



'Show yourself': Indigenous ethics, Sámi cosmologies and decolonial queer pedagogies of *Frozen 2*

Tuija Huuki & Kata Kyrölä

To cite this article: Tuija Huuki & Kata Kyrölä (2022): 'Show yourself': Indigenous ethics, Sámi cosmologies and decolonial queer pedagogies of *Frozen 2*, *Gender and Education*, DOI: [10.1080/09540253.2021.2023112](https://doi.org/10.1080/09540253.2021.2023112)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/09540253.2021.2023112>



© 2022 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group



Published online: 23 Jan 2022.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)

‘Show yourself’: Indigenous ethics, Sámi cosmologies and decolonial queer pedagogies of *Frozen 2*

Tuija Huuki ^a and Kata Kyrölä ^b

^aFaculty of Education, University of Oulu, Oulu, Finland; ^bDepartment of Communication, Culture and Media, University College London, London, UK

ABSTRACT

In this article, we examine the immensely popular animated Disney film *Frozen 2* (2019) through its potential as decolonial queer pedagogy. Drawing on Indigenous educational studies, queer and feminist Indigenous theories, and research on affect and trauma, we ask how the film popularizes Sámi nature-based cosmologies, addresses and attempts to repair the cross-generational transmission of settler colonial trauma, and presents a complex view of gender and human and non-human relations. Unlike in its predecessor *Frozen* (2013), in *Frozen 2* Disney involved Sámi consultants in the production process, and the film was dubbed in North Sámi language. We interrogate *Frozen 2*'s production process as well as its narrative and aesthetics, proposing that it allows its viewers – children and adults, Indigenous and non-Indigenous alike – to engage with and learn about Indigenous ethics, Sámi cosmologies, and more-than-human understandings of gender and sexuality in respectful and easily approachable ways.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 6 September 2021
Accepted 16 December 2021

KEYWORDS



Queer; Indigenous ethics; Sámi; Disney; children's film; posthuman; trauma

Introduction

Desire is the song about walking through the storm, a song that recognizes rather than denies that pain doubtlessly lies ahead. (Tuck 2009, 419)

At the narrative and affective turning point of the popular animated Disney film *Frozen 2* (2019, directed by Jennifer Lee & Chris Buck), Elsa, a young woman with magical powers, rides across a stormy Arctic water on a spirit horse, heading towards a mythical frozen river called Ahtohallan. Upon her arrival, she sings a powerful song called ‘Show Yourself’ – a song about not knowing herself before, always feeling different, but now finally, excitedly, coming to the point where all secrets will be revealed and there is nothing to hide anymore. The secrets have to do with Elsa and her sister Anna's past, drenched in silence and traumatic settler colonial violence, and their own background as Indigenous Northudra people.

‘Show Yourself’ has also been received by the queer Disney fandom as the penultimate queer anthem and as such, a logical follow-up to the song ‘Let It Go’ from *Frozen* (2013,

CONTACT Tuija Huuki  tuija.huuki@oulu.fi  Faculty of Education, University of Oulu, P.O. Box 2000 90014, Oulu, Finland

© 2022 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group
This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

directed by Jennifer Lee & Chris Buck), the predecessor of *Frozen 2*. These songs seem entrenched in subtext about repression, the closet, difference, the burden of normalcy, as well as finding community and reveling in the full expression of oneself, allowing for a juxtaposition of queerness and Indigeneity within heteronormative settler societies. The character Elsa has been eagerly read through a queer sensibility by scholars and audiences, as she is a rare case of a Disney princess who rejects marriage and heterosexual romance – a trope so common that its absence is enough to queer Elsa – culminating in the 2016 Twitter campaign #GiveElsaAGirlfriend (Charania and Albertson 2018; Docter-man 2016; Dundes 2020; Farris 2020; Haasch 2019; WanDerWerff 2019).

In this article, we examine *Frozen 2* through its potential as decolonial queer feminist pedagogy. In our analysis, this potential concretizes, first of all, in the way the film deals with and repairs cross-generational transmission of trauma and its affective hauntings (Blackman 2012; Cho 2008), and popularizes Sámi culture and cosmologies in a way that is approachable for children, youth, and adults. The Northuldra people were directly inspired by the Sámi, the Indigenous people of Northern Europe whose traditional lands span across the Northern parts of Norway, Sweden, Finland, and the Kola Peninsula in Russia. Both *Frozen* films include narrative, visual, and musical features that allude to or borrow from Sámi culture.

Secondly, and connectedly, we explore how the film's Indigenous sensibilities entwine with its queer sensibilities (see Griffin 2000), and how human and non-human creatures and forces form diverse kinship constellations. Indigenous cosmologies become also queer cosmologies, as many of *Frozen 2*'s human and non-human characters are not defined by heteronormative gender. Leanne Betasamosake Simpson (Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg) has argued that Indigenous cosmologies in fact depend on an understanding of gender and sexually variant beings as inconsequential, a part of life, grounded in nature: 'They also come from the land – the land that provides endless examples of queerness and diverse sexualities and genders' (Simpson 2017, 122). We read the film through a queer Indigenous understanding of sexuality as one of the many forces of nature, and an intimate relationality that is broader than sex (e.g. Driskill 2010). Previous analyses of the *Frozen* films have focused either on their feminist and queer potential (Charania and Albertson 2018; Duffy 2019; Farris 2020), or on the films' Indigenous dimensions (Fonneland 2020; Kalvig 2020; Kvidal-Røvik and Cordes 2020). However, questions of Indigeneity, gender and sexuality have not been analysed as intertwined.

Thirdly, a key part of *Frozen 2*'s decolonial pedagogy is the film's ground-breaking production process which entailed a so far unique collaboration with a group of Sámi scholars, artists and experts called *Verddet*, and the Sámi Councils of Norway, Sweden and Finland, following Indigenous ethics of sovereignty, collaboration and relationality (Kuokkanen 2019; Smith 1999). The process of writing this article as a collaboration between an Inari Sámi educational gender studies scholar Tuija and a non-Indigenous feminist media studies scholar Kata continues such ethics. We have written collaboratively before, joined in our interests in transformative research practices and questions of gender, sexuality, power, Indigeneity and settler colonialism. We were eager to continue co-writing, and *Frozen 2* drew us in, allowing us to further explore not only our shared interests but Tuija's passion for examining and healing cross-generational trauma and Kata's passion for imagining genders and sexualities outside of heteronormative, settler colonial structures.

The Disney-Sámi collaboration's purpose, particularly in terms of the portrayal of the Northuldra tribe, was to make the film 'culturally sensitive, appropriate and respectful of the Sámi and their culture' (Simonpillai 2019). To grasp the concrete aspect of *Verddet's* work, we had an in-depth conversation with one of its members, Professor of Sámi Studies at the University of Oulu, Veli-Pekka Lehtola (2021). He pointed out that Disney had already 'failed' a few times in Indigenous representation, for example with *Pocahontas* (1995), *Moana* (2016) and *Frozen* (2013). The latter mixed and matched elements from Sámi culture, such as reindeer herding, types of clothing, and traditional *yoik* song, with little consultation with Sámi people. This raised criticism about non-Indigenous filmmakers yet again appropriating, twisting, and profiting of Indigenous culture (Kvidal-Røvik and Cordes 2020, 3; Yoshinaga 2019). With *Frozen 2*, the Sámi parliaments of Finland, Sweden and Norway got in touch with the film crew as they were doing background research in the Nordic countries, and initiated the collaboration that, according to Lehtola, had a significant impact on the production process (Lehtola 2021).

While engaging with various critiques, this article consciously focuses on *Frozen 2's* subversive potential, inspired by Eve Tuck's (Unangax) (2009) call for desire-driven research instead of a scholarly emphasis on damage. Tuck argues that while it has been important for research to reveal hidden forms of subordination in order to recognize and change them, the focus on oppression and pain can maintain a rather hopeless vision for the future. Instead, Tuck suggests an epistemological move towards desire – in other words, towards proliferation, possibility, and forward-movement – to better understand the multiplicity, complexity, and irrepressibility of Indigenous people and cultures, even in the face of massive forces like global settler colonialism. The potential impact of *Frozen 2* as decolonial queer feminist pedagogy concretizes in that it is the all-time highest grossing animated film, overshadowing its predecessor *Frozen* that held the earlier record. The *Frozen* franchise includes merchandise such as dolls, costumes, clothing, and accessories, as well as video games, books, theme park attractions, a Disney on Ice show and a Broadway stage production. All this testifies to the enormous, transnational imaginative and affective hold of the film for its young viewers.

Indigeneity, gender and sexuality in Disney films

Numerous scholars have criticized Disney's investment in colonial legacies, racialised stereotypes, conservative gender roles, and heteronormative romance, arguing that the company's steps towards progressiveness are mostly attempts to polish its public image (Ayers 2003; Brode and Brode 2016; Charania and Albertson 2018; Lugo-Lugo and Bloodsworth-Lugo 2009). Already in the 1990s, Disney films such as *The Lion King* (1994), *Pocahontas* (1995) and *Mulan* (1998) were surrounded by controversy regarding cultural appropriation of non-western cultures (Edgerton and Jackson 1996). More recently, the 'New Disney' (Charania and Albertson 2018, 130) has been hailed for responding to critique by making more films with girls and women as leads, and for putting effort into ethnic and racial diversity (Cheu 2013). For example, the film *Moana* (2016), which premiered between *Frozen* and *Frozen 2* and had a young Polynesian woman as the main character, employed Polynesian Indigenous consultants in the production process. *Moana* was also dubbed into Tahitian, Hawaiian, and Maori languages.

However, such moves can also be seen as a form of cultural extraction of Indigenous labor in the service of a giant western capitalist corporation (Yoshinaga 2019).

In contrast, most Sámi commentators as well as the members of the Sámi advisory board *Verddet* were satisfied with the cooperation with Disney. There were critical voices within Sámi communities (Kvidal-Røvik and Cordes 2020), and *Verddet* knew their input would be within certain limits, but Lehtola emphasizes that the advisory board felt their concerns and advice were taken seriously, and great effort was put into following through with their suggestions (Lehtola 2021).

Frozen 2 is one of the few children's animated films that have been dubbed in Sámi languages – a Sámi version was also a part of the agreement with Sámi people. The other examples are *Moomins and the Winter Wonderland* (2017), *Spirited Away* (2019), *Mamma Mu* (2020) and *Ainbo* (2021). Additionally, the Netflix animated children's film *Klaus* (2019) – an update to the Santa Klaus story – includes representation of Sámi people who speak North Sámi, created, cast and translated in collaboration with Sámi filmmakers (Kalvig 2020, 5–6, 13; Sami Film Institute 2020). Thus far, there are no original Sámi-made feature-length children's films, therefore, the existence of a carefully produced, high quality Sámi version of *Frozen 2* – or *Jikŋon 2* in North Sámi – is a significant step.

Frozen 2 is not only an interesting reiteration of Disney's fraught but evolving relationship to Indigeneity and also to gender and sexuality. Elsa and Anna can be placed in a long lineage of Disney Princesses, a lineage that has been critiqued for portraying girls and women as always oriented towards hetero-romance, or damsels in distress (Charania and Albertson 2018; Davis 2007; Do Rozario 2004). However, some scholars have also examined the ways marginalized audiences, such as queer fans, have found great pleasure and subversive potential in Disney's magical worlds of fantasy throughout its history (Duffy 2019; Griffin 2000). Despite the loyal queer fandom, queer scholarly readings of Disney, and the sizable number of queer-identifying people working for Disney over many decades (Griffin 2000), Disney has yet to introduce an openly queer character in its children's films, and Elsa never did receive a girlfriend (Charania and Albertson 2018). But, as we argue in this article, queer Indigenous studies' views of gender and sexuality as spiritual forces, embedded in relations to land, non-human creatures and history, enable a reading of the queer Indigenous dimensions in *Frozen 2* as something far beyond explicitly queer identities.

Frozen in the past? The cultural appeal of historical trauma

Why did an animated movie about two Indigenous young women, one with magical powers, haunted by intergenerational trauma and trying to reconcile their settler forefather's sins, become one of the most popular children's films of all time? *Frozen 2* and its popularity cannot be understood apart from the massive traumatic impact of settler colonialism, its fundamental, large-scale injustice that forms the dark backbone of so many current nation states, including the Nordic countries and the United States. This impact can be conceptualized through the psychosocial notion of *historical trauma* (Walkerdine, Olsvold, and Rudberg 2013) that connects historical oppression and psychological trauma (Kirmayer, Gone, and Moses 2014). It does not place the locus of trauma in individual pathologies or mental disorders, but as applied to Indigenous contexts, in the

long term impact of colonization, suppression of culture, and forced assimilation (Brave Heart 1999). Trauma exists because the painful experiences are too painful to deal with but impossible to forget, carrying across generations. As a consequence, members of a community have not been able to communicate the pain, caused by discrimination and injustice, from one generation to the next, which has led to silence (Davoine and Gaudillière 2004). Trauma can, however, also be seen as a creative force that entails the possibility of a more ethically sustainable future (Cho 2008, 24).

Accordingly, the 2010s and 2020s have seen an unprecedented upsurge of political efforts as well as popular cultural products that address such trauma and seek new kinds of justice. Truth and Reconciliation Committees have been formed across the world, and these attempts to acknowledge wrongdoing and offer retribution are highly visible at the moment, although often, for example in the Sámi context, they have been seen as ‘settler moves to innocence’ (Tuck and Yang 2012) rather than moves towards Indigenous justice and sovereignty (see Kuokkanen 2020). The affectively charged dynamics of trauma and (hope of) justice have become a part of the global cultural repertoire, relatable and ripe for picking for filmic fantasies which seek to engage wide and varied audiences. As American cultural studies scholar Aimee Carrillo Rowe and Eve Tuck (2017, 6–7) underline, many cultural forms and narratives in settler societies are haunted by Indigeneity and ‘scenes of dispossession’ (Simpson 2014): they may serve a pedagogy of forgetting, but they also remind of Indigenous life that persists through trauma. Such hauntings do not necessarily follow linear temporalities but stretch across time and place, making the past a vivid part of the present and extending into the future (Cho 2008). Notably, it is entirely possible to watch *Frozen 2* and never make the connection to real-life political questions of Indigenous sovereignty and settler colonial violence. The animated fantasy allows a distance – but it also enables imagining magical, queer, human and non-human connections and Indigenous worlds in other ways than films more tied to expectations or realism.

However, in the production process, Anglo-American views of ‘generalized’ Indigeneity sometimes risked overshadowing Sámi specificity. This shows, for example, in the development of a scene in the beginning of the film, where Elsa and Anna are children and their father King Ragnar tells them a bedtime story about a violent altercation between the Northuldra and the Arendelle people – in his telling, initiated by the Northuldra. Lehtola (2021) explains that the scene was originally much more violent, but *Verddet* asked the production crew to tone it down, which they did. The Sámi advisors appreciated that the violence turned out to be self-defense and initiated by settlers, since the Sámi have historically avoided physical aggression and violent altercations, and their practices of resistance have rather expressed through evasion, withdrawal, and silence (Lehtola 2019). The Sámi, unlike Indigenous peoples in North America, did not experience war, but their colonization began in the seventeenth century through Christian missionary work, exploration in the name of science, and forced land transfers. In the nineteenth century, exploitative colonialism in the Sápmi region gradually turned into settler colonialism with the aim of complete cultural assimilation and replacement, but without literal genocide (Lehtola 2015, 10–27.). In *Frozen 2*, broad affective and cultural flows and hauntings anchor to the Sámi in particular. We have elsewhere explored how affective residues of historical trauma jump across time–space domains into Sámi people’s power relations

in the present time (Huuki and Juutilainen 2016; Huuki and Lanas 2019; Kyrölä and Huuki 2021).

To reach into how the film speaks to, deals with and aims to heal historical trauma, we focus in our analysis less on the surface level of the narrative and more on the film's gaps, wordless voices, scattered fantastical images and figures, as well as affective charges felt in the body. This methodological focus does not seek a coherent story but 'registers the nonnarrativizable' (Cho 2008, 24) and draws attention to passages 'with very high affect' (Walkerdine, Olsvold, and Rudberg 2013, 278). At the same time, our analysis seeks to address trauma not only as a wound and a loss but also something potentially productive (Tuck 2009).

Voice-hearing and Indigenous futurity

Being haunted draws us affectively, sometimes against our will and always a bit magically. (Gordon 2008, 8)

Frozen 2's main plot is driven by Elsa and Anna's quest to find out more about their deceased parents and the origins of Elsa's magical powers – a quest propelled by a singing, wordless voice that beckons Elsa to follow it, a voice no-one else can hear. The quest leads Elsa and Anna to a silenced history of settler colonial violence and resulting trauma that materializes in the first half of the film only as affective traces and disembodied aural hauntings. The second half of the film reveals that Elsa's and Anna's grandfather, Arendelle's King Runard had betrayed the neighboring Northuldra people by building a dam on their lands as a 'gift,' with the ulterior motive of weakening their land, forest and waters. He murdered the Northuldra leader during a supposedly friendly visit, initiating a violent battle. Elsa and Anna's mother Iduna, a member of the Northuldra tribe, was a teenager at the time but saved their father Agnarr, King Runard's only son, from the battle. The teens escaped to Arendelle and Iduna eventually married Agnarr but hid her Indigeneity from everyone. The elemental spirits, furious at King Runard's deception, cast an enchantment on the forest of the Northuldra in the form of an impenetrable mist, locking in not only them but also the Arendelle soldiers who were there at the time of the betrayal. The voice Elsa hears is related to this traumatic past.

Indigenous scholars have conceptualized manifestations of historical, intergenerational trauma as hauntings where traumatic events of the past echo as ghostly presences in the now (Raheja 2011; Tuck and Ree 2013). We propose that in *Frozen 2*, such hauntings concretize in 'hearing voices,' following British media and cultural studies scholar Lisa Blackman's (2012) work. Blackman contends that voice hearing is not just arbitrary, but the voices can communicate something from the past that is surrounded by secrecy and silence. Even if the connection to an actual event of the past would be broken, trauma can be passed down through generations without conscious awareness via embodied affective practices (Walkerdine, Olsvold, and Rudberg 2013) such as voice-hearing.

The haunting, melancholic, wordless singing voice Elsa hears can be affectively connected to the Sámi vocal genre of *yoik* 'in which the performer yoiks something rather than yoiks about something' (Ramnarine 2009, 188), even though the song's timber does not sound like *yoik* per se. This something can be, for example, a memory, a feeling, a person, an animal, a landscape: *yoik* manifests something without words, and

can be inherited from an ancestor to members of next generations. Similarly, the voice delivers Elsa affective information from the past, first only as a feeling, then a memory – it is both magical and embedded in her body.

In a scene early on in *Frozen 2*, Elsa hears the voice and starts singing back to it, echoing and reinforcing its melody. In a duet with the disembodied voice, ‘Into the Unknown,’ Elsa peers into the night sky and runs after the voice, ending up in a space where magical lights swirl around her, making vortexes and shapes of elemental spirits: a space that is ‘unknown’ yet filled with the presence of something familiar. In the film, Elsa enters this magical space through song and her magical powers over and over again. It is a space that manifests things, like *yoik* does; where land and sky blend; and where things from the past, the present and the future come together. Audiovisually it is clearly differentiated from all the other more realistic spaces, like the city and the forest.

This space can be understood, following geographer Laura Harjo (Mvskoge) (2019), as a space of Indigenous futurity. For Harjo (2019, 5), such a futurity means ‘the enactment of theories and practices that activate our ancestors’ unrealized possibilities, the act of living out the futures we wish for in a contemporary moment, and the creation of the conditions for these futures.’ Elsa’s voice-hearing – later, viewers find out the voice belongs to her long dead Northuldra mother Iduna – speaks directly to such ancestral ‘unrealized possibilities’ and resonates with the way many contemporary Indigenous and colonized people carry traumatic memories that belong to the previous generations in their bodies (Cho 2008, 38). As a space of Indigenous futurity, the magical, spiritual voice-hearing space can indeed be seen as a queer Indigenous space: one that does not differentiate the spiritual and the material; one where ancestors come alive, where human and non-human animals are kin, and bodies open up to ecstatic, magical pleasure.

Elsa’s answer to the call of the voice and the space of Indigenous futurity wakes up four elemental spirits: the water spirit Nokk, the wind spirit Gale, the fire spirit Bruni, and the earth Giants. Natural disasters – earthquake, storm and withdrawal of water – hit the settler kingdom of Arendelle which begins to fall apart. Its inhabitants escape into the nearby mountain. This is a moment when the settler colonial state begins to collapse onto itself, weighed down and blown up by the (still) unarticulated historical trauma. As art history scholar Lindsay Nixon (Cree-Metis-Saulteaux) (2020) points out, Native people have already experienced and continue to experience apocalypse – it is only for settlers that the prospect of an apocalypse is novel and terrifying. While the dislocated settler city dwellers are frozen in disbelief and dread, Elsa and Anna set out on a journey to avert further destruction.

The voice continues leading Elsa, Anna and their human and non-human crew – Anna’s boyfriend Kristoff, the reindeer Sven, and the snowman Olaf, brought to life by magic – to the Enchanted Forest. Elsa’s magical powers allow the crew to enter through the impenetrable mist. Once they have entered the Enchanted Forest and encountered the Northuldra, the Northuldra notice that a scarf that Anna wears and used to belong to Elsa and Anna’s mother has a pattern that belongs to their handicraft tradition. The sisters suddenly realize they are Northuldra from their mother’s side. With song resembling *yoik* by timber and vocalization, the Northuldra inaugurate Elsa and Anna as members of their tribe. The scarf’s pattern depicts four spiritual elements, and in the middle of

them, the Fifth Spirit. Later the viewers will see that it is Elsa who is the fifth spirit, a bridge between people and magic, the past, the present and the future.

Desire and queer non-human Indigenous sensibilities

As Tuck (2009) proposes, '[d]esire is about longing, about a present that is enriched by both the past and the future' (Tuck 2009, 417). A desire-based approach rejects damage-based thinking that sees and positions Indigenous peoples as irrevocably conquered, dispossessed and injured, but it does not refuse damage, rather moves through it. According to Tuck (2010), desire is 'smart' but also 'purposeful, intentional, agentic ... it can teach itself, craft itself, inform itself' (645–646). Desire 'accumulates wisdom, picking up flashes of self-understanding and world-understanding along the way of a life. This wisdom is assembled not just across a lifetime, but across generations' (645). The production process of *Frozen 2*, as narrated to us by Lehtola (2021), can be understood through Tuck's vision of desire: an intentional, crafting-itself-along-the-way desire to do things differently, to not get stuck in past damage but draw on collective, accumulated wisdom from various times and places.

Lehtola (2021) points out, for example, that the main plot about repairing the trauma of settler colonialism already existed as it was before the involvement of *Verddet*, and *Verddet* deeply appreciated that. In some cases, however, *Verddet* would have wanted to change things but could not anymore, and consented to Disney's 'creative freedom,' even if that meant partially consenting to a settler frame. But some features of the film propel desire towards previously unseen and unknown directions, enabling Indigenous ethics previously unseen and unheard of in mainstream cinema. For example, one important aspect of *Verddet*'s work concerned the clothing of the Northuldra. Lehtola (2021) tells that Disney was already aware of the significance of the traditional dress *gákti* for the Sámi and wanted to avoid appropriating it. Therefore Disney had originally designed Northuldra clothes drawing from the clothing traditions of various Arctic Indigenous peoples, including the Sámi but also, for instance, the Nenets inhabiting Russia's Far North. However, *Verddet* were adamant and 'raised a ruckus' (Lehtola 2021) on wanting the clothing to resemble Sámi *gákti* more, as it was clear that the Northuldra were specifically modeled after the Sámi. The *gákti* is handmade, and the processes of making it and wearing it are considered important markers of a Sámi belonging and identity, connectedness to ancestors, location and land (Magga 2018). Lehtola suspects that Disney must have 'burned a lot a lot of money' as they remade all the Northuldra scenes with revised costumes, this time modeled after South Sámi dress from the eighteenth century by *Verddet*'s suggestion. Although *Verddet* did not get all the changes they wanted, Lehtola explains they were nevertheless satisfied enough.

Leanne Betasamosake Simpson (2017, cf. Rosiek, Snyder, and Pratt 2020) underlines that an ethic of reciprocity includes respect, relationship, responsibility, and it is local. In the case of *Frozen 2*, integral to such an ethics was giving back to the Sámi whose life and culture the film draws on and is nested in, in terms of involving their representatives in plot development and audiovisual aesthetics, in making a Sámi language version, and in reaching a formal agreement between the Sámi parliaments and Disney. Information about any potential further details that might have been a part of the agreement is not available and protected by confidentiality agreements.

In terms of desire-driven audiovisual aesthetics that invoke queer Indigenous sensibilities, the scenes where Elsa finally ventures towards and into the magical, mythical river of ice, Ahtohallan, are crucial. Before reaching Ahtohallan, Elsa must cross the raging Dark Sea, and she attempts to do so with the help of her powers of creating and controlling ice. The sea materializes Nokk, a horse-shaped spirit of water, one of the four elemental spirits of the Enchanted Forest. In a visually impressive scene, Nokk and Elsa fight in the vast waves and the depths of the sea, as Nokk tries to drown her, but she uses her powers to make it her companion through a bodily and magical embrace. Nokk finally carries her over the sea to Ahtohallan, and after Elsa and Nokk have changed a respectful reciprocal bow, Nokk disappears in the water that has calmed down. The water spirit is now intimately connected to Elsa who has the capacity to call upon it.

Science and technology scholar Kim TallBear (Sisseton Wahpeton Oyate) (2015) points out how Indigenous thought is full of stories and understandings of sexual fluidity and desire between human and non-human actors. For TallBear, this is an essential characteristic of queer Indigenous thought: rethinking what erotic connections might mean overall, and specifically in relation to non-human entities and spirituality. Elsa and Nokk's intimate bond reflects such a queer, desiring, spiritual connection, even if it is not sexual in the way that western culture understands sexuality (see also Dundes 2020).

Indeed, one moment in the film that queer Disney fans cherished and lamented is Elsa's heartfelt conversation with a young Northuldra woman named Honeymaren by a campfire after Elsa and Anna's arrival in the Enchanted Forest. This encounter is one that could have been romantic, and for a moment, Honeymaren seems like she is set up to be Elsa's love interest, but the moment quickly passes (WanDerWerff 2019). However, if Honeymaren had become Elsa's girlfriend, there is a risk that the film's queer non-human Indigenous potential had been reduced to a homonormative set-up where the conventional norm of hetero-romance, geared towards marriage, domesticity and consumption (Duggan 2004), is simply applied to a same-sex setting. The intimate and intense formations of queer kinship that Elsa, Anna, and various non-human entities create together might offer the film's young viewers open and less pre-defined ways to imagine gender variant and sexually diverse lives beyond what non-Native western culture teaches us.

Nokk is not the only intimate connection to a non-human entity that Elsa creates: earlier in the film, upon arrival in the Enchanted Forest and Northuldra ancestral lands, Elsa and her crew encounter the elemental spirits first in the form of four large boulders that appear in the mist. For the Sámi, sacred sites of ritual and offering were often large natural rocks or boulders called *sieidi*, although *sieidi* could also be other natural formations such as caves or islands. *Sieidi* have been a key part of Sámi cosmologies for hundreds of years, sites where land, human and non-human animals come together, create and re-create a sensual, embodied connection through ritual (see Salmi, Äikäs, and Lipkin 2011). Similarly, the spirits of wind and fire in the Enchanted Forest connect with human and non-human entities in a sensory and embodied manner: first they appear hostile, pushing and pulling on the bodies of Elsa's crew, but gradually they become affectionate with them, particularly Elsa, as if recognizing a kindred spirit. *Frozen 2* thus offers a vision of queer Indigenous kinship relations beyond the material, extending into spiritual and non-human entities and offering hints towards Sámi *sieidi* and cosmologies.

Upon arrival in Ahtohallan, Elsa realizes that she has sensed the river as a bodily and affective experience that has always been within her. She runs deep into the ice cave

of Ahtohallan, a wondrous space in which past, present and future enmesh, and which harbors the temporality of her 'unconscious haunted by trauma and of the affective experience of the traumatic event' (Cho 2008, 58) but also the potential for repairing the trauma. In the core of the ice cave, a magical space opens yet again, reminiscent of the space of Indigenous futurity (Harjo 2019) in the beginning of the film. The four elemental spirits appear there in the shape of crystals, like the ornamental pattern in Iduna's Northuldra scarf: they form a constellation where Elsa magically fits in as the fifth elemental spirit, bridging past and present, and humans and nature's spiritual forces. The queer kinship collective enables reforming the lost connection to the past damage and thus launches a radical process of repairing it, or moving through and beyond it.

The coming together of the elemental spirits enables Elsa to travel across time through significant moments of her own youth and into the time before she was born, the fatal moments of her grandfather's deception of the Northuldra. The weight of this historical trauma is life-threatening: Elsa begins to freeze under its unbearable weight. But before freezing into an ice statue, Elsa sends her sister Anna a magical call for help. Anna realizes that in order to repair the past, she must destroy the dam that their treacherous grandfather built, even if it comes at the cost of drowning Arendelle under water.

With the help of Kristoff, Olaf the snow figure and the soldiers of Arendelle, Anna lures the spirits of the land, Earth Giants, to destroy the dam. The Earth Giants are made of massive boulders, reminiscent of the *sieidi* – it is as if the sacred sites of Sámi come alive and rise in revolt, throwing rocks at the dam that has impoverished the Northuldra land. The dam seems like a clear reference to the Alta dam conflict, a huge political controversy in the late 1970s and early 1980s, where the Norwegian government planned to build a dam and a hydroelectric power plant on Sámi ancestral lands. The plan gave rise to a major Sámi political uprising in order to protect their sovereignty, although eventually the dam was built and the resistance stifled (Korsmo 1988). Lehtola (2021) notes that this connection was one of the things in the film's plot that pre-existed *Verddet's* involvement but that they deeply appreciated.

As Iranian political scholar Sousan Abadian (2006) contends, healing historical trauma requires life-enhancing reparation on individual, kinship, communal and cultural levels. An important step in the regeneration of healthy and affirming cultures is the telling of life-affirming narratives. *Frozen 2* offers a desire-based, reparative re-imagining of the significant but, in real life, devastating Alta conflict: unlike the real-life dam on Sámi ancestral lands, this cinematic dam collapses through the *sieidi's* fury, and the water floods the lands of the settler kingdom of Arendelle instead of impoverishing Indigenous land. However, Arendelle is not destroyed after all, as is perhaps fit for a children's film: the ice around Elsa melts, and she rides the Nokk into Arendelle, saving it at last minute. At the same time, the impenetrable mist evaporates around the Enchanted Forest, freeing the Northuldra as well as the Arendelle soldiers.

Ancient beginnings of queer cosmologies in *Frozen 2*

[T]he present, then, is a colliding of the past and the future. Everyday embodiment is therefore a mechanism for ancient beginnings. (Simpson 2017, 192)

In this article, we have taken a look at how Sámi and queer Indigenous thought and cosmologies intertwine in the film *Frozen 2* and its production process, probing its potential as decolonial queer pedagogy. We have especially paid attention to how the film allows its viewers to engage with and learn about Indigenous ethics, Sámi cosmologies and culture, and more-than-human understandings of gender and sexuality. This approach was enabled by the film's collaborative settler-Indigenous production process that focused on giving as accurate and respectful account of Sámi culture as possible in a fantasy film, although some of the affinities were already there before the collaboration started. We see *Frozen 2*, as well as the collaborative writing process of this article, as desire-based, affirmative attempts to create good relationality and senses of futurity that do not disregard trauma and damage but use them as engines for imagining alternatives.

Frozen 2 and its production process raise questions about what the role of settlers can be in unraveling power structures which they are unavoidably entangled in and benefit from. In gender studies and queer theory, decolonization and strategies to undo white privilege, thinking through the production of gender and sexual categories as colonial and settler colonial constructs, have been key themes for decades. This is a project that cannot be left as the responsibility of Indigenous, Black and Brown individuals and communities, but it also requires work and listening by white and settler actors, even with the risk of critique and not always 'getting it right.' Simpson (2017, 196) urges us to ponder on 'our own relationships to place and to each other outside of the spatial constructs of settler colonialism,' while at the same time, Indigenous and settler spaces cannot be understood as strictly delineated or separate. Even in settler contexts, 'tiny islands of Indigeneity ... through which to maintain our dignity and self-sufficiency as Indigenous people' are possible (Simpson 2017, 197). We have explored such 'tiny islands of Indigeneity' in this article and argued that they are possible even within institutions and contexts so drenched in a settler colonialist perspective, like Disney, that it might seem incomprehensible.

Frozen 2 makes widely known, even if through fantasy, the historical trauma experienced by the Sámi in specific and Indigenous people more broadly across the globe. So much of Indigenous life is constantly in the process of getting sucked into the amnesiac abyss of settler colonialism, such as the recently discovered unmarked graves of Native children found in Canadian residential school sites. *Frozen 2* is a film both made for children and youth and where children and young adults are active agents of decolonization efforts and Indigenous resistance. This can be seen as an act of remembering that 'allows us to rethink a society's relationship to its dead, particularly to those who were subject to some kind of injustice ... as a mode of memory and avenue for ethical engagement with the present' (Cho 2008, 29).

Beyond the main plot, however, we have also looked carefully at moments where magical queer Indigenous human and non-human connections come alive and link further to Sámi cosmologies. These moments of queer Indigenous futurity (Harjo 2019) may not be quite as obvious as the trauma-repairing plot, but they are no less meaningful. Due to settler colonialism's suffocating force, the existence of non-heteronormative sexualities and genders in pre-colonial Sámi cultures has long been silenced and hidden (see Kyrölä and Huuki 2021). *Frozen 2* gestures towards and insists on queer Indigenous existence through centering non-heteronormative relationships and kinship connections

between human as well as non-human, magical actors, some of which are not gendered in western binary terms.

The ‘ancient beginnings’ (Simpson 2017, 192) of cross-generational sediments of trauma and its reparation, the queer Sámi more-than-human cosmologies, and the co-creative production process – these all add to the film’s capacity to materialize the hauntings of Indigenous historical trauma and gesture towards a process towards healing, even if necessarily partial and imperfect. The film’s agency is not located in one actor or place, such as its directors or production company or *Verddet*, but it is dispersed across time and space, on one hand in Sámi people, cosmologies and land, and on the other hand in the settler imagination, Hollywood, and the global capitalist machinery of Disney children’s films. The film’s unforeseen pedagogical reach and significance could likely not realize its desire-based potential without the coming together of all these spatio-temporal forces.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Funding

This work was supported by Academy of Finland: [Grant Number 295000] (Tuija Huuki) and the Kone Foundation (Kata Kyrölä).

Notes on contributors

Dr. Tuija Huuki works as Senior Research Fellow at the University of Oulu, Finland. Applying insights from new feminist materialist and posthuman theories and participatory arts-based methods, her research explores how gender and sexual harassment emerge through social, material, historical and affective power relations that impact children’s lives and Sámi childhoods and how arts-based methods and activism enable children to safely articulate and address sensitive issues of gender and sexuality in their peer cultures. For more detail, see www.tuijahuuki.com

Dr. Kata Kyrölä is a Lecturer in Media Studies at the Department of Culture, Communication and Media, University College London, the UK. Kyrölä’s most recent research explores queer Indigenous and Sámi sensibilities in contemporary media through posthuman theories and methodologies. They are broadly interested in feminist, queer and decolonial/critical race studies of popular culture, the body, and affect, and have previously studied topics such as fat bodies in the media, trigger warnings online, politics of vulnerability, and porn use practices.

ORCID

Tuija Huuki  <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-5149-0626>

Kata Kyrölä  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-8779-9227>

References

- Abadian, S. 2006. “Cultural Healing: When Cultural Renewal Is Reparative and When It Is Toxic.” Presentation at Healing Our Spirits Worldwide Conference August 7, 2006.
- Ayers, B., ed. 2003. *The Emperor’s Old Groove. Decolonizing Disney’s Magic Kingdom*. New York: Peter Lang.
- Blackman, L. 2012. *Immaterial Bodies: Affect, Embodiment, Mediation*. Los Angeles: Sage.

- Brave Heart, M. Y. H. 1999. "Gender Differences in the Historical Trauma Response Among the Lakota." *Journal of Health & Social Policy* 10 (4): 1–21. doi:10.1300/J045v10n04_01.
- Brode, D., and S. T. Brode, eds. 2016. *Debating Disney: Pedagogical Perspectives On Commercial Cinema*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Charania, M., and C. Albertson. 2018. "Single, White, Female. Feminist Trauma and Queer Melancholy in the New Disney." In *Youth Sexualities: Public Feelings and Contemporary Cultural Politics*, edited by S. Talburt, 129–151. Santa Barbara: Praeger.
- Cheu, J. 2013. "Introduction: Recasting and Diversifying Disney in the Age of Globalization." In *Diversity in Disney Films: Critical Essays on Race, Ethnicity, Gender, Sexuality and Disability*, edited by J. Cheu, 1–7. Jefferson and London: MacFarland.
- Cho, G. M. 2008. *Haunting the Korean Diaspora. Shame, Secrecy and the Forgotten War*. Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press.
- Davis, A. M. 2007. *Good Girls and Wicked Witches: Changing Representations of Women in Disney's Feature Animation, 1937-2001*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Davoine, F., and J.-M. Gaudillière. 2004. *History Beyond Trauma*. New York: Other Press.
- Docterman, E. 2016. "Frozen Fans Lobby Disney to Give Elsa a Girlfriend in Sequel." *Time*, May 3. <https://time.com/4316084/frozen-disney-elsa-girlfriend/>.
- Do Rozario, R.-A. C. 2004. "The Princess and the Magic Kingdom: Beyond Nostalgia, the Function of the Disney Princess." *Women's Studies in Communication* 27 (1): 34–59. doi:10.1080/07491409.2004.10162465.
- Driskill, Q.-L. 2010. "Double-weaving Two-Spirit Critiques: Building Alliances between Native and Queer Studies." *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 16 (1–2): 69–92.
- Duffy, L. 2019. "From the Evil Queen to Elsa: Camp Witches in Disney Films." *Frames Cinema Journal* 16. <http://framescinemajournal.com/article/from-the-evil-queen-to-elsa-camp-witches-in-disney-films/>.
- Duggan, L. 2004. *The Twilight of Equality? Neoliberalism, Cultural Politics, and the Attack on Democracy*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Dundes, L. 2020. "Elsa as Horse Whisperer in Disney's Frozen 2: Opportunity "Nokk"s to Quash Gender Stereotypes." *Social Sciences* 9 (5): 2–11.
- Edgerton, G., and K. M. Jackson. 1996. "Redesigning Pocahontas: Disney, the 'White Man's Indian,' and the Marketing of Dreams." *Journal of Popular Film & Television* 24 (2): 90–98. doi:10.1080/01956051.1996.9943718.
- Farris, M. 2020. *Into the Unknown. A Queer Analysis of the Metaphors in Disney's Frozen Franchise*. MA Diss. University of North Carolina, the US.
- Fonneland, T. 2020. "Religion-Making in the Disney Feature Film, Frozen II: Indigenous Religion and Dynamics of Agency." *Religion* 11 (9): 2–14.
- Gordon, A. 2008. *Ghostly Matters. Haunting and the Sociological Imagination*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Griffin, S. 2000. *Tinker Belles and Evil Queens. The Walt Disney Company from the Inside Out*. New York and London: NYU Press.
- Haasch, P. 2019. "Frozen 2's 'Show Yourself' Reads Like the Queer Anthem Fans Want." *Polygon*, November 27. <https://www.polygon.com/2019/11/27/20985979/frozen-2-elsa-show-yourself-queer-anthem-giveelsaagirlfriend-gay-lbgqt-representation-disney>.
- Harjo, L. 2019. *Spiral to the Stars: Mvskoke Tools of Futurity*. Tucson: University of Arizona Press.
- Huuki, T., and S. A. Juutilainen. 2016. "Mapping Historical, Material and Affective Entanglements in Sámi Woman's Discriminatory Experiences in and beyond Finnish Boarding School." *Education in the North* 23 (2): 3–23. <https://www.abdn.ac.uk/education/research/eitn/journal/502/>.
- Huuki, T., and M. Lanås. 2019. "Sámi Child-Adult/Past-Present Entanglements in a Painful Lecture in University." In *Social, Material and Political Constructs of Arctic Childhoods: An Everyday Life Perspective*, edited by P. Rautio, and E. Stenvall, 139–153. Singapore: Springer Nature.
- Kalvig, A. 2020. "Nature and Magic as Representation of 'The Sami'—Sami Shamanistic Material in Popular Culture." *Religions* 11 (9): 453. doi:10.3390/rel11090453.
- Kirmayer, L. J., J. P. Gone, and J. Moses. 2014. "Rethinking Historical Trauma." *Transcultural Psychiatry* 51 (3): 299–319.

- Korsmo, F. 1988. "Nordic Security and the Saami Minority: Territorial Rights in Northern Fennoscandia." *Human Rights Quarterly* 10 (4): 509–524.
- Kuokkanen, R. 2019. *Restructuring Relations: Indigenous Self-Determination, Governance, and Gender*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Kuokkanen, R. 2020. "Reconciliation as a Threat or Structural Change? The Truth and Reconciliation Process and Settler Colonial Policy Making in Finland." *Human Rights Review* 21 (3): 293–312.
- Kvidal-Røvik, T., and A. Cordes. 2020. "Into the Unknown [Amas Mu Vuordá]? Listening to Indigenous Voices on the Meanings of Disney's Frozen 2 [Jikŋon 2]." *Journal of International and Intercultural Communication*, published online 2 Dec 2020. doi:10.1080/17513057.2020.1849774.
- Kyrölä, K., and T. Huuki. 2021. "Re-imagining a Queer Indigenous Past: Affective Archives and Minor Gestures in the Sámi Documentary *Sparrooabbán*." *JCMS* 60 (5): 75–98.
- Lehtola, V-P. 2015. *Saamelaiset: Historia, Yhteiskunta, Taide* [The Sámi: History, Society, Arts]. Inari, Finland: Kustannus-Puntsi.
- Lehtola, V.-P. 2019. "Evasive Strategies of Defiance – Everyday Resistance Histories among the Sámi." In *Knowing from the Indigenous North: Sámi Approaches to History, Politics, and Belonging*, edited by T. H. Eriksen, S. Valkonen, and J. Valkonen, 29–46. New York: Routledge.
- Lehtola, V.-P. 2021. Zoom discussion with Tuija Huuki and Katariina Kyrölä.
- Lugo-Lugo, C. R., and M. K. Bloodworth-Lugo. 2009. "'Look Out New World, Here We Come?': Race, Racialization, and Sexuality in Four Children's Animated Films by Disney, Pixar, and DreamWorks." *Cultural Studies ↔ Critical Methodologies* 9 (2): 166–178. doi:10.1177/1532708608325937.
- Magga, S-M. 2018. "Nurinpäin käännetty gákti saamelaisen vastarinnan muotona" [Gákti Turned Inside Out as Sámi Resistance]. *Politiikka* 60 (3): 260–264.
- Nixon, L. 2020. "Visual Cultures of Indigenous Futurism." In *Otherwise Worlds: Against Settler Colonialism and Anti-Blackness*, edited by T. L. King, J. Navarro, and A. Smith, 332–342. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Raheja, M. H. 2011. *Reservation Reelism: Redfacing, Visual Sovereignty, and Representations of Native Americans in Film*. Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press.
- Ramnarine, T. K. 2009. "Acoustemology, Indigeneity, and Joik in Valkeapää's Symphonic Activism: Views from Europe's Arctic Fringes for Environmental Ethnomusicology." *Ethnomusicology* 53 (2): 187–217.
- Rosiek, J. L., J. Snyder, and S. L. Pratt. 2020. "The New Materialisms and Indigenous Theories of Non-Human Agency: Making the Case for Respectful Anti-Colonial Engagement." *Qualitative Inquiry* 26 (3-4): 331–346.
- Rowe, A. C., and E. Tuck. 2017. "Settler Colonialism and Cultural Studies: Ongoing Settlement, Cultural Production, and Resistance." *Cultural Studies ↔ Critical Methodologies* 17 (1): 3–13. doi:10.1177/1532708616653693.
- Salmi, A.-K., T. Äikäs, and S. Lipkin. 2011. "Animating Rituals at Sámi Sacred Sites in Northern Finland." *Journal of Social Archaeology* 11 (2): 212–235. doi:10.1177/1469605311403962.
- Sami Film Institute. 2020. A Public Facebook Post. January 21. <https://www.facebook.com/SamiFilmInstitute/posts/10156802144016179>.
- Simonpillai, R. 2019. "Disney Signed a Contract with Indigenous People Before Making Frozen II." *Now Toronto*, November 19. <https://nowtoronto.com/movies/news-features/disney-frozen-2-indigenous-culture-sami>.
- Simpson, A. 2014. *Mohawk Interruptus: Political Life across the Borders of Settler States*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Simpson, L. B. 2017. *As We Have Always Done. Indigenous Freedom through Radical Resistance*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Smith, L. T. 1999. *Decolonizing Methodologies. Research and Indigenous Peoples*. London: Zed Books.
- TallBear, K. 2015. "An Indigenous Reflection on Working Beyond the Human/Not Human." *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 21 (2–3): 230–235.
- Tuck, E. 2009. "Suspending Damage: A Letter to Communities." *Harvard Educational Review* 79 (3): 409–427.
- Tuck, E. 2010. "Breaking up with Deleuze: Desire and Valuing the Irreconcilable." *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education* 23 (5): 635–650. doi:10.1080/09518398.2010.500633.

- Tuck, E., and C. Ree. 2013. "A Glossary of Haunting." In *Handbook of Autoethnography*, edited by S. H. Jones, T. E. Adams, and C. Ellis, 639–658. Walnut Creek: Left Coast Press.
- Tuck, E., and W. Yang. 2012. "Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor." *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 1 (1): 1–40.
- Walkerdine, V., A. Olsvold, and M. Rudberg. 2013. "Researching Embodiment and Intergenerational Trauma Using the Work of Davoine and Gaudilliere: History Walked in the Door." *Subjectivity* 6 (3): 272–297.
- WanDerWerff, E. 2019. "Why Elsa from Frozen Is a Queer Icon – and Why Disney Won't Embrace that Idea." *Vox*, January 22. <https://www.vox.com/culture/2019/11/22/20975178/frozen-2-elsa-girlfriend-lesbian-queer-review>.
- Yoshinaga, I. 2019. "Disney's Moana, the Colonial Screenplay, and Indigenous Labor Extraction in Hollywood Fantasy Films." *Narrative Culture* 6 (2): 188–215.