted in new knowledge being constructed. Certainly I feel like I have made huge leaps in my ability to act in solidarity as an ally: to Sámi people in particular and other oppressed peoples in general. I have begun to understand what it means to be an ally as well as an academic. I have understood that it is my responsibility to address my ignorance and that to expect oppressed people to assist me in this is a “politics of distraction” (Smith, 2003). I have used academic disobedience to challenge those parts of the academic tradition that I consider oppressive. Of course, I had begun this learning-journey long before this project, and it is one that I will continue on for the rest of my life because I will always be becoming an ally (Bishop, 2015). But I have come a lot further along this path than I had a year ago.

And even if this project did not “result” in anything specific (an action in the language of PAR), perhaps my attempt to use this methodology has, in whatever small ways, encouraged other people to think about the legacy of the academy within the Sámi community in
new ways. In fact, as part of the process by which I have shared my writing with my co-researchers at a draft stage I learned that, at least for one co-researcher the project had been instrumental in changing her expectations of being a research participant. She told me of how prior to this project she has sometimes been called up by researchers asking her questions about her past as a Sámi woman which she had submitted to answering. Now, however, she says that she has learned that there is another – more respectful, more reciprocal and less exploitative – way of doing research and that from now on her expectation would be to be a full participant from the beginning of any research project with a say in how and why the research was conducted – and that she is no longer as afraid of academics!

Of course, throughout this project, I have also made many mistakes, even if I may only begin to guess what they all are. For example, I think I secretly wished for the project to be neat, mess-free and structured and that this affected the way I acted. But this isn’t how the world works in reality. It is messy. I have tried to represent this experience also throughout my writing. The unusual nature of the structure of this essay means that perhaps it has been difficult at times to follow a clear argument. This, as I said in the Introduction, was also my intention. I hoped, instead, to take you, the reader, along on my journey. Through this I hope I may help challenge some of the assumptions that people who propose to conduct research with colonised and other minority peoples hold about what research is and how it is conducted. I think what I have presented here is one way in which positivist, colonising, patriarchal research traditions can be challenged. It should be OK to not be certain or “finished” with our thoughts. We should not pretend to be exposing some sort of finalised, objective, universal truth. Instead we should be offering options: options for thinking and speaking, for research, for discourse, for being. Further, by employing academic disobedience and thinking deeply about the structures we adhere to, we can try to ensure that our conduct in the field is ethical; that we do not reproduce the oppressive and exploitative frameworks and discourses of the Western research tradition. In short, that we are allies.
Appendix 1: Dictionary

This is a short dictionary of more or less “jargon-words” which I have chosen to use throughout this essay because of their specific meanings. These are my definitions of how they are used in this essay.

**Decolonisation**: In short, it means strategies for fighting against the colonial legacy. In relation to indigenous people it refers to the fight for self-determination and land-rights as well as intellectual self-determination.

**Diaspora**: It refers to the scattering of people from a certain geographic (or cultural) area across the globe or of a population from its homeland. Sámi people who live in Stockholm or in other places outside of Sápmi can be described as a diaspora.

**Discourse**: According to Stuart Hall (1992, p.291), A discourse is a group of statements which provide a language for talking about – i.e. a way of representing – a particular kind of knowledge about a topic. When statements about a topic are made within a particular discourse, the discourse makes it possible to construct the topic in a certain way. It also limits the other way in which the topic can be constructed. In other words, a discourse is a way of thinking, speaking or writing about a thing or concept that also determines how that thing or concept can and cannot be perceived. The idea that Sápmi has been colonised is a discourse. It excludes the idea that Sápmi is not colonised.

**Discursive field/formation**: A series of discourses that fit together to form a larger concept. Decolonialism or postcolonialism, for example, are discursive fields.

**Epistemology**: The theory of knowledge, which governs how knowledge is seen to be constructed and what is perceived as valuable knowledge. The way in which Western knowledge is traditionally constructed as detached, objective and neutral is an epistemology.

**Essentialism**: It refers to the idea that attributes and characteristics (and by extensions identities) are somehow genetic and constant instead of socially constructed and fluid (anti-essentialism).

**Hegemony**: It is simply the dominant state. State here does not just mean nation state (though it includes this as well) but can also mean the ruling class (white or wealthy or elite or the majority-culture, for example) and the ways in which it knowingly and unknowingly manipulates society for its own benefit. This meaning of hegemony was developed by the Marxist theorist Gramsci.

**Homogenous**: It means simply “the same”. Within a population it means that all people are similar to each other and it erases difference. To say that all Sámi people are the same is to describe them as homogenous.

**Methodology**: A system of methods used when conducting research in a systematic way. Sometimes,
like with decolonial or indigenous methodologies, it also includes the way you think about a particular problem or issue.

**The Other:** (with a capital O) relates to how identities are always constructed in relation to and in opposition to other identities. The Other helps create a sense of belonging and by extension, the Other in itself becomes an expression of deviance. The Other is never neutral. Woman is the Other of man, black is the Other of white, indigenous is the Other of colonising populations.

**Positionality:** It refers to the specific place in time and space (position) where we exist. This position can be geographical, social, cultural, ethnical, racial, gendered, aged and any number of other social aspect that may affect how we view the world. It is related to privilege and oppression.

**Positivism:** Within social science it refers to the academic tradition that argues that research about social phenomena should be based on reason and logic and be studied with the same methods as the natural sciences and places much value on objectivity and neutrality. It pretends to be non-political in nature, though any choice that is made even within positivist science has both political origins and consequences. Haraway (1988) argues that this attitudes constitutes a “god trick” – to see everything from nowhere – which is impossible.
Appendix 2: Decolonising My Mind

Though I recognise that the academic convention is to write as if you assume the reader knows nothing at all about that which you write, I am being intentionally academically disobedient. I know that the knowledge about Sámi people is limited outside of Sápmi (including in the rest of Sweden), but this account is not intended to teach you, the reader, about the Sámi. Instead, it is an account of my own attempt to decolonise my mind by reading and reflecting on alternative versions of history. I try to do this in an open and honest manner whilst remaining critical so that I do not simply romanticise indigenous knowledge. This is a chronological account.

I read *TechnoVisions of a Sámi Cyborg* by May-Britt Öhman (2016). I understand that Sápmi is a land colonised, a land with a complicated history, a land filled with trauma. A land built on the backs of those who died and are still dying for their right to live their own culture or because they cannot. I understand the importance of reclaiming Sámi history in its own right but also as a part of Swedish history.

In understand that there is a trauma that comes from colonisation in the form of the loss of land, the loss of language, the destruction of religion/spirituality, the loss of identity, the brutal violence of racial biology, the shame. But also the re-traumatisation that comes from having to re-live these traumas in order to educate and force the majority population to accept this history.

I understand that my own identity is partly created in opposition to the Sámi. I understand, for example, that my belief in animal rights and the protection of all animals – including predators – from the intrusion and destruction of habitats is in opposition to Sámi concerns for their livelihoods. I understand that my desire for renewable energy sources in the form of hydro- and wind-power causes destruction of lives and livelihoods in Sápmi. I understand that my pride in being a “good” person, as I see myself in relation to the environment, is not unproblematic.

I understand that these are complicated, contradictory issues. I understand that my feelings about these issues are also complicated and contradictory.

I understand that this is the history of a region at the mercy of decisions made by others far away and (sometimes) a long time ago.

I understand that it is problematic that Sámi people are always the ones to be put under the magnifying glass, the ones to be studied. Perhaps the lens should be turned the other way? How has my identity been created in opposition to the Sámi? However, I also understand that it is important not to silence again by turning the lens exclusively on the privileged.

I read *Sámi Women, Autonomy and Decolonisation in the age of Globalisation* by Rauna Kuokkanen (2006). I understand that it is important not to present Sámi people exclusively as victims of the colonising process but also think about the myriad ways in which this process has been resisted.

I understand that Spivak’s term “epistemic violence” is useful in describing this process of colonisation.
I understand that Sámi history and culture is not unproblematically constructed. That the construction of the Sámi matriarch silences the oppression of women who are victims of male violence.

I understand that indigenous women are especially disadvantaged by current political projects for self-determination and land-rights. This is often because of the prevailing sexism within both the majority and minority cultures and also based in the type of industry which “develops” indigenous lands.

I understand that the link between a people and their land is real and based on very specific histories. This is true for Sámi as well as majority-Swedish people.

I read *From Research as Colonisation to Reclaiming Autonomy* by Rauna Kuokkanen (2008) and I understand that research is a colonising tool. That researchers can no longer enter indigenous spaces, take the knowledge they need and “run away”. That research not only decides what is knowledge/knowable but also who is considered human. That this is colonising.

I understand that “intellectual self-determination” is imperative and includes the right for Sámi people to decide what they consider valid knowledge and the right to reclaim their own systems of knowledge.

I read *Det Rena Landet: om konsten att uppföna sina föräder* by Maja Hagerman (2007) and I understand that Sweden’s racist history that began with Linnaeus’ obsessive classification systems and culminated in the Institute for Racial Biology at Uppsala University is traumatic. I understand further that this trauma is continuing when the left-overs of this particular part of Sweden’s history are still visible and part of our most influential institutions in the form of universities and museums.

I read *Är Jag en Riktig Same* by Christina Åhren (2008) and I understand that identities within Sámi society are complex and carry with them particular histories often based on past and current legislation. I understand that this has often created conflict within Sámi society.

I understand that Sámi identities are just as multi-faceted, complex and contradictory as those of the “majority population” and that issues of gender and sexuality are as challenging in Sápmi as they are elsewhere. I understand that the Sámi identity is often essentialised not just as reindeer herders but as straight and cis.

I understand that in a culture where professions are still sometimes hereditary and traditional that breaking with the norm is sometimes seen as “extra” problematic. I understand that this sometimes forces people into making life choices contrary to their perceived identities.

I understand that within reindeer herding cultures for their collective to work a certain amount of conformity is required and that loyalty to the own collective is strong.

I understand that, for various complicated reasons, partly to do with legislation, “blood purity” had become important to reindeer herding Sámi. I think that this issue is very problematic.

I understand that it is important not to vilify entire communities or individuals but to understand that these issues are complex.

I weep when I read that sometimes these issues become so difficult that individuals choose to end their lives.

I read *Försvenskning av Sverige* by Ehn, Frykman and Löfgren (1993) and I understand that the building
Appendix 2: Decolonising My Mind

of a nation is a very deliberate project to make the imaginary and arbitrary real, constant and ancient. I understand that its borders are meaningless without the Other. I’m thinking that the Sámi were integral to the demarcation of Swedish borders. There must be our Sámi and their Sámi. I also think that in the idea of the Swedish nation where nature becomes an increasingly important patriotic object, the Sámi are seen as being part of this nature, not of society or the nation.

I watch Åvdåsvástádus - Symposium at the University of Uppsala (University of Uppsala, 2015). I listen to Maja Hageman who speaks about Herman Lundborg but also about herself as a non-Sámi conducting research in this area and she says that this is not just Sámi history but Swedish history too. I listen to May-Britt Öhman’s reply that Maja should not let herself be re/dejected but that she is also in contact with a people who have experienced a deep trauma and who will react. I think about how it is important for me to keep this in mind too.

I listen to a podcast about Alta-konflikten: från civil olydnad till samisk terrorism (P3 Dokumentär, 2012) and I am struck by one sentence uttered by a Norwegian Sámi man. He says that Sámi are always the ones who “need help” and that this discourse is very destructive to the self-esteem of Sámi people. I think that he is right and I am reminded of how our futures are bound together and that I am not free if you are not free.

I continue to watch videos from Åvdåsvástádus - Symposium at the University of Uppsala (University of Uppsala, 2015). I listen to Niils-Axel Heikka and I am reminded that some Sámi are queer too. I remember reading Queering Sápmi (Bergman & Lindquist, 2014) and thinking again that Sámi people, like many minorities, are always constructed as primarily Sámi by the outside world and that I must remember that there are many different constellations of non-normative identities within Sápmi too.

I listen to the general discussion and I understand from someone that, for some, part of the reconciliation process requires a genuine apology from the Swedish government. Someone else says that if there is to be an apology, Sámi people must also be ready to accept it.

Someone else asks why? What does an apology mean if it is not also followed by action? If someone steps on your foot and apologises you might accept their apology. But what if that person does not step off your foot? Will you accept their apology then?

I also understand that trauma and shame are two aspects of contemporary Sámi identity that people need to process both privately and collectively. Someone argues that shame is at the root of apathy and that it is paralysing. She argues that to stop being paralysed by shame there needs to be a proper apology as part of a reconciliation process so that Sámi people can know that it was not their fault.

Someone else argues that it is not the Sámi who should feel shame but majority Swedes. I agree. And I do feel shame. Can I be held responsible for the actions of my ancestors? I can for the simple reason that I am benefitting both materially and immaterially from the existing hegemony. Off the top of my head this includes the wealth that comes from the exploitation of the land through mining, green energy and through the establishment of a Swedish identity – partly in contrast to the Sámi identity – even if I choose to reject that identity.

Whilst watching Hur gör man för att rädda ett folk by Maja Hageman (2015) I think about several things. Firstly how the Sámi situation perhaps is slightly
different than the situation for other indigenous people because they can often “pass” for Swedish. There aren’t necessarily any physical markers that distinguish Sámi and non-Sámi people. I think that this can lead to a number of different things. Firstly, I think it is at the root of the “success” of the assimilation that occurred in the beginning and middle of the last century. Secondly, it means that people who want to emphasise their Sámi identity often become reliant on symbols. I think this, in turn, perpetuates the idea that Sámi culture is something static and ahistorical. Thirdly, it means that Sámi who are able to “pass” can choose in which environment they want to be “out” and in which they don’t. But it can also, I think, mean that there is a certain distrust for who is and who isn’t Sámi amongst Sámi peoples themselves.

I read När jag var åtta år lämnade jag mitt hem och jag har ännu inte kommit tillbaka edited by Kaisa Huuva and Ellacarin Blind (2016). Reading this book I understand many things but it also makes me question others.

I understand that the trauma of the physical separation from parents and families and the psychological separation from language and culture is real. Importantly, through these stories, I understand these experiences in the words of those who experienced them.

Their anger jumps off the pages and into my head and heart.

I understand that in some ways the “nomad school” is not just the cause of the loss of language, culture and identity for many tens of thousands but that it is perhaps also (one of) the cause(s) of the animosity and mistrust that exists today between different “types” of Sámi. Those who kept their culture, traditions and language and those that “chose” to assimilate in different ways.

I understand that the rationale for the “nomad school” is based on social Darwinism and racist views of Sámi people.

But I also think that these accounts are not entirely unproblematic. It is clear that many children experienced real trauma from being separated from their families. But they are not the only children in the world to be so and in many places boarding schools for children even from a very young age are common. Do these children also suffer from this “collective” trauma? Equally, many talked about the work they were forced to do at the schools but this also was and still is common for children in many parts of the world. Does the trauma come from the comparative hardship, then, between Sámi and majority-Swedish children?

And when it comes to the trauma of racial biology and eugenics, Sámi people were not the only people who were victims. Others included Roma, the (undeserving) poor and the mentally ill. Whilst still recognising this trauma as real, I think that perhaps, in a way, this focus on trauma also serves a different purpose. A sort of Strategic Trauma (as related to Strategic Essentialism [Spivak, 1998]). It is strategic in the sense that it allows Sámi people to unite in a common purpose and a common past. Thus a united front is formed outwards and solidarity is formed inside. Instead of acting paralysing it promotes action.

I think that this trauma can in some ways also produce a kind of nostalgia. Horowiz (2012 cited in Arnold-de Simine, 2013, p.62) argues that trauma can act to ‘reassert a present sense of communal values, a lost unity, a shared moral and cultural centre.’ Boulter (2004 cited in ibid., p.63) further argues that traumatic nostalgia is when ‘the desire to transcend trauma is coupled with an equally strong desire to “keep that trauma fixed in a continual and paradoxically static
past.” Is the way in which the trauma of the nomad schools is being used for a political purpose also nostalgic?

But then I think: Am I asking the wrong (colonising) questions? Am I even “allowed” to have an opinion here? I may not understand, but maybe I don’t have to. Maybe I never will. This is not my trauma.
References


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