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Between Norwegianisation and Revitalisation in the South Sami Society: A Memory Culture Analysis of Boarding School Life and Its Aftermath

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ABSTRACT

There is no doubt that the first boarding school in the South Sami region in Norway (1910–1951) was authoritarian and contributed to Sami assimilation over several generations. Descriptions given by a former student regarding the poor conditions 70 years after he felt he was the victim of abuse is perhaps a sign of growing self-awareness among the South Sami. Informants have nevertheless stated that the social community at the later Sami schools (after 1951) strengthened their sense of identity and community. Despite the challenges, some Sami students from the 1970s and 1980s claim that the Sami school has been an important identity maker. Nonetheless, the Havika legacy shapes the South Sami community today in many ways with issues relating to Norwegianisation, shared school experiences and memories. As a result, this case study investigates how boarding school life is reflected in the South Sami memory and history culture.

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Introduction

This article explores the Sami school as a phenomenon in the South Sami[1] area and looks into how it has been portrayed, discussed and treated in recent times. In short, this is about the boarding school's afterlife and how as an institution it has characterised individuals and society over several generations. The work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in Norway (2018–2023) and other documentation collected in connection with studies of boarding schools for the Sami throughout Sápmi have highlighted highly objectionable aspects of these schools' operations.[2] This refers to systematic oppression of Sami culture, abuse, assimilation and Norwegianisation for comparative perspectives.[3] One aspect is that there was no explicit policy in the Nordic countries to assimilate the Sami by taking the children away from their families. However, as Kuokkanen points out, the consequences of forcing the Sami children to attend the public school system were in many ways like those in North America,[4] resulting in separation from one's cultural background.[5]

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Even though studies have been conducted among the Sami regarding their school experiences, little has been done in the South Sami regions. Research is needed to place South Sami school history and stories into a national and international framework. Not only is this interesting in comparative historical-critical source studies, but also because both the national and international contemporary contexts have increasingly shown interest in Indigenous history, living conditions and rights today, where public institutions especially, such as the education system, have worked within and in interaction with various Indigenous communities. Interesting recent examples are Svein Lund's comprehensive work published in 2005–2013 and Ingjerd Tjelle's study of boarding schools in Finnmark, published in 2022.[6] Various stakeholders have used the school as an important arena for Norwegianisation. This contributes to perspectives in the debate on the consequences of colonisation in a broad sense, where schools and education are important arenas on several levels.

This article aims to show how national, hegemonic narratives of Norwegianisation and assimilation are woven into and characterise Indigenous communities. Memories and stories about boarding schools are often key components in this picture, and analyses of the school system's Norwegianisation and assimilation roles will show that the school as an institution has played a crucial part in this century-long activity.[7] There are obvious reasons why the role of the school system is highlighted in accounts, scientific works and public reports, as this was not only an important apparatus for uniformity, but also a key arena for the implementation of political decisions and the realisation of ideological choices. The school, and its development over time, will shed light on features and tendencies in the interaction and negotiations between Indigenous peoples and the majority population.

The marginalisation of the Sami is reflected in how Sami themes have historically been treated in the school curricula. Current perspectives on this are presented by Kemi Gjerpe, who shows in her article that recent Sami curricula give indications of society's contemporary values and ideals.[8] In this context, the absence and/or exoticisation of Sami themes in older curricula provide interesting contemporary images, as do the changes that have been introduced in recent times, especially taking into account newer curricula in a comparative light. Torjer A. Olsen and Bengt-Ove Andreassen emphasise trends in Norway to explain changes in the school's overarching curriculum, where Sami topics have gradually gained more space.[9] In a situation that has moved from Norwegianisation and assimilation to inclusion and revitalisation, schools have played and continue to play a significant role in this development. One objective of recent studies is that research should treat indigenous topics on the Indigenous communities' own terms. This contrasts with the invisibility, marginalisation and oppression, in both politics and science, that have characterised the situation in Sami areas for generations.[10] An important premise in this study is therefore to see the importance of the South Sami's own perspectives on the past and present. How the present has influenced the interpretations of the past is an interesting way to examine phenomena, events, traits and tendencies in the South Sami's own history and memory culture.

The main question in this article is therefore: in what way is school history reflected in the South Sami memory and history culture, and how has the legacy of the boarding school shaped the South Sami community of today? The empirical starting point of the study is, among other things, the Sami People's Mission's

own texts in the form of reports and annual reports, as well as newspaper articles on the Sami school since its establishment in central Norway in 1910 up to the 2000s. One particularly interesting source is former students' own accounts describing experiences and retrospective reflections on their own school experiences. The latter come from interviews conducted specifically for the study of South Sami memory culture with emphasis on personal school experiences, as well as accounts in the six-volume Sami School History edited by Svein Lund.[11] In general, this is about how South Sami children and Sami youth experienced their school life in a system that was legitimised by the expectations and needs of the majority society, and not according to the premises of the Indigenous community itself.

Sources, accounts and memories can be challenging. Memories therefore tend to be influenced by the accounts that are transferred within societies. Moreover, the time aspect plays a role: the longer the distance in time, the greater the danger of memory shifting, with the ever-present risk that posterity events will be woven together with others' memories and interpretations of the same event. Personal narratives contextualise and reflect the place of individuals in such collectives as the workplace, cultural communities and the nation.[12] Memories are also characterised by the type of events that are conveyed in retrospect, whether they are dramatic or daily activities, or whether the events have left enduring marks on the lives of individuals. Whatever the case, such memories are interesting and important because of the individual assessments each human being makes of their own experiences. Reflecting on one's own school practices and seeing the interaction between society, home and school in perspective helps to make the interpretations part of the collective history and memory environment in the South Sami society. In this context, to understand attitudes, perceptions and actions it will be useful to show some of the features of the school structure that have been contiguous in the South Sami community through many generations.

We all have a perception of who we are, where we come from – who we are descended from. This is about identity processes and symbols that show who we are, including the use of history by the general public, politicians, the media and the authorities. This is evident in the rhetoric used, in political events and in public reports. In short: it affects us as individuals and as a society. Notable events in societies and communities are highlighted and used as examples of contemporary learning from the past. Past events find their specific manifestations in memory culture. Cultural memory can broadly be defined as the sum of all biological, media-related and social processes that are involved in the interplay of past and present within sociocultural contexts.[13] In the Sami community, 6 February 1917 has become one such event that is celebrated throughout Sápmi. Thus, one could argue that the events surrounding the first Sami national congress in 1917 and the key figures who led it have become identity markers in Sami society. Conscious steps have been taken so that the 1917 national congress has meshed into the culture as a common frame of reference for key perspectives and issues that concern the Sami in particular. On an overall level, this is about the consequences of assimilation and its significance for the Sami cultural community, and with that as the backdrop, the strengthening of Sami identity. The core element in the story of boarding schools is also, as this article shows, part of collective perceptions of how the

assimilation of the Sami has taken place and how the consequences of this can and should be corrected.

Sami Schools in Central Norway

In the South Sami area, the Havika boarding school, established by the Sami People's Mission, is an important symbol for later generations in relation to the Christianisation and Norwegianisation of the South Sami society.[14] The school had its own religious agenda that has left long-lasting marks on South Sami societies. Not only did the mission society's priorities have an effect on the students and parents of the time but, in 2022, the informants also pointed out that the legacy of the earliest boarding school students has left deep marks on the South Sami, and that this is one of the reasons for the lack of trust in state institutions and the authorities' ability to facilitate school life for Sami children. Several stories concerning life at the boarding school, and later reflections on the experiences at school, have helped to shape the South Sami's perception of the Norwegian school system and the intervention of the state authorities in the lives of the South Sami. The stories about the boarding school have served as a focal point for the South Sami's school experiences for several generations and can serve as an illustration of society's unwillingness and inability to address the needs of the Sami community. They paint a picture showing that the Sami schools changed Sami societies where Christianisation and Norwegianisation went hand in hand and contributed to the fact that not only did Sami culture and language have difficult conditions, but also that family structures and the social community could be changed due to prolonged absence from the home environment. Nevertheless, there are examples of South Sami who point out the importance of the cultural and social community that the Sami school facilitated, and which has been of foremost importance for the preservation and development of the South Sami identity.[15] The picture is therefore complex.

Over time, the consequences have, however, been dramatic. The South Sami community has felt that the needs of society at large have driven the Sami from their traditional areas and businesses, where linguistic/cultural pressure and marginalisation in schools and communities have been destructive. The Sami were to become Norwegians, and the school system was regarded as an important instrument for achieving this objective.[16] We will briefly take a closer look at the schooling conditions the South Sami children and young people experienced in their early development years. Next, we will see how the boarding schools are portrayed by the Sami themselves, and how the legacy of a strict religious prohibition regime can be understood from a historical and memory culture perspective. Havika boarding school (established in 1910) is conspicuous compared with the later schools in the South Sami area, primarily because it was established and run by the Sami Mission, where the missionary work reflected the content of school life with strong elements of Christian education. Later schools were established according to state regulations and in dialogue with the South Sami society, where the hegemony of the Sami Mission was replaced. This represents an important regime change with modernised teaching methods and professional approaches.

The South Sami were said to have been assimilated as early as 1910 when the school was established.[17] It was a well-known and controversial topic at the time that the South Sami language and culture were under immense pressure. Nevertheless, the South Sami

expressed enthusiasm for the establishment of the school. Contemporary texts, newspaper articles and reports show that this was something the Sami themselves had been requesting.[18] In an anniversary journal for the Sami Mission published in 1988 we can read that "Many of the Sami were happy, not only for the education the children received, but also for the Christian spirit that prevailed at home."[19] The Missionary Society seems to have perceived itself as contributing to a rescue operation where they were doing the Sami a favour as, according to the missionary society, the schools provided the children with a good upbringing, nutrition and care, "so they were thus skilled in the struggle for existence that not least the Sami children were to face."[20] Within the mission's Christian framework, the pedagogical reform ideas of the time may have had an impact on subject content and teaching. The care dimension seems to have played a role, whereby the child's health and hygiene were given priority.[21]

The Sami mission sought to serve the Sami people with the gospel.[22] The purpose of the various schools in Sami areas followed a stated and long-term goal of Christianisation of the Sami using the Norwegian primary schools' curricula, but still outside the control of the authorities. Havika boarding school was undertaking a "special deed" because, according to the missionary society, the Sami in North Trøndelag and Southern Helgeland (central Norway) had poor schooling conditions. It was believed that Havika had remedied a great failing and was a great blessing.[23] Reactions among Sami parents were mixed and at times critical of the school's teaching practices. There are examples of criticism related to how the school organised its work and its emphasis on certain subjects, where especially the strong prioritisation of Christianity was highly criticised by some concerned parents. In what way did this affect the students' everyday lives?

Several schools were established for Sami children in the South Sami regions, in part due to pressure from mission groups, but also due to demands from the Sami themselves for rights and opportunities for education. Hence, there was both internal and external pressure for Sami parents and children to adapt to the Norwegian school system, both financially and structurally, and where Christian missions had an important function in everyday school life. According to Lovisa Mienna Sjöberg, the South Sami area was to a greater extent characterised by free church activities, and towards the end of the nineteenth and in the early twentieth centuries several missionary associations were active among the South Sami.[24] This may have contributed to the South Sami accepting, and initiating, a school governed by the mission. There may have been reasons why not all South Sami parents considered the Sami mission as suitably responsible for the school's content and administrative practices, and why they repeatedly approached the state authorities about establishing a separate school for Sami children without any action being taken.[25] Whatever the case, this may have finally provided the necessary support for the establishment of the school in Namsos (Havika) in 1910. In other words, a school run by the Sami Mission seems to have been better than no school at all.

It is an interesting fact that Sami parents expressed gratitude at an early stage when the school was finally opened. It is not known whether the establishment of the Sami school under the auspices of the missionary society was the source of disagreement in the South Sami community, but the struggle to establish a school over many years and the relief expressed that it was finally open to South Sami children quieted the controversies that were voiced concerning the missionary society being the school owner. However, criticism of teaching methods and the operation of the school was to emerge quickly and

vigorously from the Sami community. The criticism intensified as the years passed because the strong focus on religious education was maintained and the absence of Sami content in the teaching was salient.[26]

There is a conspicuous disparity between grateful Sami parents in the early stages and what some students at the Sami school expressed in adulthood, and then the criticism that was heard already in 1911[27] and deepened and reinforced during the first Sami national congress in Trondheim in 1917. This criticism already granted little honour to the missionary society. The Trondheim newspaper *Nidaros* stated in February 1917 that "the Sami demand their own school with Sami language,"[28] and that the conditions at Havika were heavily criticised by the school's own South Sami board member, Sanna Jonassen. She believed that it was harmful to the children's health to attend the school due to a lack of proper hygiene, and also stated that the language issue was an underlying but particularly important feature that had been neglected: "The Sami were always disregarded in the rural schools," it was claimed, and one therefore had to "work for one's own school with Sami language and thus be able record one's own history."[29] An important part of the meeting was the discussion centring on the belief that the missionary societies should not be in charge of instruction at the Sami school, but that the state itself should provide the teaching.[30]

The sources cannot tell us whether the Church Ministry was made aware of this harsh criticism from the Sami community, but it reached the authorities through media coverage on the debate.[31] The criticism was later repeated by Sanna Jonassen, when in December 1917 she claimed that:

> The volunteer mission school at Haviken . . . is financed by donations from compassionate people, and the consequence is that the children who visit the school at Haviken are considered to be blessed and must accept what they are being offered. . .. Are the children who grow up in such conditions treated fairly? Are they equal to other children in the country? And shall our children still be nourished with crumbs whilst others have bread? That we Sami help bear society's burdens in the form of taxes, and that our young men are conscripted and, in cases where necessary, help defend the country, is a matter of course. Shouldn't it be just as natural that the state takes care of our children's education here in the south as well and set up a school home for Sami children with teaching in all school subjects?[32]

Eight years after the establishment of the Sami school it seems clear that the enthusiasm that the Sami had initially expressed had changed to harsh criticism of several areas of the school's day-to-day routines and key values. In addition to claims that the school's equipment and facilities were poor, there was also dissatisfaction with the fact that the mission was responsible for the teaching. These conditions were heavily criticised by the Sami as early as 1917. Nonetheless, the mission continued to run the school with the authorities' approval for 33 years after this discussion took place, until 1951. The criticism describing shameful conditions was not followed by a wide-ranging mobilisation of Sami parents. One reason may be that the process of Norwegianisation had come a long way in 1917, and that the Sami had capitulated in the struggle for their own state-run school. The Norwegianisation policy was gradually put to an end and an official breach with it was marked by an official position paper from 1948. The following report proposed that the solution to questions of the Sami school and language was a task for the state itself:

> We can note that Havika in particular, which was the first boarding school for the South Sami, contributed to the gradual intensifying of assimilation over several generations, and that this was a deliberate practice for all schools during certain phases in the history of the Sami schools. Among other things, this was about efforts to gradually undermine the Sami language and way of life – in short, to remove the Sami language and identity and replace it with the majority's worldview, culture, language and values. Another aspect that has had major consequences was that boarding school life was strongly characterised by a "Christian spirit" and "religious drill," with an ideological backdrop that included undermining Sami traditions and replacing this knowledge with the solutions, values and maxims of society at large.[33]

After Havika was closed down in 1951, the Sami school was continued in the small town of Hattfjelldal, in the neighbouring county to the north. According to Leif Elsvatn, the new school at Hattfjelldal differed qualitatively from Havika as there were Sami staff at the boarding school. After political negotiations towards the end of the 1950s, Hattfjelldal was to be given the status of a school for Sami children in Nordland County, while a new Sami school was proposed for Snåsa, North Trøndelag, the neighbouring county to the south. An important recommendation made at this time was that the state should take over responsibility for and the day-to-day running of all boarding schools for Sami children.[34] Today, the Sami schools at Hattfjelldal and Snåsa are run by the Norwegian state and Snåsa local authority, respectively.[35]

The experiences conveyed by Sami students at the boarding schools over a number of decades can be seen in the context of the development of the national school policy. There are major differences between the mission school and the state's centralised responsibility during the first post-war period, and then the decentralisation and opening for Sami experiences and cultural expressions from the 1960s and 1970s. This must be seen in the context of significant changes in Norwegian school policy throughout the twentieth century and the anti-authoritarian impulses that erupted in protests and demonstrations in the 1970s. The Sami distinguished themselves more strongly as a separate people with their own territory, their own culture and their own social structure. This had consequences for the education system.[36]

The first post-war years were a time of revision and innovation in school policy. In this process, *Samordningsnemnda for skoleverket* (the coordinating board for the school system) played an important role. This resulted in a proposal for coordination and simplification, where the entire education system was to be coordinated, and where issues relating to Sami schools and boarding schools were elucidated.[37] Whilst the establishment of the municipal Sami school in Snåsa in 1968 was related to reasonable demands from the Sami in Trøndelag, it was also a compromise because the Sami themselves wanted a school run by the state. The view seems to have been that the state could pay better attention to the Sami culture than the local authority. It was not until the arrival of the social cohesion school (1945–2000) that the Sami were recognised as indigenous people with legally regulated rights and were included in the school Acts and curricula. The Schools Act of 1959 allowed the use of Sami as the language of instruction, while the Sami were not explicitly mentioned until the 1970s in the primary school curriculum (M74).[38]

The development from the beginning of the 1970s is characterised by a broad mobilisation and breakthrough among the state authorities, where the Sami school at

Hattfjelldal was given permanent status, and where Sami language, traditional knowledge and business practices were included in a (limited) Sami subject syllabus at the school.[39] The debates that followed and the struggle for the existence of the Sami school, where the overarching idea was that education was a key factor in developing the South Sami community, have had a major impact on the relationships between South Sami representatives, the affected communities and the Norwegian school authorities during this phase and the time that followed.

The disagreements over where the Sami school should be located have been a complicated issue for the South Sami. In White Paper No. 21 (1962–1963),[40] Snåsa was pointed out as a suitable place for children of the reindeer-herding Sami in Trøndelag and Hedmark. It seems to have been important that Snåsa local authority made free property available for the school and the boarding school buildings, and that the Sami children could augment the number of pupils in a previously thin student base in the municipal school. In the discussions, the mission was no longer considered to be an acceptable school operator, and it was stated that the local authority should take over responsibility with grants from the state. The aim was to ensure a decent standard at the boarding schools.[41] Reviews and negotiations between the Sami, state, local authority and the mission show that primarily the state authorities were the ones who could guarantee good standards at the boarding schools, as Sanna Jonassen argued as early as 1917. A key component in this discussion was still related to the mission society's role in Norwegianisation policy, while the mission's internal texts, reports and newspaper reports are characterised by idealisations. The Missionary Society's euphemistic descriptions are thus striking, wherein the Sami are depicted as being happy about both the education they received and the Christian spirit that prevailed in the school,[42] whereas several Sami voices, both contemporary and later, have been critical of the conditions at the school. The earliest criticism from 1911 and 1917 focused on the fact that a mission was allowed to control the school's operation and academic priorities, with detrimental consequences for the students. This was particularly related to the negative effects this had on the Sami's own language and cultural practice. A more stinging expression of frustration is found, however, in the 2007 criticism raised by a former student with allegations of both oppression and abuse allegedly taking place during the 1930s while the mission was running the school, presented at a time when systemic marginalisation and Norwegianisation of the Sami were seen as abuses against an entire people.

The conditions that have been uncovered regarding injustices against the Sami at the mission schools, and historical insight into the consequences of Norwegianisation, cast this statement in a special light. The case was published in several newspapers and other media in July 2007, where specific critical conditions at the Havika school were mentioned. Former student Ole Westfjell claimed that the children at the Sami school at Havika were systematically oppressed and abused during their school days in the 1930s. He claimed that it was forbidden to use South Sami at school and in their spare time, and students had to sneak away to speak their mother tongue. If they were caught speaking it, they faced severe punishment. Westfjell, who finished his schooling at the Sami school in 1937, claims that the treatment he and others received can only be described as child abuse.[43] Westfjell's claims were refuted by another former student, Sofie Kappfjell, who graduated from Havika one year before Ole Westfjell. She claims that she knew both the teachers

and the conditions at the school well, and she enjoyed herself there. Kappfjell believes that a false picture has been given of the conditions at the school, and that she could not agree with the allegations of abuse. She claims that she was never refused the right to speak Sami, and that Havika was a good school for her time, and felt it was wrong to criticise the school and the mission.[44]

The contrasts between Westfjell's and Kappfjell's school memories are striking, but it is difficult to claim that one or the other has been remembered incorrectly. There are many similar examples of language denial and punitive measures at boarding schools in other parts of Norway,[45] and it is likely that, bearing the Norwegianisation policy in mind, punitive measures have also been used in this region. Several examples of physical punishment methods for violating the prohibition against speaking Sami have been given in Svein Lund's comprehensive interview material on Sami school history,[46] and several accounts of critical conditions for Sami children at boarding schools have been repeated in Ingjerd Tjelle's book on boarding school life in Finnmark, the North Sami region.[47] It is unlikely that conditions would be significantly different in the South Sami area, but it is possible that the experiences were different between girls and boys, different grade levels and years and that teachers could act differently towards the students. In the Norwegianisation era, the same view of learning and ideology formed the basis for the training throughout the different Sami regions. This authoritarian approach to teaching contrasts with the later reform pedagogy, which focused on such elements as well-being, participation and socialisation. Common features of the diverse reform-pedagogy movement were that it was oriented towards understanding children and young people's abilities to learn at different stages of development, and that it aimed to stimulate the pupils' self-activity in the learning process.[48] In retrospect, the first decades at Havika, with religious drill, strict discipline and prohibitions, will appear as a counterpoint to the development in school policy in the 1970s. It is likely that these ideological contrasts illuminated the learning environment and reinforced criticism of the schools in Sami areas.

The description given by Ole Westfjell about the poor conditions 70 years after he felt he was the victim of abuse is perhaps a symptom of a growing self-awareness among the South Sami, and that the authorities and the majority population in Norwegian society would be more responsive in 2007 than was previously the case. Westfjell's story quickly disappeared from the media, but the legacy of Havika and other boarding schools, and the injustice which many Sami children endured, has received renewed attention, culminating in the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission that the government initiated (2018–2023). The aim is to lay the foundation for recognition of the effect of the Norwegian authorities' policies on the Sami and Kven/Norwegian Finnish, and the consequences the experiences under these policies have had for them as a group and as individuals. Voices like Ole Westfjell's, and others, have been part of the impetus for this investigation. Exclusion intensified over time, with alienation after completing primary school far from home being one of the consequences. Several informants have nevertheless stated that the social community at the Sami school strengthened their sense of identity and community, whereby the establishment of lasting connections between children and young people has been and is of immense importance for cohesion within the South Sami community.[49]

The Sami school is perceived today by several former students from the 1970s and 1980s as positive for identity formation because they met like-minded people and gained a stronger sense of community through meeting many others in the same situation. Former Sami students point out that it was important that several of the teachers were Sami. There are some who claim that the invisibility of South Sami culture has also been experienced as a total phenomenon in a system that was not adapted to the minority but designed to maintain and favour the interests of the majority. It has been difficult to uphold language and close relationships between children and parents/grandparents in such a system. In the interviews, great sadness has been expressed over the fact that contact with grandparents was reduced due to their stay at the Sami school, and that this has exacerbated the loss of language. Common to all boarding school children who had to travel far away from home was that they could not experience a normal upbringing in their hometown as most others did, and that their relationships with their hometown were fragmented and characterised by distance for extended periods of time.[50]

The lack of a written language and few South Sami with teacher training made the situation for the South Sami students special, even in a Sami context.[51] However, it is reasonable to assume that school life could be experienced differently by students, and that memories could have shifted, could have become foggy or mixed with other memories and may have been adapted to new contexts. In other words, the pictures that are drawn of everyday life at the boarding school will differ from student to student, but this is most often a matter of the individuals' retrospective interpretations of their own experiences, and to a lesser extent generalisations of Norwegianisation through 40 years of school operations.

History and Memory Culture Perspectives on South Sami School History

With the help of specific references in their own culture, social and cultural groups in general can create a common identity regardless of group affiliation. Indigenous and minority communities have proven to be vulnerable when it comes to the preservation and development of key references in their own culture.[52] Majority societies have for generations undermined the way of life and position of Indigenous peoples through systematic assimilation processes. Such processes have had an impact on Indigenous communities' own collective self-understanding, where there are many examples of exclusion and loss of identity. This also manifests itself differently in different Sami communities. Memory links the individual and their past to a group's collective self-understanding, is based on shared references and is negotiated through a continuous process within the group. A social group thus constitutes a memory community where memory and forgetting help to support socially shared obligations and values. Collective memory processes always unfold within a social framework because it is the social groups who decide what is memorable and how the memorable should be commemorated.[53] In South Sami memory environments, this refers to how effective communicative memory is between generations, and how cultural memory is staged and created, regulated and passed on through direct, personal dialogue.[54] The social groups need stable frames of reference to identify their own past in the present and connect the past to an affective meaning for those who come after, and thus enable them to establish a sense of

continuity: even though this past can be painful and traumatic, it is understood as cultural memory.[55] Relationships between the past and the present in the design of collective memories are complex, within which memory can be understood as a political hostage to contemporary events.[56] The experience of continuity has been particularly difficult to achieve in the South Sami language and cultural field, where the boarding school experiences from different generations seem to infiltrate and are passed on in South Sami communities, basically, through non-institutional everyday interaction that binds together families, groups and generations.[57]

The absence of strong linguistic environments has been an obstacle to the use of the South Sami language. At the same time, there have been other and stable milieux supporting the survival of the South Sami language despite marginalisation and pressure.[58] The earliest Sami schools had a leading role in the attempts to Norwegianise the Sami, but the ability to combine continuity and change seems to have been a key part of conserving identity through shared references in the culture that have been communicated and developed internally in the South Sami community. This reveals thought-provoking paradoxes in South Sami school history, where the systematic downgrading of language and culture has simultaneously functioned as a carrier of continuity in the community. At the same time, several informants have pointed out that boarding school life has led to alienation both at home and at boarding school: children do not feel at home in either of the environments, but rootlessness is a characteristic that people recognise. Such descriptions can be found in the material from both North and South Sami regions, where problems associated with establishing relationships with the home environment and grief over having lost support and security from the parents arise.[59]

The conditions for continuity have been difficult since boarding schools were established in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Later, in the 1960s and 1970s, boarding-school experiences were different. Despite their own poor school experiences, former students sent their own children to boarding school because the education programme at the rural schools was not as adapted for the Sami. The distance between the school-children and home, far from parents and siblings, had to be large when parts of a sibling group went to boarding school. One informant has pointed out that distance over time and lack of physical nearness can be harmful to the relationship with one's own family, and that the challenges boarding school children faced have marked some for life. This could involve quickly learning the regulations and structures at school and manoeuvring in the social hierarchy that existed among the students, thus becoming perfect boarding school children in short order.[60] But this did not apply to everyone. There were those who cried themselves to sleep and those who quit. There were also those who returned to the Sami school after a period in the local rural school, where some experienced harassment due to their Sami cultural background. This could have different explanations.

One informant states that some students were allowed to switch between the Sami school and the rural school from one year to the next, which was due to feelings of homesickness and/or adjustment difficulties.[61] Another informant is convinced that trauma can be inherited from parents. It can be felt both emotionally and physically, perhaps due to previous negative experiences from the Sami school and conflicts with other parts of the population that are passed on to the next generation, which then have

had an impact on everyday life and relationships with others.[62] An example of this, as several informants point out, is that in adult life they have developed a sceptical attitude towards public institutions such as the school and health services. The material also provides examples of how the level of conflict in the home environment between reindeer-herding families and the majority community has contributed to parents sending their children to boarding school rather than the rural schools close to home. Parents have not wanted their children to be forced to defend their way of life, their business and the culture they belong to. But there are also other reasons that appear to be strategic choices within the South Sami community that have been of greater importance. A key factor is a strong awareness of the costs of establishing a school for the South Sami children, and that this has been a strong motivation for choosing the boarding school over the home school.[63] This provides interesting perspectives on how internal and collective pressure has filled boarding schools with students, where the fear of closure and poorer education for Sami children was a motivator over time.

None of the informants attempts to idealise boarding school life. On the other hand, many claim that life at the boarding school had negative effects on the children and their development in several areas. It has been pointed out that being away from home had a deep cost.[64] For example, this meant that boarding school students associated with reindeer herding were excluded from the fluctuations and cycles that control it. Sami children and young people traditionally received their education by sharing in adult life together with their parents. Knowledge was transmitted between the generations, between parents and grandparents.[65] Thus, the boarding schools, which were intended to facilitate participation and the continuation of traditional knowledge, such as the important reindeer herding, contributed to the students being distanced from their home environment and essential parts of their culture. In the South Sami community, it must have been difficult for those families who encouraged their children to attend boarding school to deal with such a dilemma. Despite limited teaching of the Sami language, in the South Sami area there were, according to informants, good teachers in South Sami cultural history and approaches that included use of Sami material knowledge. This has been highlighted as important by the South Sami themselves.

The recent discussion on the closure of the Sami school in Hattfjelldal in 2016 and the struggle to preserve the institution have highlighted the development of the Sami school's position in the South Sami community.[66] Former pupils pointed out that the school has in fact meant a lot to many children and young people, and that it has contributed to awareness and strengthening of the South Sami culture and identity. During the twenty-first century, institutional development and social structures have become important for the preservation and development of South Sami culture, language and society. Despite some degree of ambivalence, criticism and mixed experiences, today's Sami schools help to fulfil important functions and support the South Sami society.

Conclusion

An important question is whether the boarding school maltreated Sami children linguistically and culturally, and if it undermined their South Sami identity. Some have felt that the school was important as a meeting place for South Sami students and thus established a community that would otherwise have been difficult to build. Researchers have pointed

out that the school was seen by many as a haven for the use of the Sami's own language outside of school hours.[67] There is no doubt that the first boarding school was authoritarian, and that the Sami children were subjected to strict and unnecessary detention rules. The teaching took place in a Norwegian environment and according to the same curriculum as the Norwegian primary school, which was designed for the majority population of Norwegian-speaking children. The conditions at Havika may appear to have been better for the Sami than in the ordinary rural school. At Havika, the communication and sense of community between Sami parents, children and young people has been highlighted as encouraging and positive.

Despite all the challenges and problems, some former Sami students claim that the Sami school has been an important identity marker for boarding school students in the 1970s and 1980s. One explanation is that good learning resources were recruited from the South Sami community that could provide the children with the necessary care, training and contact. On the other hand, this could be because Sami children at this time were so pre-programmed for boarding school life and, therefore, were initially convinced that boarding school was the best among the alternatives available. Some of the informants point out that parents, grandparents and other relatives expected their children to attend the Sami school. Expectations from home and from society seem to have been an important reason explaining why many families chose the Sami school rather than the rural school.

Could this be a way to legitimise boarding school life? Some have pointed out that primarily Norwegian school values were communicated, and the Norwegian core curriculum applied to everyone – including Sami children. There was thus little room to allow perspectives other than the Norwegian majority views, and Sami ideals and their way of life were not valued. It should nevertheless be expected that the teachers, especially the Sami, tried to promote Sami culture and Sami perspectives, but the demands of society at large put the Sami teachers in a challenging situation, and they were in some ways trapped by the system of Norwegianisation, even though the will to take necessary action was present. The changes in the Sami school's content and focus can also be linked to national school policy, where the breakthrough of social pedagogy seems to have played a role.

School experiences shape the South Sami communities in many ways today, when issues relating to Norwegianisation, Havika's legacy and revitalisation have been high on the agenda. The fact that life at the Sami schools established lasting relationships between students is described as particularly important by some informants. Here, shared school experiences and memories are pointed out as being significant for one's self-image and for the building of a resilient South Sami community. Boarding school life has therefore characterised South Sami communities to a considerable extent and has both positive and negative aspects that have been important for identity formation, strength and the understanding of a shared community. The material gives clear indications that there has been a shift from the early boarding school of 1910 to those established after the closure of Havika in 1951. Despite difficult conditions, the empirical evidence in this study shows that active memory environments have existed as culture bearers in schools, homes and various arenas in society, and that the will and ability to achieve continuity have overcome the consequences of pressure, demands and alienation at home and in boarding schools – which fits into a picture in which internal resilience must have played a role. This shows that adaptability and conservation seem to have gone hand in hand with cultural and linguistic awareness.

The Sami children's boarding school experiences are in many cases stories of loss and distance from the home environment with negative consequences, but, despite the stories of Norwegianisation and the turbulent narrative of the boarding schools in distinct phases, this was also an arena that could nurture identity building among South Sami schoolchildren in the 1970s and 1980s and into adulthood.

Notes

1. The traditional land of the South Sami people is in central parts of the Scandinavian Peninsula. The South Sami are the southernmost of the Sami peoples. See Hermanstrand, et al, *The Indigenous Identity of the South Saami*.
2. Kuokkanen, "'Survivance'"; Hansen, *Educational Policy*, 204.
3. Kortekangas et al, *Sámi Educational History*.
4. Truth Reconciliation Commission, *Canada's Residential Schools*.
5. Kuokkanen, "'Survivance'," 697-726.
6. Lund et al, *Samisk skolehistorie Vols* 1-6; Tjelle, *Internatliv*.
7. Stortinget: *Innst., Innstilling fra Stortingets presidentskap*. See also the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's report of June 1, 2023: Sannhet og forsoning, *Grunnlag for et oppgjør med fornorskningspolitikk og urett mot samer, kvener/norskfinner og skogfinner*: Rapport til Stortinget fra Sannhets- og forsoningskommusjonen: Avgitt til Stortingets presidentskap 01.06. 2023 [Basis for a settlement with Norwegianisation policy and injustice against Sami, Kven/Finnish Norwegian people: Report to the Norwegian Parliament from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission: Submitted to the Presidency of the Norwegian Parliament 1 June 2023]: Dokument 19 (2022–2023). Vol. Dokument 19 (2022–2023). Oslo: Sannhets- og forsoningskommisjonen, 2023. https://www.stortinget.no/globalassets/pdf/sannhets–og-forsonings kommisjonen/rapport-til-stortinget-fra-sannhets– og-forsoningskommisjonen.pdf.
8. Gjerpe, *Samisk læreplanverk*, 150-65.
9. Olsen and Andreassen.
10. Hermanstrand, *Eie eller leie, valg eller tvang*?, 68-78.
11. Lund, *Samisk skolehistorie*; Tjelle, *Internatliv*.
12. Hansson, *Samernas folkhögskola*, 43.
13. Erll and Young, *Memory in Culture*, 101.
14. Lorås, "'Som Faar uden hyrde'," 48-60.
15. Interviews with South Sami informants conducted May 12, 2022, June 17, 2022, June 23, 2022.
16. Todal, *The Sámi School System*, 185-92; Evjen et al, *Samenes historie fra 1751 til 201*, 170-94.
17. Devik, *Sameskolen i Havika*, 20; and Braseth, *Samer sør for midnattssola*, 338-50.
18. See for example the South Sami newspaper *Waren Sardne*. Editor Daniel Mortenson writes in an article that parents can "safely send their children to the Sami school in Namsos because the conditions are good for both body and soul" (*Waren Sardne*, April 9, 1910).
19. Gamlemshaug et al, *Norges Samemisjon*, 85; Havik, *Sameskolen i Havika*, 5-7; Duna, *Samer og reindrift ved Namsenfjorden*, 188-207.
20. Norges Finnemisjon, *Vårt arbeide*, 23.
21. Thuen, *Den norske skolen*, 94-5.
22. Norges Finnemisjon, *Vårt arbeide*, 24.
23. Berg, *Finnemisjonen*, 40.
24. Sjöberg, *Kristendomens historia*, 46.
25. Steen, *Finnemisjonen 75 år*, 118.
26. Devik, *Sameskolen i Havika*, 35; Rogstad, *Streif i sør-samenes saga*, 118-124.
27. Devik, *Sameskolen i Havika*, 35; Rogstad, *Streif i sør-samenes saga*, 37.
28. *Nidaros*, February 11, 1917.
29. Ibid.

30. See also transcript of the minutes of the Sami national congress in Trondheim in 1917, as of March 29, 2017, listed in the National Archives website. Accessed March 28, 2024. https://www.arkivverket.no/om-oss/samisk-arkiv/samelandsmotet/block-body-9. See Borgen, *Samenes første landsmøte*.
31. See, for example the newspapers *Adresseavisen*, February 15, 1917, *Namdalen folkeblad*, February 17, 1917, *Nidaros*, February 15, 1917.
32. *Dagsposten*, December 29, 1917.
33. Hansen, *Educational Policy and Boarding Schools*.
34. Elsvatn and Gaske-Nøørjen, *Sameskolen midt i Norge*, 35; Stortingsmelding No 21, *Om kulturelle og økonomiske tiltak*; Nilsen and Solstad, *Sørsamisk opplæring ved heimeskolen*, 10-36.
35. See Aarjelsaemien vierhtiesåafoe, Hattfjelldal: www.samisk365.org; and Aarjel Saemiej Skuvle, Snåsa: www.snasa.no/leve-her/skoler-barnehager/aarjel-saemiej-skuvle/ and https://sainwil.wixsite.com/minside-3/om-skolen-skuvlen-bijre.
36. Telhaug and Mediås, *Grunnskolen som nasjonsbygger*, 213.
37. Thuen, *Den norske skolen*, 137; Lund et al., *Samisk skolehistorie Vols 1-6*, http://skuvla.info/skolehist/samord-tn.htm.
38. Kvam, *Jakten på den gode skole*, 124.
39. Elsvatn and Saemienskovle, *Sameskolen midt i Norge*, 15.
40. Stortingsmelding No 21, *Om kulturelle og økonomiske tiltak*.
41. Ibid.
42. Steen, *Finnemisjonen 75 år*.
43. *Trønder-Avisa*, July 17, 2007.
44. *Trønder-Avisa*, July 22, 2007.
45. See for example Minde et al., *Fornorskinga av samene*, 14-16.
46. Lund, et al. *Samisk skolehistorie*.
47. Tjelle, *Internatliv*.
48. Helsvig, *Norsk reformpedagogikk*, 172-81.
49. Interview with South Sami informants, May 12, 2022, June 17, and June 23, 2022.
50. Interview with South Sami informant, June 17, 2022; Friborg et al., *Childhood Boarding School Experiences*, 848-75.
51. Devik, *Sameskolen i Havika*, 37.
52. Memory very much informs the present and the future of the culture. The South Sami informants in this study link their own reflections on their boarding school experiences to past narratives, contemporary events and expectations for the future.
53. Misztal, *Theories of Social Remembering*, 53.
54. Assmann, *Erinnerungsräume*, 49-72.
55. Erll and Young, *Memory in Culture*.
56. Misztal, *Theories of Social Remembering*, 68.
57. See Assmann, "Communicative and Cultural Memory," 109-19.
58. Mæhlum, "Southern Saami Language and Culture," 17-28.
59. Tjelle, *Internatliv*; interview with South Sami informants, May 12, 2022 and June 23, 2022.
60. Interview with South Sami informant, May 12, 2022.
61. Interview with South Sami informant, June 23, 2022.
62. Interview with South Sami informant, May 12, 2022.
63. Interview with South Sami informant, June 23, 2022.
64. Interview with South Sami informant, June 23, 2022.
65. Hansen, *Educational Policy and Boarding Schools*.
66. NRK website, interview with Ole-Henrik Lifjell, May 30, 2016.
67. Devik, *Sameskolen i Havika*.

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