

HEALING IN THE SÁMI NORTH

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Abstract

There is a special emphasis today on integrating traditional healing within health services today. However, most areas in which there is a system of traditional healing have undergone colonization and a number of pressures suppressing tradition for hundreds of years. A question arises as to how to understand today's tradition in light of earlier traditions. This article comes from Sámi areas of Finnmark and Nord-Troms Norway, and compares local healing traditions with what is known of earlier shamanic traditions in the area. The study is based on 25 interviews among healers and their patients. The findings suggest that though local healing traditions among the Sámi in Northern Norway have gone through major transformations during the last several hundred years, they may be considered an extension of an indigenous tradition with deep roots in the region. Of special interest are also the new forms tradition may take in today's changing global society. This open and dynamic understanding of tradition may be important to keep in mind in today's focus on an integration of local tradition within the health services.

Key words: Healing, Sámi, Traditional, Shamanism, Integration,

Introduction – The Meeting of Three Tribes

This article comes from Finnmark and Nord-Troms, the two most northerly counties of Norway, and a crossing point between three cultures, or as it is said locally, the “meeting point of three tribes”. These are the Sámi, an indigenous people residing in the area for at least nine-thousand years (Haetta 1993; Ingman and Gyllensten 2007), the Kven, Finnish descendents who first came to farm in the area around three hundred years ago, and Norwegians who have had a presence in the area probably since the thirteenth century, originally arriving in connection with fishing trade, and at that time primarily holding trading posts along the coast (NOU 1994). In addition to being a crossing point between three cultures, and their integral worldviews, it is today a crossing point between tradition and the modern era, where the traditional subsistence lifestyles of fishing, farming and reindeer herding are giving way to more modern ways of life.

Though this article focuses primarily on healing traditions within the Sámi community, these are to some degree representative of practices throughout the multicultural regions of Finnmark and Nord-Troms as cultures have blended and merged throughout centuries. Though the communities in this area are geographically close, they are in many ways diverse as the livelihoods and extent of assimilation and intercultural marriage have differed – Inland communities often having a more preserved and apparent Sámi culture, while coastal communities are more clearly marked by the effects of assimilation policies.

The Sámi themselves are likewise not one clear homogenous group, but are historically several different yet related cultures with their own languages and history – The Northern (coastal and inland), Southern, Lule, Skolte, Pite and Inari cultures and language variations being some examples. This article focuses on the Northern Sámi coastal and inland

communities, many of which are multicultural today due to intermarriage, the effects of assimilation and peoples taking part in modern Norwegian culture and life.

Today there is an international emphasis on rethinking health services in light of local practices, world-views and understandings (2002), a call especially emphasized within mental health services (Kirmayer, et al. 2000). Though there is also an emphasis on providing culturally relevant health services to the Sámi people in Norway, there is often little awareness of local traditions among health professionals in the area (Sørli and Nergård 2005). While some believe that traditional shamanism is still practiced in the area many seem unaware of any particular local healing traditions in use today at all. Patients however do continue to use traditional healing approaches widely, and, according to a recent questionnaire study, desire a greater representation of local healing tradition within the health services (Sexton and Sorlie 2008; Sexton and Sørli In Press). This article is an attempt to provide some background on the traditional healing practices within the region today, focusing specifically on the world views which appear to form the framework of this tradition, and seeing these in light of what is known of Sámi healing traditions of the past. These traditions have been given little awareness in the existing health services, and are of special interest as the Sámi are quite unique as an indigenous people in Northern Europe today.

Help in Times of Need – an Opening Story

Most of the themes in this article have emerged through the narratives told by healers and their clients. Here is a short account of an elderly woman and healer who on several occasions had experienced being protected by some form of helper. Like many of the narratives, it contains

several of the themes central to the worldviews surrounding local healing tradition, themes that may also be linked to traditions and symbolism of the past.

“I was walking along the wall of a house that had been taken down and moved after the landslide in the area, and there was snow on the ground. First I followed along some footprints in the snow, and then I was going to go by a boulder above the house. As I started going towards the boulder I raised my foot to take a step and suddenly felt two strong male hands on my shoulders that pulled me back. Oh, so powerful those hands were! I turned around to see who it was that had been following me, and nobody was there. Then I looked in front of me again, and saw that I was just about to step into a water well. There were just some boards laying over that well and some snow above them, and when I pushed them aside I saw how deep it was. And I thought to myself, if I had fallen in that well, no one would have found me, no one would have known where I had disappeared....Afterwards, the reaction came, I could hardly walk up the hill to the road, I was so weak in my knees thinking I could have ended my days in that well ...The night before I had a dream that I was out traveling, going to take a ferry from Lyngseidet. I was in a hurry, and there was a little ferry at the dock. I was going to go on board and I just lifted my foot up, and the ferry took off from me. They waved and smiled to me from on board and were glad, smiled when I didn't come along. It was exactly as what happened later that day, when I lifted my foot and was going to take a step....Had I come on board that ferry I would have drowned. It was only a warning for me.”

The elderly woman who recounted this story was herself strongly rooted in the Læstadian church of the area, and sometimes referred to such helpers as the one in her near accident as angels. She had lived a rich though difficult life, of which she had many vivid stories to share, and was sought by many for help in the coastal area where she lived. After meeting her, we later met a person who himself was struggling with psychological after effects of a near drowning accident. He told how he had brought his wife to this elderly healer for help with a shoulder problem. Although he himself had not sought her for his own problems, he told how the stories she shared from her own life during their visit had made a very deep impression on him. *"I did not tell her of my problems, but it was fantastic to hear her stories."* He explained, saying that the stories helped him believe in a force outside of him, in the Universe as he put it.

Conceptual and Methodological Framework of the Study

It was clear in the initial preparation of this study that traditional healing is a sensitive issue for many. Though most healers we spoke with had chosen to be open, some had a harder time talking about tradition, explaining that it was an inner knowledge that really could not be shared, and that *not* sharing or speaking openly of it was itself a part of the tradition. There has clearly been a silence around helping and healing practices that has today eased among some, and still exists among others, especially those living in inland regions. Considering this silence, one can question whether Sámi healing tradition ought to be made a subject of research at all, and if so, how.

These considerations have guided the framework surrounding this study - the goal of which, rather than looking at specific details, or attempting to expose local healing tradition, is to highlight the framework and some of the world-views within which it seems to be set. For this reason, we also chose to use primarily interviews, rather than observation of healing work that could possibly be experienced as too invasive for some healers or their clients.

We see the ethnographic and qualitative approach used here within the light of a reflexive and social constructivist tradition (Gergen 1999), emphasizing that the reality emerging from these interviews is both highly dependent on their context, as well as the researcher's own background. The fact that local tradition has not always been openly talked about, and may have aspects which would not be shared in such a study, also make it important to emphasize that the findings here are seen as findings emerging in this study, at this particular time, and clearly just one reflection of local healing practices.

Participants and Interviews

The study was approved by the regional ethical committee and is based on a total of twenty-five interviews. Though all participants had a Sámi background, most Sámi in Norway consider themselves both Norwegian and Sámi (Sørliie and Nergård 2005), and some in this study also had a mixed family heritage of Sámi, Norwegian and/or Kven.

Eight of the interviews were with healers, and the remainder with clients of healers, or people who knew of local tradition. Though some of the interviews with healers were taken as early as 2003, most interviews were taken between February 2006 and April 2007. A number of the clients of healers were people recruited through their participation in a study on the interfaces of traditional and western mental health services in Nord-Troms and Finnmark. Nineteen interviews have been recorded, and audio notes were taken immediately after the other six. Nine of the interviews were in Sámi.

Interviews were open in form and carried out in peoples homes with a focus on providing a space for them to share their own personal stories and backgrounds independent of whether these were initially thought to be related to local healing tradition or not, and entering on experiences within local healing tradition if and when natural during the course of the conversations, which could be followed up with subsequent conversations.

In addition to these interviews are some observations from the region noted by both authors. We have two different backgrounds. Ellen Anne comes from the area and grew up in a reindeer-herding family. She has worked as a nurse's aid within the mental health services of the area for over twenty years, and carried out the interviews in Sámi. Randall, though grown up in Alaska, has spent much of his life in Norway, and worked as a physician in general practice and the mental health services of Finnmark for around three years before starting to work on this study.

He has also had a long-term interest in diverse healing traditions, an interest partly spurred by experiences in this Northern area of Norway.

Analysis

Analysis was a continual process from the start of the project. Notes were taken both of observations in the region, after informal conversations about local traditions, as well as after interviews which were transcribed, and those in Sámi translated into Norwegian. As the focus here is a general understanding of the framework and worldviews associated with healing practices, we sought for broad themes or topics related to beliefs and worldviews guiding local tradition, ways of helping, and ways of knowing. These have been found through a paradigmatic analysis of common themes throughout narratives (Hatch and Wisniewski 1995), and emerged through the transcription process, re-listening and rereading the notes and interviews, discussing these with colleagues, and comparing with existing literature on Sámi healing traditions of the past.

Historical Context-The Noaidi in Times of Change

The original Pre-Christian Sámi religion and spiritual life are thought to have been intimately interwoven with the life style, and the arctic nature around (Bergman, et al. 2008), a nature which was seen as an expression of the creative energies inherent in the Gods and Goddesses within Sámi mythology (Myrhaug 1997). The *noaidi*, generally considered a figure that practiced a form of shamanism, played a central role as an intermediary between the spirit and human planes in Sámi life, and healing practices were an integral part of the shamanic vocation (Pollan 1993). Sámi shamans are thought to have been primarily men, often having female assistants –

distinguishing the tradition from *Seidr*, the shamanic practices of the neighboring Nordic agricultural communities primarily practiced by women (Blain and Wallis 2000).

Though there has been much discussion and debate within academic circles around what an actual working definition of shamanism should be, much of the recent literature on shamanism as a therapeutic approach has focused on the use of differing techniques for accessing a non-ordinary state of awareness by practitioners (Grof 1996; Noll, et al. 1985). It is within non-ordinary states that practitioners have been thought to access some inner form of knowledge, carry out spirit travel or make necessary visits to spiritual or mythological planes of existence. From an anthropological perspective, the role of the shaman as a mediator between physical and spiritual realms, often in contact with personal spirit helpers, is in focus (Balzer 1996)

A few Sámi shamanic drums are still in existence, and a rich iconography on these drums has granted some understanding of traditional Sámi cosmology (Keski-Säntti, et al. 2003). Existence is thought to have been divided into three realms, the earth, heaven and underworld, all of which were mapped on the drums with symbols representing these different regions and their inhabitants. Included on some drums were also symbols from Nordic mythology and Christianity indicating some confluence of tradition even from early times (Pollan 1993). Similar to other cultures of the arctic, such as that found among Siberian tribes and Inuit people, drumming and a unique form of song or chant, locally called *joik*, was used as a means or vehicle for spirit travel through the different regions of the Cosmos. Such spirit travels in which the spirit of the Shaman leaves his or her body, is characteristic of arctic shamanism where such voyages were taken in order to make contact with the forces of nature, to find animals, understand causes of disease and negotiate cures (Sergejeva 2000) (Price 2001).

Similar to what is known from other shamanic traditions, those moving into the function of a noaidi would often undergo a difficult transitional period in which experiences of the spirit world could become overwhelming for a time – an initiation phase often termed “shamanic illness” in the literature on shamanism. In Sámi areas, the Noaidi to be could be approached by helper spirits that made it clear that individual should take on the role of a shaman (Miller 2007), a role not often taken lightly, and sometimes refused, or only taken after seeing that the option of not taking the role would result in personal illness or misfortune.

A particularly severe missionary activity, initiated by the Danish king, was carried out in much of Sámi areas of Norway during the sixteen and seventeen hundreds (Berglund). Drums were outlawed and burned. Some noaidi were accused of witchcraft and tried (Hagen). This suppression of Sámi tradition through the church was a central part of the political power play in the area, and later continued in a new form until the late nineteen-fifties with the assimilation policies of the Norwegian government playing a modern role in this process (Nergård 2006).

While the missionaries sent by the Danish king had learned Sámi before arriving, the Sámi language was later a target for these assimilation policies, with the national authority exerting its presence and language in the area through the church, schools and courts of law. In schools, Sámi children were punished for using their mother tongue, and often separated from parents and sent to boarding schools. Despite this, the Sámi language has survived, is still spoken among the majority in some inland areas, yet practically lost in others areas such as the coastal regions of Northern Norway and more Southerly Sámi regions.

Healers Today

Becoming a Healer

"We have often heard from the time we were children that there are people who can remove pain and illness, and it is because we believe in this that we seek help from them."

The view that some people, either men or women, have an often inherited innate gift or ability, to heal or help others is widespread throughout the region and often spoken of and integral to conversations on the subject. Some of the elderly however told that a generation or two ago, healers had different gifts and were specialized in different areas. Some were known to remove pains of different sorts, others to stop bleedings and still others to find lost or stolen articles or help to provide an understanding of a situation through a conversation. Some of these healers are still renowned in the area as particularly skilled and respected healers, and there are many stories circulating about the cures they have performed.

One elderly healer told that people began visiting her for healing already while she was a child. Her sister had been bothered by severe eczema, and when her mother had brought the sister to the local doctors and healers without help, she finally asked the young girl to try. The eczema soon cleared, and she became known for such abilities and visited already then.

However, this story was more an exception as most healers we spoke with became active as healers later in life, sometimes going through a period or process of personal difficulties before openly working with healing. This theme of some sort of personal difficulty before becoming a healer, be it in health, work or family life, was a theme that seemed to stretch through most of the life stories of healers. Some also described a transitional period in which they gradually

became aware of and comfortable with their abilities in parallel with these being gradually acknowledged by others.

All healers that we met had had other healers in their family, and shared this family linkage as an important part of their background, often sharing stories of other family members who had worked as healers. An important ancestor, generally a parent or grandparent had worked as a healer, and some remembered their parents or grandparents being contacted by many people during their childhood. One, however, who although he had ancestors who worked as healers, told how he had “inherited” his abilities from an older man outside of his family he had met seemingly by chance. This older man had recognized him as his successor at their initial meeting, and when the older man died, the younger experienced that he had received an ability to understand others and heal which he had not had before. This passing of the healing ability as a dynamic force mirrors stories of noaidi, and is also suggested as a continuing form of inheritance in a recent anthropological thesis which has looked specifically at one family of healers in a coastal region of Norway (Miller 2007) .

Ways of Helping

The healers we spoke with did not call themselves healers. Most stressed that it was another force doing the work through them and emphasized that they were only a tool or a channel. Sometimes the force was referred to as God, sometimes more to a general yet unnamed source. Locally they are often referred to as helpers and work mostly in their own homes, generally providing their services for free as one traditionally did not take money for healing. Though there are many ways a helper can work - through conversation, the laying on of hands and the use of plants - they are often contacted by phone and help or heal over a distance, often practicing what

is called *reading*, the reciting of special verses known only to the healer, and thought to come from biblical tradition. In some cases a healer is called when the patient is in the hospital. In the words of a patient who had called a healer for help before a major operation: *“It was the healer who prayed that the doctors would receive wisdom from God so they could carry out this operation they had never done before.”*

When healing is done through the laying on of hands, it is often explained as a way of “pulling out” pain and illness, and healers may often feel the pain itself, or the nature of the pain when touching patients, and shake the absorbed pain away from their own hands or wash them in flowing water after a session to release the energies. One healer made a particular point of the importance of clearing the negative energies one might gather in contact with people who are ill, pointing out that this was important for healers to be aware of, and should be given more awareness among health professionals working in clinic settings.

Some of the healing work takes on more of a ritual form. An example is *reading* the sacred verses to water and then giving the water to a patient, sometimes to be taken over a period of time. One healer also told how she might read to fire or earth depending on if the illness was seen as coming from or being related to that element. Fire for example if it was a burn. If a rash is seen to come from a swamp, moss from the swamp may first be read to and then passed over the body of the person with the rash. If it has come from a river or stream area, the patient and reader may go to the stream and carry out the reading. Cleansing of homes and places where there is “unrest”, meaning people have heard and experienced noises or unexplainable things often thought to be spirits residing in the house. In such cases matches or candles may also be used throughout the house to bring “light” to the house and help the attached spirits move out and into the light.

More natural medical techniques are also used, though these are mostly referred to in stories of healings in the past, and elders believe these traditions have to a great degree disappeared. Such techniques that we heard of in a number of stories include the use of earth or turf from specific areas for skin problems, and the knowledge of specific herbs and plants for inner or outer ailments. Cupping, or a form of suction treatment, where a vacuum is formed within a cup and placed on the surface of the body, as well as the burning of an herb over points on the body, both similar to treatments known from Chinese medicine, are only scarcely in use today.

Sources of knowledge

Though helpers had often grown up close to a family member who was a healer, the kind of knowledge they emphasized was not one of learning. Helpers rather explained in one way or another that they received knowledge from somewhere inside themselves or from somewhere they could not explain. One, when asked how he did his healing, responded: *"It is inside me, I do as I believe I am supposed to."* One who was often contacted by phone for help told how the first thought that came to her when someone called was essential and often suggested what the problem was:

"It is like someone (inside me) tells me things, that things are this way or that...That this person has a particular illness...It comes from above....And if I ignore the thought, and don't do it, they don't get well. I have tried to get used to it, the first thought that comes, and not overlook it."

She also told that though she knew special verses used in reading, sometimes other words would come to her as an inner voice or thought. Another helper explained it as if her awareness was raised to another level beyond herself in which she would receive insights that could be useful for those who came for help. She could also experience this at times in her own life and felt she received valuable practical direction that she could use in her everyday life.

One helper, who had come from a long line of healers, had had a series of out of body experiences as a young child where she experienced traveling beyond her home and seeing things throughout the neighborhood, things she could later confirm actually happened. When she spoke to her parents about this, she was adamantly told not to speak about it, and kept the experiences inside her until adulthood, not daring to tell anyone and feeling ashamed of the experience. As an adult, she was contacted when people needed help finding lost or stolen objects, and explained that she would often, in a similar way as during childhood, receive a picture or vision of where something was or how it had happened that an item had been lost or stolen.

Both helpers and others we spoke with in the area told of many experiences of precognition, of knowing things before they happened, especially unexpected deaths or tragedies. This could come in a dream, or was described as a bodily knowing, sometimes a sense of unease:

“You know, when it comes to death, I feel so strange in my stomach when I look out the window, and I can't sit still, and I tell others that now I know for sure that I will hear someone has died.... it has been like that for me for years.”

Another:

“I have in some way known before something is going to happen that it will. But it has been...many times it has been very tiresome. My grandmother was the same way, so my mother said that I had probably inherited this from her.”

One healer told how she used to work herding with her grandfather, a renowned healer, in the mountains several hours from the village at a time before telephones and doctors in the area. Sometimes while they were working he could suddenly say that they had to return to the village as so and so was sick, naming the individual. On returning they would find the person in question in need of help.

Framing in different traditions

Broadly, each of the Sámi healers here leaned towards what might be thought of as more of an indigenous or Christian tradition. In addition, a few of the somewhat younger healers in the area held perspectives that were more global or composite, including more obvious influences from sources such as the Indian Chakra system or Native American medicine or even modern knowledge of vitamins and minerals. Though these perspectives might be thought to be more complementary, they were held by people who were in a family line of healers, and also practiced healing as had been done by their parents or grandparents.

Within a more indigenous tradition, a personal access to a healing force and an intuitive knowledge were central. Two of the healers stressed that the tradition was similar to what had

been practiced for thousands of years, and had parallels to that practiced in other indigenous communities. Though witchcraft, locally called “ganning” is believed by some to be the cause of illness, often mental illness, healers we spoke with did not emphasize that witchcraft was an important source of illness, rather framing it as a superstition of the past. However, mental health therapists do say that a number of patients still believe this, and will in this case use healers known to be able to remove such curses.

Though others clearly framed their work within a Christian tradition, such as those who used “reading” and had a personal affiliation with the Læstadian Christian movement, these still contained many of the understandings within the traditional or indigenous tradition. They would for example tell stories that referred to encounters with spirits, or beings in nature or used natural medical techniques, yet explained these within a Christian framework, as seen in the initial story.

Discussion - The Noaidi and Healers of Today

A major and clear difference between the tradition of the noaidi and that of the healers in this study is the fact that the drum is no longer in use. Neither was there any apparent use of other tools for modulating awareness. However, healers here do tell of experiences of expanded states of awareness, receiving knowledge from somewhere inside themselves, or other planes of consciousness and encountering spirit beings, all themes linked with the earlier tradition of the noaidi. In this light it is interesting to note that some of the literature on the tradition of the noaidi indicates that they may have been less dependent on the use of the drum for their visionary and divinatory practices than often thought (Miller 2007). The centrality of the use of the drum or other tools for inducing trance, ecstasy or non-ordinary states has also been questioned in

research among some Siberian tribes where it has been pointed that those considered to be especially powerful shamans were less dependent on such tools (Barkalaja 2004). These observations have led some to propose that shamanism should be considered more a system of beliefs than a technique of ecstasy (Barkalaja 2004), in which case, the question of links between today's practices and those of the past should focus more on beliefs and understandings of reality than outer tools and techniques. In other words we should not necessarily equate the loss of the drum, with the loss of the healing tradition that it was a part of.

The initial account of the elderly healer speaks of the potential for helpers from another plane to appear and help in times of need, a theme also found in other stories we heard, and clearly mirroring the shamanic tradition of the past where spirit helpers were central in the function and work of the noaidi. Another theme in her narrative which also possibly echoes past tradition and beliefs is the theme of the boat, or ferry. In her dream she interpreted the ferry as a shuttle to the next life. Boats are known to have often been depicted both on the drums of the noaidi from the seventeenth century as well as on petroglyphs as far back as 4000 BC, and are believed to have symbolic meaning as vehicles connecting the plane of the living and the spirit plane of the dead (Bayliss-Smith and Mulk 1999) – a meaning she similarly interpreted within her own dream. Though a direct connection to her own dream interpretation, and the past symbolic understanding of the boat is hard to make, the parallel is of special interest here, and one of a number of examples of references to symbolism that seemingly had a possible connection with the past shamanic culture in our study.

Another possible parallel with earlier traditions, may be the cultural role Sámi healers today have as “mediators” between the visible and invisible, or physical and spiritual realities. This may be seen in the view that they have extraordinary gifts and abilities. It might also be seen in

their “initiation” into special knowledge (the verses read) that can be used to contact a transpersonal source of healing. The concepts and views of healing also seem to have certain parallels to earlier belief systems. The understanding of healing as a force that can act over a distance, be transmitted between people or between a healer and his or her chosen successor seems to resonate with a shamanic world view in which reality is seen as a spirited continuum connected by unseen forces. The view of a spiritually embodied Universe also seems to underlie some of the healing approaches we found in this study. Examples being reading to water, fire or even a swampy area when an illness is thought to have its origin in that element. The cleansing of a home for unwanted presences with light from candles, is another example of such an understanding.

Though it may be important to see the possible connections with the practices and worldviews of the past, as well as with other shamanic cultures when trying to understand today’s tradition, it is not suggested here that healers necessarily be considered shamans. A similar situation has been pointed out in other regions, and has been described as a “post shamanic thought world in which old ideas are still potent but obscurely transformed....involving a kind of shamanism without shamans, which can perhaps best be formulated as a “shamanic approach to life””(Price 2001). On the other hand one may ask the question as to whether there is truly much difference between healers today, and the noaidi of the past.

One can wonder how and why some aspects of the shamanic culture, such as the drum, have (until the present revitalization) been completely lost and other aspects, such as the belief system, seemingly persisted. One reason the drum was severely suppressed, may be that drumming and spirit travel seemingly provided a direct source of contact with the divine that was particularly threatening for the church. The suppression of the drum as “a tool of

knowledge” may also have resulted in some form of its function being integrated within the society or individuals in new ways, helping to explain the large number of accounts we heard of other forms of knowing, precognition and similar experiences among participants. Such an integration of the function of the drum may have been especially relevant in certain family lines as some families could keep the tradition more intact through social and genetic inheritance. This perspective of the importance of family is supported in literature which looks at the close link between shamanic practices and our neuro-biological heritage (Winkelman 2000), as well as in studies which show that the ability to access trance states is both inherited (McClenon 1997) and developed through social processes (Nelson 1975). This may explain why the familial inheritance within Sámi healing tradition could have become especially important when the outer tools of healing as well as the cultural fabric for preserving tradition were lost and weakened.

The fact of a persistent and strong narrative tradition certainly also helps to explain why world views and belief systems have endured, especially as many of the stories and experiences told are interspersed with experiences that are found within shamanic tradition. Jens Ivar Nergård who has done extensive field work in Northern Sámi areas of Norway has pointed out the central importance of such narratives in preserving Sámi culture and providing a blue print for both experiencing and understanding reality among people today (Nergård 2006).

An additional point in the continuance and transformation of Sámi tradition is the Læstadian church which was established by a man with Sámi background in the mid eighteenth century, and known to have incorporated ecstatic group worship with parallels to healing ceremonies of the past (Miller 2007; Nergård 2006). This form of Christianity seems to have been used as a legitimizing vessel for local traditions as suggested by several participants in this study. A

similar continuation of traditional beliefs and ritual elements within church settings has also been described in a number of arctic regions such as Greenland, Finland and Alaska (Dutton 2007) (Kan 1991), as well as in other cultural and geographical settings such as the syncretic churches of Brazil which include indigenous, African and Christian elements (De Alverga 1999).

Though some aspects of the worldviews inherent within local tradition seem to persist, it is also clear that knowledge is being quickly lost. According to the elders in Sámi areas, certain healing techniques such as cupping and the use of herbs are far less, or not at all, used today. On the other hand, there is a renewal of tradition in process. An interest in the ancient traditions of the Sámi has been spurred among some of the younger generation, as well as in urban centres where many with Sámi background today live. Some have taken up building and using drums similar to those of former times. Though the potential for reviving traditions which were originally embedded in a very different historic and social framework is often questioned, these latest steps may possibly be seen as part of the ongoing efforts to revitalize Sámi culture. They may also be steps longest in the coming do to the earliest and most powerful suppressions being aimed directly at such practices. The exploration of other healing traditions seen among some may also be an important part of supplementing and reinvigorating common elements within different yet possibly related traditions. These efforts may also portend a continued confluence of tradition, now on a wider global scale than before.

The changing nature of local healing tradition, the age-old and holistic paradigm which it is based on, and the fact that it is often practiced in silence in a home environment and outside of the modern economical system provides a number of challenges for any possible future integration of local tradition within the health services. However, considering the suggestions both by patients and service providers, it is important to find and create bridges between

traditions. Hopefully future research and endeavours within the health services will provide guidance as to how such bridges might best be built.

Acknowledgements

This study has been a communal effort in which a number of people have contributed. First we would like to thank those healers and clients who have shared their experiences and knowledge. We would also like to thank Tore Sørli for his guidance in developing this article, as well as Jens-Ivar Nergård, for his perspectives on the narrative tradition. Many thanks also to Marit Einejord who has transcribed the Sámi interviews in Sámi and translated them into Norwegian. This translation was, needless to say, quite a major work. We would also like to thank those who have written earlier work on these traditions, an important source of information and knowledge that has been built on here. Finally, we would like to thank Helse-Nord, The Sámi Parliament, and The Sámi National Center for Mental Health for their financial support.

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