



Neo-Shamanism in Finland: Religious Appropriation or Root of Identity?

On the Current Significance of Shamanism and Neo-Shamanism Within the Saami of Finland

Deborah Onorati
Student Number: U1266998

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Thesis Supervisor: prof. dr. H. L. Beck
Second Reader: dr. P. K. Varis

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Abstract

This thesis explores the topics of shamanism and neo-shamanism as experienced in the Saami minority, with a particular focus on its significance for Finnish national identity. Through history, Finland witnessed the presence of two indigenous tribes: on the one hand, the Finns and on the other, the Saami. Traces of this can be retrieved in linguistic analysis: Finnish and Saami shared a common ancestor, the Proto-Finnic-Saami, from which two different languages split up in around 700 AD. The Saami were aboriginal inhabitants of Fennoscandia and present-day members of that community, whose recognition is based on self-identification (Raento & Husso, 2001), are considered to be the descendents of a wide population of hunters and fishermen who moved from the coastal areas of Scandinavia towards the inland, as a consequence of the retreat of the ice covering the area (Kozłowski & Bandi, 1984). In the Neolithic they started interacting with southern and northern tribes, with a consequent intermingle of several cultural influences (Tambets & al., 2004). From the end of the 17th century Christian missionaries tried to eliminate every form of non-Christian element present in the religion of the Saami, mostly confiscating the most sacred of their possessions: the sacred drums (Rydving, 2014). Nevertheless, the Saami strived to preserve their cultural values, of which shamanism was one.

Instead, neo-shamanism represents a reconstruction of shamanic traditions in the lives of contemporary Westerners (DuBois, 2011); it developed on the image of the exotic Other, which is at the same time “natural”, namely bearer of the actual manifestation of nature and “cultural”, indicating an abstraction where the traditional culture is perceived as an idol (Lindquist, 2000). A recent project conducted by the Church Research Institute of Finland mapped the religious landscape of the Helsinki region, showing how almost all the religious groups firstly identified as active all around Finland are also represented in or around the capital area (Ramstedt, 2015). Centres for shamanism can nowadays be, for example, found in Helsinki, Vantaa, Tampere and Turku alike. In analyzing neo-shamanism, this writing aims at identifying current specific cultural appropriations of the traditional form of Saami shamanism.

Archaeological findings of rock painting in Finland trace elements of shamanistic presence back to circa 5000-1500 BCE (Lahelma, 2005). Presenting elements of shamanism as a religious and a spiritual movement with the intent of locating it away from the magic-attributed practices which shamanism is sometimes identified with, this writing will consider the relationship between the

original form of Saami shamanism and new religious movements developed as a continuum of it.

Adopting theories on linguistic changes and development as a first basis, it will be shown how the two main tribes of Finland (the Finns and the Saami) grew apart. A description of what makes them different will be presented, with a focus on religious practices. Subsequently, a series of definitions on what shamanism is will be presented: where did the word originate; what it came to mean and what it came to embed will all be topics discussed and analysed.

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Chapter One: Introduction

Finland is recognized as a homogeneous country (Raento & Husso, 2001). Nevertheless, there are several minorities coexisting within the nation's core. They are ethnic and cultural groups, some more limited in members than others, which are considered a marginal participant in society due to their religious, linguistic or ethnic background. Some of these groups have suffered persecutions and repercussions for the values that made them different. However, counter to what might seem logic in a context of homologation, they still elicit a profound sense of pride for the characteristics which distinguish them from the majority population and long to keep these elements underlined as such.

This thesis presents an account of the Saami minority on one particular aspect of their cultural identity, namely religion. For long, Saami lacked a word for the construct of "religion" as understood in Western terms, but they nevertheless nourished a sense of spirituality which they expressed through shamanic practices. Shamanism will therefore constitute the focus of the present writing. Since its first appearance and recognition, shamanism has however undergone changes linked to the processes of modernity and globalization. Nowadays, a revival in shamanic traditions can be witnessed: it is labelled under the name of neo-shamanism. This writing aims at finding an answer to the questions:

"What does neo-shamanism entail for the Saami?" and "What are the implications of neo-shamanic practices for Saami identity?"

The thesis will start with an historical overview about the Saami origins and how they came to settle within the Finnish national territory. It will present a short account on identity, in order to set the initial guidelines necessary to understand the total discourse. Through a comprehensive discussion on shamanism, it hopes to lay the basis for the consequent in-depth discourse on Saami shamanism and neo-shamanism. Traditional cultural elements such as the national epic and particular musical re-appropriations will be used in finding traces of continuity between the past and the present.

- *The Origins: a Genealogy of the Saami*

The Saami are the aboriginal inhabitants of Fennoscandia; around 60000 Saami live in the northernmost parts of Finland, Norway, Sweden and the Kola Peninsula, in Russia (Salmi, Aikäs, &

Lipkin, 2011), of which around 7000 are settled within the borders of Finland (Kitti, 1996). Being Saami is a self-defined construct: individuals who consider themselves Saami and who speak Saami as their mother-tongue are considered Saami; also individuals whose grandparents can or could speak Saami are considered as belonging to the Saami heritage (Kitti, 1996).

The first recognized appearance of the Saami was the one documented by Tacitus, the Roman historian who in 98 A.D. in his "*Germania*" described a people he referred to as "Fennis" (Kitti, 1996). Tacitus' accounts present the Saami as a group of savages, who had no knowledge of weapons and who dressed up in animal skins (Meriot, 1984). All the texts that followed, however, were the combination of new disconcerting discoveries on the Saami way of living and a set of imaginary additions written to please the reader (Meriot, 1984). Only with the work of J. Schefferus the Saami started being discovered on the basis of true reports. His accounts encompassed testimonies related to every aspect of the Saami, and are particularly relevant for the insights on religion presented (Schefferus, 1673). They were divided in tribes, each with their own land. Since the establishment of borders had yet to come and constitute an issue, at times the Saami used to settle everywhere in the land they called Sápmi: it was their home, in its totality. They were nomadic tribes of fishermen, reindeer herders and hunters which still nowadays are considered distinguished from the rest of the European population due to genetic characteristics (Tambets & al., 2004). Research on genetic components on both the Saami and the Finns has proven that their genotype was shared on the maternal side, but was substantially different on the paternal side (Weinstock). Due to the so-called bottleneck phenomenon, according to which the size of a population is drastically reduced due to human activities or environmental events, the paternal lineage for the Saami and the Finns was not equal. Practically speaking, this means that studies on the genetic material of both these tribes have demonstrated that while part of their mitochondrial heritage was European and possibly came from the Iberian Peninsula or the southern-west regions of France, the other half of their DNA-composition was instead different. Part of it has arrived from Asia, and other parts arrived from Kunda, an area of current-day Estonia which had disclosed itself after the ice sheets had melted (Tambets & al., 2004).

There are many theories about Saami presence in Fennoscandia: some scholars recall their presence as the result of a migratory process which began due to the melting of the ice sheets of their territories, dating back to 19500 BC. This forced them to move southwards and settle in the mainland areas. Demonstrations of the Saami settling in a territory that was already inhabited by

other local groups come from rock art paintings: many remaining has been found, and the southern inhabitants of Finland still nowadays claim to have a heritage ownership over them (Joy, 2017). Nevertheless, due to their cosmological significance, the common understanding is for them to be linked to shamanic practices coming from the northern tribes of the Saami. Theories of this kind express the arrival of the Saami in their actual land of residence as a re-conquest of their initial territories: initially living in the northern parts of the Scandinavia peninsula, tribes coming from Karelia had moved southwards in post-glacial times. The culture that was formed from this migratory process developed under the conditions of the periglacial environment: its tools, its ways of life and its settlement organization guaranteed its survival (Kozłowski & Bandi, 1984). Archaeological sources demonstrated how the frozen areas of northern Fennoscandia surrounding the Urals were more accessible in comparison to the other borders of Fennoscandia (Kozłowski & Bandi, 1984): this might explain why the Saami decided to leave the southern territories they had adopted as their new homeland to move north, instead of reaching the shores of Norway. Other scholars theorize the Saami as being the descendants of the Ahrensburgian population: coming from Western Europe they moved northward following the coastal lines of Norway (Tambets & al., 2004).

Saami origins need to be understood as the interaction of several cultural influences, coming from east, west and south alike (Broadbent, 2013). They can be categorized according to their linguistic development, which presents nine forms of Saami language spread through the entire area of Fennoscandia; or they can be differentiated according to the economic activities used as a form of sustenance. Looking at the linguistic development of the Saami language is particularly useful in recollecting an account of their settlement and evolution. Prior to the Middle Iron Age (300-800 A.D.) the Saami population living in Sápmi spoke a non-Uralic language, traces of which can still be found today in Saami place-names (Ánte, 2012). Throughout the Middle Iron Age, however, drastic changes took place: the Proto-Saami language that they were speaking spread to the south and, mixed with the Karelian dialects spoken in the Lakeland of southern Finland, several differentiations developed (Ánte, 2012). The Saami language has undergone several changes, which can be summarized into five distinct phases (Ánte, 2012). The first phase, known as the emergent phase, witnessed the emergence of a Pre-Proto-Saami language as a distinct language from the other dialects known at the time. It needs to be kept in mind that archeologically speaking, there is not a relevant enough number of findings: the period of emergence of the (Pre-) Proto-Saami language is typically recognized as a “archaeological invisible” period for Saami

history. Successively, the second phase, the transformative phase, took place: several innovations contributed to Proto-Saami to be formed. The third phase, the dispersal phase, is the one in which Proto-Saami spread throughout Lapland, southern Finland and Karelia gaining a series of differentiations. The diversification phase, the fourth one, can be understood as a continuum of the preceding phase: Saami language kept on developing and several variants arose around Lapland. Finally, the last phase, the marginalization phase: from medieval times Saami stopped being spoken, it became a somewhat forgotten language, extinct in relation to the widespread of Finnish.

Since the 1990s, Saami have been fighting for the recognition of their rights as a minority group, while at the same time demanding recognition as an indigenous people. Especially during the time span of 1985 to 1993 they have been the open participants in a political battle against the Finnish majority and its government (Pietikäinen & Hujanen, 2003). Traces of the derogatory opposition as perceived by the Saami were already witness in linguistic appellatives: the Finnish majority had long been referring to the Saami as “Lapps” (*lappalaiset*), a term that was considered highly pejorative and filled with ideas of backwardness. The consistent actions of the Saami have finally paid off: nowadays the Saami of Finland elect their own parliament, with 21 members; the institution is funded by the Finnish government (Kitti, 1996).

- *Two Identities*

The discourse on identity is slightly trickier than that on historical origins: while fields such as archaeology and cultural history can help shape the genealogy of a people, identity is hard to define. Identity can be categorized from an essentialist or a non-essentialist point of view; the former, which is mostly adopted in politics and in actions meant at the creation or re-establishment of a nation, defines identity as a set of fixed and clear features (Pietikäinen & Hujanen, 2003). The latter, instead, sees identity as something fixed, something dynamic and flexible; discourses surrounding the formation of a people are usually built around this non-essentialist approach (Pietikäinen & Hujanen, 2003).

From the outside and from general categorization, Finland is considered as the homeland of Nordic people. While geographically true, this definition also simplifies the peculiar distinction that exists between the tribes of Finland, the Finns and the Saami in this instance. While on a side time has shown how the two groups gradually grew closer to one another through marriages and cultural intermingling, there has recently been a counter tendency aimed at establishing a

recognized separation between the two unities (Pietikäinen & Hujanen, 2003). So, while initially linguistic differences and particular cultural manifestations were being amalgamated into one cohesive whole, more recently the trend has seen a shift: members of the Saami minority upholds the unicity of their language, as existing separated from the national Finnish and political integrity has been shattered by the Saami desire for independence.

Chapter Two: Methodology

- **Theories of Shamanism**

Thinking about indigenous groups automatically leads to theories of shamanism and totemism (Layton, 2000). Both of these theories will be hereby presented and analyzed, totemism being used as a particular aspect of the broad discourse surrounding shamanism.

The idea behind totemism is the recognition of tribal communities with a specific element, either an animal or a plant mostly; the chosen element represents the guardian figure that protects the group and it is what is celebrated during rituals (Layton, 2000). The particular importance of totemism for a discourse on shamanism lies with Émile Durkheim's study of the matter: to him, totemism was the original form of human religion (Durkheim, 1915). This is to be understood in the light of a social context: Durkheim recognized in religion a social function, and at the time of his discourses on totemism his major point of interest was rooted in the idea of "kinship". The group worshipping the totem, the chosen object of veneration, was the original construct behind the family. Keeping this in mind, Durkheim viewed the structure on which society was based as constructed on necessity (Durkheim, 1933). It developed as a result of divergent and re-divergent processes, so that it was never something static, but a product in constant motion (Peel, 1972). Since studying highly developed societies was just perceived as being a complication to the matter, as with time passing by new elements had been added and they were seen as non-influential, Durkheim decided to focus on small-scale groups, tribal or aboriginal communities so to speak as they were reflective of the most basic and simplest forms of relations, which were just the same than those that emerged in widely developed societies later on (Kuper, 1985). What Durkheim was interested in was how a society could possibly arise from a basic union of man and woman, connected in marriage, and therefore constituting a family. At the beginning, however, this grouping of man and woman was not identified as family but as "clan" (Durkheim, 1933). Societies were the collection of several clans. Such clans, grouped together, needed something: religion. Religion was the answer to the daily worries and to what could not be otherwise controlled. The connection between religion and family was to be found in totemism. Totemism was indeed defined as the group of people who, reverencing the same totem, "*believed themselves to be of one blood*" (Frazer, 1887, p. 3). Perceived as an animistic religious group worshipping a natural species or a phenomenon, the clan also had a social significance reflected in

the common obligations that the members of the totem had towards each others (Kuper, 1985). Some scholars, such as W. Bogoras and V. Jochelson postulated shamanism as a phenomenon which developed from totemism (Hultkrantz, 1989): when the clan system was the basic organization structure of every pre-modern society, every member of the clan could perform cultic functions; those were transferred to one single person when the clan system dissolved and that person was the shaman (Potapov, 1946).

Many are the ideas that come to mind when speaking of “shamanism” as many are the discussions surrounding the term and what it truly represents. While with time people came to associate discourses of shamanism with various topics connected to magic, prophecy-making, esoteric practices, sorcery, and practical healing, Mircea Eliade, the Romanian-born scholar of religion who before everyone else started focusing on shamanism, linked it to a particular form of religion (Eliade, 1989). While it might indeed be easy to point at shamanism as an attempt to manipulate supernatural powers for certain characteristics of primary importance within its core, there is a substantial difference between sorcery so understood and religion: in religion, people approach the recognized divinities with a feeling of supplication, asking for something specific but not having any certitude of their request being satisfied. In the plethora of shamanisms that can be recognized today, the topic hereby discussed refers to Eliade’s conception of the field. If one is to understand shamanism as a search for an individualistic inner spiritual power, it appears rather clear that indeed shamanism fits the generally-understood definition of religion.

While Eliade claimed that shamanism first appeared in Siberia, it is rather difficult to pinpoint its position in time, as one can never be completely sure about a religious phenomenon’s first traces. According to Eliade (1989), shamanism dates back to the Upper Palaeolithic era (around 30.000-25.000 years BP) while other sources declared that it originated already in the Middle Palaeolithic, between 100.000 and 50.000 BP (Sidky, 2010). Eliade pertained to the fact that archaeological findings of rock art dating back to exactly Upper Palaeolithic were a proof to his positioning in time of shamanism: the dots and drawings that appeared on the rocks were the result of shamanic trance and embodied a conversation with the spirits. Furthermore, the belief he held was rooted in certain 19th-century theories (now almost totally discredited) according to which aboriginal practices and cults were the primitive beliefs on which the newer religions were established. Basically, the principle behind these theories was an evolutionary one, where modern cultures were displayed at the top of the evolutionary ladder and older ones were instead at the bottom.

The background idea following such theories was that aboriginal and native cultures were the ones that had given start to particular religious practices, while the newly developed and enlightened cultures were the expression of progress (Tylor, 1929). One can critically view this thinking as both positive and negative at the same time; indeed, while perceiving primitive cultures as a basis for other cultures to develop upon would mean to think of their practices as unchangeable and static, a more positive outlook is also possible. This would go back to Bernard of Chartres' famous metaphor¹ of the dwarfs standing on the shoulders of giants: the interpretation of the philosophical saying is generally agreed to stand for discovering new truths based on pre-existing concepts and discoveries. This means that in order to find new truths, the past ones are always necessary. In this case, stretching its meaning to primitive and modern forms of religion, the old ones would not represent worse ideas than the ones carried by so-called "enlightened" religions but would simply be a needed step within society.

The assumption of Siberia being the original place where shamanism originated needs to be taken into account very carefully. Indeed, while Eliade was very optimistic and sure about this claim, there was evidence of shamanistic practices similar to those encountered in the cold lands of Russia in Asia and in the Americas as well (Hutton, 2001).

This thesis will adopt several definitions of religion, in order to position shamanism within a religious discourse. Subsequently, theories from Émile Durkheim and Mircea Eliade will be used, with the intention of presenting a clear depiction of shamanism and the way it fits the global religious discourse. However, while reading the following, it needs to be kept in mind that religion has been and still nowadays is often associated with faith. The stance taken in writing the present paper will not dwell into this equation.

While religion is a very difficult term to commonly define, many theorists presented specific definitions for the term. According to William James (1902), for example, religion is "*the set of feelings and acts that individual men experience in their solitude*"; therefore, religion does not necessarily require faith in a monotheistic god and is instead purely connected to what each individual comes to consider as "divine". James believed that there was more than just the natural reality of the physical world; that outer-reality world, the unseen realm of the divine,

¹ Attributed to Bernard of Chartres and presumably dating back to the 12th century, the saying "*nanos gigantum humeris insidentes*" was found in John of Salisbury's *Metalogicon*: "*Bernard of Chartres used to compare us to dwarfs perched on the shoulders of giants. He pointed out that we see more and farther than our predecessors, not because we have keener vision or greater height, but because we are lifted up and borne aloft on their gigantic stature*" (MacGarry, 1955, p. 167).

created a series of effects that were manifested in the natural world: that was what could be considered religion.

Following this idea is also Émile Durkheim, for whom religion was *“a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to the sacred, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden”* (Durkheim, 1915, p. 44). For Durkheim as well, sacred did not relate to a monotheistic god, but could refer to any object, animate or inanimate, that people considered filled with sacred qualities. Besides the non-monotheistic presence, the two definitions are very similar in their construction: in both cases, religion is depicted as a collection of actions and thoughts. Anthony Wallace shared the same understanding of it; for him, religion was *“a set of rituals, rationalized by myth, which mobilized supernatural powers for the purpose of achieving or preventing transformations of state in man and nature”* (Wallace, 1966, p. 107).

Discourses on evolutionary outlooks have been proposed, in trying to find a guiding pathway between the primitive forms of religion and the more developed ones existing nowadays. While at the beginning religious practices were probably carried out to deal with social tensions (McClenon, 1997), by the time of complex rituals men were using religion to express particular cognitive needs: when people were not able to find answers to existential questions, they turned to religion (Wallace, 1966). Religion would then be, according to these ideas, the consequence of Darwinian models and demonstrations of this could be supported by the evolvement of religious rituals: lyrics to songs were added to simple rituals when the mankind appropriated itself of language and only once the musical outset had been completely mastered did tribes start to add proper musical accompaniment (Donald, 1991).

The term “shaman” tends to be descriptive of magico-religious practitioners who, helped by various spirits and powers, perform outer-worldly travels as a form of divination. Mastering the spirits, namely controlling them, is generally considered as a necessary ability of the shaman. The etymological meaning of the word “shaman” comes from the Tungusic *“šaman”*, which means *“the one who is excited, moved, or raised”* (Lewis, 2003, p. 45). The shaman was the only being capable of communicating with the Supreme Being, a figure which could be compared for importance and significance to any of the Gods of other religions. Furthermore, the root of the word, sa-, means “to know” (Diózegi, 1968) and sets the shaman as that figure who knows more about the world of the spirits than the rest of the community, someone who has special insights into that world and who, therefore, is able to be set apart from the physical world and put into

another dimension, that of the sacred. Traces of Durkheimian theory appear then, when trying to locate shamanism within a larger discourse of religion. Another point in favour of this connection would be the importance attributed to the shaman: his was not only a figure of mediation, but represented the very core of the community; the shaman was necessary for the survival of the community itself. Keeping this on the back of the mind, one could recall how Durkheim considered the establishment of a community of sound importance for a religion to exist: religion indeed had, according to the French sociologist, firstly and foremost a social role. But Durkheim was not the only one acknowledging this relationship: Eliade as well declared that the shaman represented the very centre of a society. He well explained how the shaman was the only figure able to manipulate the sacred, but he also reassured the reader in understanding that the figure of the shaman was not that of a despotic leader: he was, yes, a core figure within the tribe, but he did not usurp the role of other participants during religious ceremonies nor in everyday life. This way, the figure of the shaman could be analyzed as reflecting Turner's conception of "*communitas*": a spirit of social equality, of solidarity and of togetherness (Turner, 1969). *Communitas* represented a state where all members were equal, in that they shared and professed the same beliefs, and were organized in such a way that nobody would feel excluded. It embodied a community outside of social distinction and hierarchies. Turner thought of *communitas* as opposed to a structure: set roles and positions within the community were not what, according to that British anthropologist, constituted religion. The importance that society had within religion was clearly outlined following Durkheim's ideology of religion being the constituent aspect of social grouping, but Turner took this point further by stating that structured societies had a negative impact on groups as they limited people to act only within the prescribed role they had been assigned. Within *communitas*, instead, people were relatively free: their actions were not constrained, they were not separated from others nor from reality (Turner, 1975). This might at a first glimpse sound contradicting: while the shaman is set apart from the rest of the community due to his performing capacities, he nevertheless maintains an equal position within his society. This needs some elucidation.

In his theorizing *communitas*, Turner pointed out how certain social ties are actually necessary within a social organization, underlining the "social" as a fundamental aspect of religion (Riches, 1994). A shamanic community was a very simple example of society, structured around reindeer-herding and hunting. Nevertheless, no matter how vast the size of a community is, a structure is necessary to keep a balance. The figure of the shaman was helpful in this instance as, holding particularly strong powers, he could, when needed, offer consultation to the tribe.

The religiosity of shamanism lies with the ecstatic experience: that was the most important element, and that also explains why the shaman was so relevant. Being he the only figure able to perform ecstatic journeys and encounter the spirits, his existence was necessary for the continuity of the religious practice. So far, three main components have been linked to shamanism, namely the shaman, the shamanic journey and the spirits. While a brief discourse on the figure of the shaman has already been presented, more will follow on the other two elements shortly.

The journey is intended to represent a non-physical voyage where the soul of the shaman travels from the physical world to the outer-world dimension, in order to get in contact with the spirits. Only the shaman's soul has indeed the capacity of communicating with the spirits and making them revisit their actions, therefore turning the misfortunes thrown upon the humankind into good events. In order for a positive expectation to be met, the tribe will have to attain to its religious duties; only then will the spirits take the request into consideration. It is during this crossing of worlds that the shaman's soul approaches the Supreme Being.

What Eliade considered the quintessential experience in shamanism, the journey, was something that he had already theorized as being a universal human psychological attribute, something that pre-existed in the human brain. Of course, not everybody was able to use that capacity but it was from this idea that the association of shamanism to neurotheology developed (Sidky, 2010).

Neurotheology insists on a connection between religiosity and the human brain: specific areas of the brain would be activated in connection to religion (Sayadmansour, 2014).

Anything could be considered "spirit"; a spirit can be identified with an animal, an inanimate object such as rocks or trees, or with the soul of the dead. The very nature of the spirit is not important for shamanism, as what matters is the relationship that the shaman has with the spirit. Spirits can be of two kinds: they can be good or bad. Evil spirits bring misfortune and bad luck to the tribe, which can be manifested in general cases as a poor crop, or an unsuccessful hunt. The shaman is intended to summon the spirits, demanding good fortune and protection for the community. The spirit then becomes a guarding presence, overlooking the community and safeguarding it from misfortunes. It has a helping role, which implies that the shaman does not possess the spirit nor is he possessed by it, but rather he directs it towards specific actions.

- *Globalization Versus Glocalization: Shamanism at the Crossroads between Past and Present*

The earliest theories setting shamanism as their focal point were divided between “generalist” and “regionalist”. Belonging to the first group of theories were those writing claiming that shamanism was a stage in the evolutionary development of spiritual culture. Instead, regionalists believed that shamanism only existed in the northern parts of the Russian Empire and its bordering areas, namely Lapland and Mongolia (Hultkrantz, 1989).

The present section aims at defining these two groups on a broader scale. The underlining assumption is a synonymy of sort between, respectively, the terms “generalism” and “regionalism” as just explained above, and the concepts of “globalization” and “glocalization”. Globalization is generally attributed to processes that override locality and that lays outside of temporal considerations. As defined by Giddens, *“globalization concerns the intersection of presence and absence, the interlacing of social events and social relations at distance with local contextualities”* (Giddens, 1991, p. 21). The idea of globalization is generally entangled with those of hierarchy and power (Pieterse, 2015) and tends to be viewed negatively, with the exclusion of significant underdeveloped portions of the world (Rodrik, 1997). Nevertheless, if one is to keep discourses of economics aside, globalization positively merges different cultures in various ways. The idea surrounding the concept of globalization is however one of “globality”, of constructs being the same around the world. The other side of the spectrum shows instead a phenomenon which, taking from globalization, is highly localized: glocalization, a concept intrinsically linked to “locality” (Robertson, 2010). It is having local and global in one single term, which is reflected in practices carried out around the world but with specifically local aspects added to them. It is the adaptation of the global to what is local, in order to maintain and highlight the cultural value of a specific nation.

Early understandings of shamanism attributed to it a medical purpose, and the shaman was generally considered a doctor: helped by the spirits, the shaman was able to treat diseases and help the endangered community (Zelenin, 1937). The idea was that the sick body was filled with living animals; these had to be removed by a sucking process which the doctor carried out. Once the animals had been removed, they became spirits and stayed within the doctor’s soul, as helping spirits for future instances (Hultkrantz, 1989). However, shamanism has undergone a long way from that initial time where it was associated with healing processes. Nowadays, it has become famous as a post-modern “world religion”, a sort of globalized phenomenon that every curious person can try out (Harner, 1990). There are many events and festivals which use shamanism as a propagandistic method to attract more participants (Stausberg, 2012). The debate about whether

shamanism is then a product of spirituality, and could therefore be categorized as religion, or whether it is a cultural movement is open once again: it is up to the believer (or the consumer, as the new believer could easily be called) who chooses the preferred interpretation of the term (Gilhus & Sutcliffe, 2014). Under this light, it is not difficult to make sense of Taussig's claim of shamanism being *"a made-up, modern, Western category, an artful reiteration of disparate practices, snatches of folklore and overarching folklorizations, residues of long-established myths intermingled with the politics of academic departments, curricula, conferences, journal juries and articles, and funding agencies."* (Taussig, 1989, p. 43). However, there are two main streams that need to be pointed out and which categorically distinguish new practices of shamanism into two fields: on the one hand, there is the intention of reconstructing the old elements of traditional shamanism in the modern environment, without any changes to its basic structure and on the other hand, there is an innovation trend, where traditions are mixed up with new elements (Strmiska, 2005). This idea links one side of the spectrum with a strong ethnic importance, while the opposite side is more focused on a relationship between humanity and nature in general, without any specific ethnic group in mind (Kraft, 2015). This is perhaps the underlying notion that Taussig was missing: he perceived the shaman as any guiding figure who, out of choice or because had been called to do so by the community, had an educatory role over the others. To him, the shaman was not the one entitled to usher the fortunate spirits towards the tribe, drifting the evil ones away. His assumptions were based on a very individualistic perception on reality, in contrast to what the shamanic community was working with. Primitive shamanism existed because of a tied group, because the group needed the guiding figure of the shaman. Shamanism was not intended as a research for an inner self, masqueraded by the spirits and the daily misfortunes. Here lays, perhaps, the difficulty faced by Taussig in understanding of shamanism as a religion: spirituality was for him primarily a research of the self, the private encounter with a transcendental entity. He erred in generalizing his narrative to an all-too-wide field. He compared literature to a spiritual discourse at times rooted in gender categorization, but did so in the clear mindset of a westerner (Taussig, 1989). While J. Atkinson's claims on Taussig's argumentation against shamanism were a critique of his assumption (Atkinson, 1992), her points seem to agree with Taussig's own line of reasoning. In reaction to Taussig's claim of shamanism being a Western category, Atkinson suggested that shamanism should instead not be generalized into one single phenomenon: to her, there was no such thing as a unitary category of shamanism. It was better to speak of "shamanisms", in the plural tense, where there exists a plurality of representations, all of

which share a significant core group of elements but are significantly different. Nevertheless, Atkinson's solution does not solve the problem: defining shamanism as one of the many "shamanisms" still makes it part of a new form of construct, something that is, exactly, "made up". Furthermore, she associated the widespread success of shamanism with a growing interest in various scholarly disciplines, including psychology and sociology (Atkinson, 1992). Again, this only supplements Taussig's idea of shamanism being a construct used by scholars to have a different field to study and to assess.

There are, however, scholars elaborating on the idea that shamanism did not merely appeared and evolved within the West. M. Winkelman (Winkelman, 1990), for example, has proven how culturally-influenced shamanism was, already from its first appearances. Through a cross-cultural study, he examined 47 societies, all exhibiting a different degree of shamanic presence. Surely, the presence of the West was significantly important in the study of shamanism as in romanticizing about an exotic Other it made shamanism more appealing to the public (Atkinson, 1992); nevertheless, it cannot be considered as a fundamental constant as for where shamanism emerged and developed. Perhaps, then, Taussig's claim would have been more legitimate if it had been about shamanisms, about the overly-large discourse that the West has created around traditional shamanism. Its initial healing purposes were adapted to psychological needs and shamanic practices were used to make troubled patients feel more at ease, reintegrating them with an otherwise alien reality (Lévi-Strauss, 2016). One should then distinguish between shamanism as a subject of study, and shamanism as a religious group; while the first one is a product of the West, the second construct would point to a cultural representation of religion (Santos, 2014).

What is culturally being experienced in post-modern and modern times is a trend of reconstructing traditions (von Stuckrad, 2005). However, there are different perceptions of this reconstruction. Popularized views on shamanism, which are more often than not drifting away from the true meaning that shamanism held at its very beginning, contributed to its expansion worldwide. They made shamanism look like something exotic, something that could only be experienced in places far away; shamanism became then attractive exactly because of that particular character that it got attributed. Thus, shamanism became the object of a religious othering, pointed at as something different and therefore interesting to experience. From other directions, there was a direct intent of wanting to adapt shamanism to the new religious world (von Stuckrad, 2005).

In a globalized academic world, some scholars (Francfort & Hamayon, 2001) are critical of the growing popularity that shamanism has reached: by presenting different demarcations of newly-developed shamanism, the outcome is a trivial adaptation of the ancient traditions, which most of the time are completely discredited (von Stuckrad, 2005). Others instead aim at asserting a form of authority for the new kinds of shamanism: these ideas are based on the assumption that in defining “new” (or “neo-shamanism”, as the concept will later on be addressed as) shamanism one should not confront it with a “true” idea of shamanism (Wallis, 2003). The background to this view presents a shamanism denuded of all its core elements, so that the finite product is something neutral that can be adapted to every cultural representation and influence (Harner, 1990).

There is something rather peculiar about shamanism, which for what matters could be extended to almost every (if not every) religion. It is the fact that shamanism needs to be associated with an ancient creation, with something that extends to a very distant past. Eliade would have agreed with this choice, considering that he had himself defined shamanism as the oldest religion of humanity. What might perhaps be annoying to some is the fact that, somehow, shamanism needs to be described as something old, as if that would automatically attribute it the right of being considered a Religion. This is not something new; it is a particular aspect of modernity: for something to be truly recognized, it necessary needs to have a link to the past. The conception that history contributes to the creation of identity serves sometimes to legitimate a people’s rights. Stressing the connection of shamanism to the past, then, might just be considered as a way to attribute it specific rights: shamanism was there in the past, it is delineated in particularly old traditions and for this exact reason it needs to be maintained as such nowadays.

Nevertheless, shamanism is particular because besides this strong underlined connection to the past, it is strongly embedded in modernity as well. That is neo-shamanism, namely an adaptation of non-Western tribal notions and traditions into a contemporary Westerner lifestyle (Lindquist, 1997). Neo-shamanism democratizes shamanism, eliminating all the restrictive aspects of the old traditional religious movement to make it more appealing to people nowadays. One instance is exemplified in the figure of the shaman: while in traditional shamanism the shaman was called to be such, had an interior power that needed to be voiced into a spiritual contact, and was the only member of the tribe with such particular features, shamans nowadays are common people who, through a series of lectures and traineeships, willingly become such (Reece, 2010). This is where

the discourse on glocalization could be resumed: neo-shamanism becomes a regional adaptation of the old traditional form of the global phenomenon, and it is built on various sets of locally-accepted characteristics.

As it has previously been pointed out, the word “shaman” means “the one who knows”. The knowledge he has, summed to the power he maintained within his community, contributed to his image being depicted along the lines of a “Noble Savage” (Basset, 2016): the shaman came to be viewed as a modern version of the myth, especially in Western environments. The figure of the Noble Savage, which tends to be remembered as being made famous by J-J. Rousseau, aims at symbolizing humanity’s goodness before civilization and progress corrupted it.

What has been discussed in the present chapter is intended as a background source of knowledge from which the following chapters will build on. Now that an informative and theoretical session on shamanism has been provided, the paper will dwell into an analysis of a particular side of shamanism, as experienced by the Saami minority in Finland.

Chapter Three: The Saami

The Saami are a peculiar people: since time unmemorable, scholars have worked hard in tracing their ethno-genesis in relation to other populations of nearby areas. Nevertheless, the Saami managed to preserve their own particular characteristics, finally obtaining the status of an independent group (Shumkin, 1996).

There is one main dividing line in analyzing the Saami population in relation to shamanic trends, and this is the widespread of Christianity. The arrival of Christianity to Sápmi brought along a drastic change in the central characteristics of the Saami people. Prior to Christianity, the Saami were nature worshippers and closely involved in shamanistic practices; they honoured the cosmos, and as other pagan populations, they venerated several deities (Stutley, 2003). In contrast to this, in Christian and post-Christian times, the efforts of missionaries contributed to a substantial loss of shamanic values which were sharply supplanted by traditional Christian beliefs and rituals. This chapter will display both instances, focusing on an analysis of the presence or absence of elements of shamanism as described in the previous section. It is indeed particularly important to understand that Saami shamanism did not originate in a vacuum: it was the resulting product of a process of merging different aspects coming from various trends of neighbouring populations and incoming influences (Pettersson, 1987). This is tightly linked to the very essence of being Saami: the origin of this people was never fully clear, and was at times perceived as the conclusion of several migratory fluxes of an in-between land.

A relative difficulty in analyzing religious elements and traditions both before and after the advent of Christianity is the scarcity of written documentation pertinent to the time before Christian conversion: what is definitely clear about that time is the fact that the beliefs of the Saami were not to be associated with a monolithic religion. The word “religion” did not even exist in the Saami language (Pentikäinen, 1997). The Saami would more rightly be considered as adherents to a world-view (Sergejeva, 1997): their religion did not just concern a separation between natural and supernatural, between physical world and outer world; it was a set of practices, a mentality that existed in a multidisciplinary setting where several elements were to be considered as equally important. It was philosophy, nature, the essence of the human being and its relation to the natural surroundings (Pentikäinen, 1997). When not understood according to these concepts, Saami shamanism is misjudged as magic; even though magical aspects did not completely evaded

the Saami way of living, they are to be associated with more general Nordic folk beliefs (Kasten, 1989).

Another complication arose with the discovery of a secret language within the Saami. It was made out of sounds that tended to imitate animal cries, or sounds to be retrieved from the natural surrounding (Stutley, 2003): that form of communication enabled the shaman to enter in full contact with Nature and its spirits, so that it was possible for him to discover its secrets. There were particular animals and plants that were venerated as sacred, and embodied the vector function of passage between the realm of the living and the Underworld; by eating those animals, the shaman acquired the knowledge of the secret language of Nature and was able to perform his journey (Stutley, 2003). This language, which was merely an oral source, made it impossible to retrieve specific information directly from a primary source and therefore constitutes a partial obstacle to a full research.

- *Traces of Shamanism Within the Saami*

Up until the 17th and 18th centuries, the Saami practiced a form of shamanism characterized by hunting and animal ceremonialism (Joy, 2011). The Saami were one of the few indigenous groups who had managed to maintain a version of shamanism which reflected the original Siberian form: cultural integrations and assimilations manifested themselves for the Saami as well, but their shamanic beliefs were strong and radical enough to survive a modernization of past traditions (Musi, 2004). Even though, perhaps, not every scholar identified the traditional Saami performances and beliefs as a manifestation of shamanism, as was the case for J. Schefferus who recognized in shamanism traces of magic only (Schefferus, 1673), many are the elements that could be examined as traces of shamanism.

The main idea behind shamanism was the need to control the spirits living in nature, as nature was the only source of sustenance for the Saami (Musi, 2004). The shaman was meant to ensure a level of harmony between the whole community and the natural forces. The figure of the shaman, however, also worked on a deeper level: it was the main source of preservation of the Saami culture and heritage (Joy, 2014). It therefore acted as the principal vector for transmission of traditional values, and represented the vehicle between past and present. The shaman was called *noaidi* and the first encounter with this figure was documented through rock carvings and rock painting, archaeological discoveries dating back to the Pre-Historic era; the images depicted on those findings are strikingly similar to those drawn on the shaman drums (Joy, 2014), indicating

therefore the possibility of having been made by the same person. The noaidi was the only subject invested with that authority, and this is an important consideration with implications for the identity of the Saami as independent from other indigenous groups of the area. Able to literally set in stone stories and myths from the Saami, the noaidi became a real bearer of traditions and contributed to the creation of a body of knowledge about the tribes (Joy, 2014).

- *The Soul and the Spirits*

Of extreme importance within the Saami traditional religion was the soul. It had a dual-pluralistic function, with involvement in both the physical and spiritual realms. The two or more sides of the soul did not conflict with each other, and when a person died the soul abandoned the body to continue to exist elsewhere. More specifically, the Saami believed that at the death of the body the soul would originate “second souls”, or “soul-shadows” to survive, and that at least one of the so-originated souls would be reincarnated in another body (Musi, 2004).

The helping spirit of the Saami was called *sveje*, or shadow (Stutley, 2003). The shadows represented sacred animals that accompanied the shaman throughout his journey.

One particular set of spirits is that of the *Gufihtar*, which are underground spirits considered as partially phenomenally real (Helander-Renvall, 2010). This is their main distinctiveness: they are considered very similar to human beings. Their being underground spirits means that they are guardians of special places only accessible to the shaman and the souls of the dead. They possess special abilities and are believed to be organized in their own society, with rules and traditions very similar to those of the Saami. These spirits not only guide the Saami in their everyday life, but share it with them: they are perceived as friends and testimonies also show how Saami are confident in making pacts and agreements with these spirits (Turi, 1966). Nevertheless, some Saami members fear the *Gufihtar*, as they are thought to command humans to follow specific guidelines: no noise is allowed, and there are restrictions about where to build a hut in order not to disturb the spirit (Helander-Renvall, 2010). The importance of these spirits lay in the fact that they acted as teachers of shamanic values and abilities to the Saami (Helander-Renvall, 2010). *Gufihtar* also had another valuable quality: they enhanced Saami identity (Outakoski, 1991) as being dressed in Saami clothes and speaking Lappish only, they were to be connected to the Saami only.

- *The Saami Drum*

One of the most important items to the Saami and the shaman alike was the drum. It was used for divinatory purposes and was full of significance to both the shaman and scholars studying shamanism. Saami used to divide their drum in three zones, which represented the places where the shaman travelled during his journey – the sky, the Earth and the underworld (Stutley, 2003). It was the practical representation of the Saami Weltanschauung, the Saami worldview (Pentikäinen, 2010), embedded in a tripartite division of the universe. The sky was a dome, at the centre of which there was a tree, called “tree of life”; in its branches, there were the sun and the moon (Musi, 2004). The sun was imagined as a female principle, and represented the motherly figure of creation (Hoppál, 1978). The Earth was represented in the form of a sleigh and was thought to be in the sea, floating over a giant whale whose movement could cause earthquakes and tensions (Musi, 2004). The centre of the sea was a meeting area for conflicting forces, where all the evil concentrated: this was represented as marine whirlpools (Musi, 2004). The underworld was never commonly represented: at times it was depicted as an isolated place where only the dead shamans could arrive (as in the case of the *Sájva-ájmuo*), while in other cases it was a dark and cold setting located underneath the Earth (Musi, 2004). There are, however, contrasting voices on this topic: to L. Bäckman (1975) the *Sájva-ájmuo* was not the realm of the dead, but the residence which the Saami deities shared with the guardian spirits. Generally speaking, the realm of the dead is a construct of Saami tradition that could be described as being part of a threefold set of ideals: it embodies traditional Saami elements, it reflects Nordic values and ideas, and lastly, it is also influenced by Christianity. According to the typical Saami world-view, the realm of the dead was a continuation of life: what had ceased to exist on Earth was still able to exist somewhere else. This appeared manifested in the perception of the underworld as the place where the dead shamans go, so a place of continuity for their majestic souls (Pettersson, 1987). Furthermore, the underworld was opposed to a general idea of heaven as the place where the gods and the spirits lived. Christian elements are to be traced in the idea of a life that continued after the life on earth for both the good and the wicked persons alike. This adapted dichotomy has been identified as existing in the Saami understanding of afterlife in relation to its contact with Christian missionaries (Pettersson, 1987). From this could be the perception of the underworld imagined as the physical opposition of what was on earth: everything was reversed, the underworld was an upside-down representation of the earth (Pentikäinen, 2010). As for the influence that the Nordic cults had on the Saami, some scholars believe that it needs to be associated with the pantheon of gods that the Saami recognized, and that reflected the deities venerated by other groups; one of such examples

would be Thor, the god of war that Scandinavians commonly worshipped (Schefferus, 1673).

Therefore, one can see how certain aspects of traditional Saami shamanism can easily be connected to other sources; this does, however, by no means mean that Saami religion originated as a copy-cat of pre-existing currents. It is just a manifestation of how several outside elements were merged into one cohesive whole, which came to represent the basic religion of a people. In support of this thought is the fact that the three realms were always connected: a pillar standing right in the middle of each realm guaranteed an ongoing attachment of places and elements, constantly in touch with each other (Pentikäinen, 2010).

The importance of the drum was already noticed by J. Schefferus in his "History of Lapland". He had documented how the members of the community using the drum could easily discover secrets and knowledge unobtainable by the rest of the society (Schefferus, 1673). The drums were richly decorated, covered with images reflective of the shaman and his community. This is also the chief characteristic that differentiated the Saami drums from the other shamanic drums: they had more pictures painted on the drum skins than their neighbouring counterparts, and were also used with a double purpose; instead of only being the object for an alteration of the state of consciousness in the shaman, the drum was constructed in such a way that specific requests to the spirits would be shown to the wider public (Sommarström, 1989). There were various movable objects inserted on the skin, each connected to one of the geographical layers depicted on the drum; if the shaman was to ask the spirit for good guidance on where to find the most fish, the drum would respond with a movement of the objects located in a particular river (Mantegazza, 1881). It is nevertheless peculiar that the use of the drum was not confined to the shaman only: in many cases, every household possessed a drum which was used for divinatory purposes by the head of the family. There still existed restrictions as to when and where to use the drum, and it was forbidden for women to even stand in proximity of it (Itkonen, 1948), which in itself is not too strange as traditionally, Saami shamanism was a male institution (Manker, 1938). It was not rare for the common Saami individual to make use of the drum: mostly, for what concerned private use of the sacred object, the requests reflected simple issues and did not involve any community principle (Pentikäinen, 2010). It needs to be noted that in those instances the drum was not used as the medium of direct interaction with the spirits: the spirits would still be summoned by the shaman only.

- *Towards a Saami Modernity*

In looking at modern trends of religiosity, one always has to keep in mind the existence of hegemonic power relations within and among social groups (Helander-Renvall, 2010). In the context of shamanism, it needs to be understood that the nowadays trend elevates what used to be a traditional religious aspect in the life of indigenous groups to fame and success. There still is a romanticized desire for what is exotic to emerge into the everyday life of the West, and the imagination of the Saami as a distant “other” is consequently still emphasized in western culture (Lehtelä, 2007).

Even though there have been suggestive changes in the way of living of the Saami, their society is still partially linked to the old traditional values of the past. The Saami community is mostly based on reindeer herding, on hunting and fishing, but the introduction of touristic elements has contributed to a change in the Saami daily life’s organization (Joy, 2014). Nevertheless, this change could be traced and understood in one of the most significant aspects of traditional Saami world-view, namely the connection to nature. Indeed, even though many Saami are now employed in the touristic sector and many others owe their own business, their efforts to maintain a direct contact with the earth are strong enough to constitute a link to the values of the past.

It would be incorrect to think that, with economic progress and the recognition of the Saami as an independent minority in Finland shamanism stopped existing. With the advent of colonial powers and the widespread of Christianity, accompanied by the use of forced coercion, Saami shamanism became a side participant in the life of the community (Lehtola, 2002), but it was never fully abandoned. Even though the sacred drums had to be handed in to avoid persecutions and trials, the beliefs of the people were not eradicated. Even nowadays, there are several currently-operating groups that act as a restoration of the old traditional values which some scholars describe as having been abandoned. While Christian missionaries, pledging for peace and solidarity, focused on confiscating and burning the drums, they also posed a direct threat to the Saami community as a whole. Many drums owner were brought to court and punished, because they did not want to abandon their beliefs and therefore constituted a problem to the expansion of Christianity.

- *Neo-Shamanism: Putting Religion Into Context*

Finland first experienced Christianity in its Orthodox branch due to its influence coming from Russia (Wilce, 2011). However, around the 12th century a series of crusades led by the Swedish state pushed the trend back to the east, starting to introduce the first forms of Christianity. From

the second half of 1500 onwards, Finland was then for a long time influenced by Lutheranism, at the time the official religion of Sweden under king Gustav Vasa. The situation lasted around until the 19th century, when Sweden was forced to cede its Finnish possessions to Russia; from that moment on, Finland became a Grand Duchy and the tsars of Russia pressured the new-born duchy to adapt to the main trends of the European mainland. Generally speaking, that was reflective of the Romantic current of folk and mythology adopted in Germany: there suddenly was a rediscovery of what could be defined the Finnish folklore and the entire nation followed in its footsteps.

After the 1990s, Saami shamanism witnessed a full-fledged transformation: it became the peculiarity of an indigenous group; while keeping its spiritual characters to some of the members of the Saami community, shamanism also collapsed to tourism and entertainment (Fonneland & Kraft, 2014). There are two main reasons behind this change: first, Saami shamanism came to gradually be intended as the main differential of a Saami nation; and secondly, it ended up representing the main ethnic element of revival of the indigenous group. These motifs are closely related and were both influenced by political trends of recognition and validation. Particularly, the figure of the shaman came to be associated with a symbolism of resistance towards the colonial power of the invading states and the authority of the leading figure of shamanism represented a refusal of larger institutions (DuBois, 2011). Since the advent of Christianity, shamanism had been forcefully repressed, denigrated to a side religion to be practiced in secret. Indigenous communities, therefore, used that item of suppression as a source of recognition: practicing shamanism equated a tentative of revive what the State power had harshly tried to eradicate. Rhetorically interpreted, this discourse might seem to be predominantly westernized: seeing “shamanism” as a construct, as something depending upon something else for recognition also implies reducing it to a limited representation of culture. It eliminates the idea of a complex primitive religion, in favour of Christianity: a dichotomy where Christianity is the predominant and validated religion, opposed to which shamanism simply becomes an idealized aspiration of a minority group. However, this negative view can be contrasted by neo-shamanism, intended as a modern expansion of shamanism itself. It goes against generalizations of shamanism and acknowledges the presence of something still interesting and vital to not only a small percentage of the population, but a wider group of individuals, wanting to find a connection between the past and spirituality.

Neo-shamanism developed as a stark contrast with the initial view of shamanism as being one unified phenomenon. Moving away from that primordial conception of the field, neo-shamanism advises for a plurality of the term, relatable to the different cultural settings analyzed. Neo-shamanism is to be interpreted as a revitalization of the old trends linked to shamanism, but it is also to be understood as related to the particular cultural adaptations of different geographical areas. These areas are located in the West, and this in turn results in neo-shamanism being a Western adaptation of a world-wide phenomenon (DuBois, 2011). Often, these revivals are linked to a feeling of nostalgia towards an idealized indigenous past: Romantic reminiscences calling for a return to nature and an imagined feeling of power and superiority are some of the reasons behind the interpretation of neo-shamanism. At the same time, while there is a stark tendency of wanting to create a strong bond with the past, not only on a cultural level but perhaps more importantly, on a personal level, other interpretations are possible. The desire to retrieve a connection with the past acted as the promoter for aspirations of filling up blank spaces of unknown values. It is mostly linked to introspective experiences, guided by a wish to legitimize one's own position.

Nonetheless, neo-shamanism developed as a consequence of the necessity to adapt to constantly changing times (DuBois, 2011): the globalized world of today, characterized by technology and advances does contrast the traditional view of shamanism, the one linked to the relationship between human beings and nature. Consequently then, some changes were necessary.

Globalization acted as the gradual input of a separation between the sacred and the material. The two spheres of influence came to distance themselves as a consequence of modernity (Benavides, 1998). As M. Weber had already theorized under the process of disenchantment, progress and technology eventually succeeded in taking control over humankind. Questions that used to be addressed by religion only came to be answered by self-reflection and subjectivity. The realm of the sacred was holding a side position in the broad discourse of globalized culture, but it was still present. While partly agreeing with M. Weber on the function of modernity, G. Benavides was highly critical of the disappearance of religion (Benavides, 1998): it existed in people's mind and it was still part of their lives. Simply, it had a different connotation. The mystical experience that religion used to provide was substituted by a form of so-called New Age spiritualism, of which shamanism came to be a founding stone with the prefix of "neo", symbolizing a change of sort.

Neo-shamanism is a fully-encompassing term, with relations to various aspects of life: from music to gender, from healing practices to botany. There clearly is a connection to the traditional form of shamanism; music is linked to the use of the drum and the call of the spirits, and healing was the

initial understanding and perhaps most used practice as related to shamanism. New adaptations of the phenomenon, therefore, tend to still have a connection with the past. Neo-shamanism is a counter-reaction to the commonly-held belief that a full disenchantment had taken place, and that the situation was irreversible. It arose as the reaction towards modern tendencies of seeing a relationship with nature impossible (von Stuckrad, 2002).

The stance taken here follows the lines of R. Wallis's theories: looking at neo-shamanism, one should not a priori distinguish between a fake and real version of shamanism (Wallis, 2003). Neo-shamanism, with its new adaptations should not drastically be categorized as fake. First of all, it should be remembered that new constructs adapt to changing contexts: this applies to religions as well. Primitive religions developed and sometimes they distanced themselves from their initial positions: it is an aspect of globalization, and adaptation is not necessarily a negative ideal. Within the context of shamanism, however, what changed the most was the popular reception of it. Missionaries and travellers had brought forward the most disparate and at the same time vivid sources of shamanism and their interpretations had for long been considered the only valid way to look at that religion: the shaman was the model of irrational behaviour, and shamanism in general was viewed as a backward way of living. Scholarly perspectives on the topic slightly changed the idea that the public had developed to have of shamanism; this process continued up to recent times, when shamanism came to be considered accessible to everyone. Shamanism existed in nature; it was the basic relationship between men and nature: it could be revived and re-established; it could be modernized and adapted to the situation that the circumstances required (von Stuckrad, 2002). This is how neo-shamanism came about.

Considering neo-shamanism as a religious revival means attributing it a psychological component: religion arises as a result of internal and external human needs. While factors such as epistemological questions and existential doubts should not be considered of secondary importance when dealing with religions, they should also not be the only focus of a throughout study. Indeed, reviving a primitive religion also means creating or strengthening a link with family ties; it can be analyzed as a defensive mechanism towards anxiety, and it can be understood as an expression of creativity (Hägglund, 2013).

A child's response to the world stimuli is reflective of what it is shown to him/her: while innate traits are typical of every human being, children learn to mould their behaviour according to what their surrounding presents them with. Therefore, when shamanism was the one and only religion

of the Saami, Saami children knew how to deal with nature because they would witness their parents' and community members' reaction to it. Shamanism's direct relation to nature implied that Saami children would learn to treat nature with respect, considering it a source of help: nature's secrets would be revealed to the shaman and communicated to the wider community for the community's well-being. As a consequence, shamanism was perceived by the practitioner as a supporting self to which to turn when in need. It was an ideal disclosed to children from generation to generation, something passed on from father to son. With the arrival of Christianity this traditional element was forced to a halt and the children of the Saami community were at a loss: the situation was new for their parents and they lost their source of inspiration and guiding figures. When neo-shamanism started developing, it was seen as the only possible way to recreate that bond that humanity had with nature: it was viewed as reinstalling the idea of kinship that traditional shamanism had brought along. Practitioners viewed neo-shamanism as a therapeutic function, linking the present to a past that had been destroyed.

A common trait in many religions is the dualism of life and death, which was not extraneous to shamanism either. Christianity views this dichotomy as both negative and positive at the same time: while death is the final response to a man's bad deeds, it is also the only way to meet the divinity, God. To core shamanism, death was seen in a very similar way: while on the one hand it was the deterioration of the body and the final experience of nature, it was also the only possible way for the common soul to meet the spirits. Death was embraced as a common state of trance, from which the soul would travel to the spirits and could be summoned by the shaman: the member that the community had lost was not actually lost, but would be guiding its members in a spiritual form. Nevertheless, exactly because of the feelings of disappearance that death was ascribed with, it tended to generate instability and anxiety: it made (and makes still nowadays) people unsure about how to react to it and was long considered a taboo in many societies. As a consequence of modernity and globalization cultures grew more and more similar one to the other; this sparked a general sense of fear about how to react to what used to be culturally analyzed and faced in a specific way. Neo-shamanism adopted the core perception of shamanism towards death, in order to distance people's fear in relation to it.

As for what concerns creativity, religion has often been considered the source of deep imagination: starting from a mystical creation myth dating back to millennia, to arrive to a conclusive "last day" of which several interpretations and pictures are presented. The idea of the existence of another world, a distant place from which the one people live in depends upon

triggers one's creativity. Imagining and believing in these creations is a strong psychological exercise which can be viewed negatively: it can be perceived as a willingness to be separated from reality, or as non-recognition of what is truly there. Neo-shamanism adopted this particular aspect of the discourse: traditional shamanism was associated with natural surroundings, with a real environment and therefore applying that perspective to the current state of affairs results in a clearer and more realistic outlook on the world.

The entrance of new spiritual movements shaped on the old forms of the same groupings, divided Finland into more than 10 different communities, each professing a different spiritual belief (Ketola & Martikainen, 2006). While neo-shamanism maintains some of the values held dearly by traditional shamanism, it rejects others of the same importance. One of such values is that of the community: traditional shamanism was embedded in a community feeling and it took shape within the community. The shaman would summon the spirits for the well-being of the community, and the religion itself had a shared significance between its members. Nowadays, instead, neo-shamanism adapted to the general way of life of the West: it is highly individualized and subjective, practitioners hardly ever come together with a common intent and rather, neo-shamanism is lived independently. Spirituality is viewed as self-development: it is about a sense of discovery of the self, of personal expression. Neo-shamanism is lived as an introspective journey, where the individual gets to experience him/herself in his/her authenticity. Modernity favours forms of subjective life as opposed to instead communitarian cults (Wilce, 2011). Experiencing their inner selves in an individualized and private way, people feel fulfilled. Nonetheless, even though the practical side of neo-shamanism is individualized, there still is a sense of cohesiveness which brings the members of the group together (Townsend, 2005).

A renewed way of dealing with shamanism is undeniable. What used to be sacred is now unified with the material aspect of life: there used to be special locations and objects considered sacred by the Saami. These were called *sieidi* and were considered particular because of their relation to nature: a piece of wood shaped in an uncommon way, or a cliff resembling an animal; they were interpreted as the direct participation of nature in the community every-day life. Nowadays, however, these symbols of nature are the major destinations of shamanic tourism and fame (Silvén, 2012). The *sieidi* act as the starting point to reconstruct the shamanic journey: they are a map to particularly interesting aspects of the past that present-day individuals want to become familiar with. It needs to be understood that the two agents involved in this situation perceive it differently: to the Saami the *sieidi* still holds memories of a time past; it evokes positive feelings of

affection towards their own cultural heritage. It is instead the perception of the modern subject that drags neo-shamanism away from its core elements of shamanism. For example, shamanism was used as a healing technique by the Saami, in relation to the powers of nature; in opposition to that, neo-shamanic practitioners tend to experience that healing-mechanism as something completely different, as something that has nothing to do with spirituality but that, instead, is an act of magic. Healers today claim to be the modern representatives of the old shamans, in trying to source their knowledge from actual sources, to obtain recognition from the wider public (Eriksson, 2004/2009). In Saami traditional shamanism, the healing process occurred through the use of the drum: the shaman and the patient would both be in a state of unconsciousness and would travel together to the realm of the spirits, from which they would receive enough energy for the patient to be cured. Nowadays, instead, neo-shamanism uses thoughts and reflection as a healing method: the shaman-healer is expected to concentrate hard enough to direct the illness out of the patient; the physical contact of hands between the shaman-healer and the patient is what guarantees the success of the action: the healer is the mediating figure that links the patient to a supernatural healing power. This method is often implemented by the use of natural elements such as water, fire or other minerals considered to possess magical protective characteristics (Eriksson, 2004/2009). The practice aims at recreating a connection to Nature, bringing the modern aspect of neo-shamanism back to its traditional core values.

Another distinctive element of difference between the traditional practice of shamanism and the modern re-appropriation of it is emblemized in the figure of the shaman. Traditional Saami shamanism appointed the shaman as a source of authority; the shaman was a special person, the only one in the community who had the right abilities to enter in contact with the spirits. Nowadays, instead, neo-shamanism claims for a multitude of shamans: practically everybody can become a shaman and all it takes is a series of classes in how to use the drum properly (Townsend, 2005). Becoming a shaman is a matter of wish and attitude: the shaman is not a chosen subject anymore; he is not a mediator between the earthly realm and the Underworld, but a simple human being whose aspiration was to become a shaman.

Ultimately, spirituality remains a very personal construct. It is about one's inner motivations, feelings and perception towards what is out there. This applies to new movements as well, and is in turn reflected in neo-shamanism. Nevertheless, current adaptations of primitive religious traditions can be analyzed following R. DeMille's method of evaluation, based on two main factors: authenticity and validity (DeMille, 1990). Authenticity refers to the truthfulness of the new

practices in relation to the traditions it aims at readapting; while on the one hand, neo-shamanism tends to reflect particular aspects of core Saami shamanism, there are also elements that are completely ignored and displaced. Validity, instead, deals with the practitioner's understanding of the modernized religion; practically speaking, does neo-shamanism respect what the adherent was expecting from it? This is where the situation gets nuanced and difficult to settle: the public's attitude towards shamanism has shifted in time and nowadays the expectations that people hold in regard to neo-shamanism has little to do with the original ideas behind the Saami performance. What remains is something practical: the expression of a newly acquired political significance, intended as having finally found a place in the world. But also something appealing, something attractive: the practice of healing, the use of so-believed-to-be magical crystals; small details which are aimed at creating a guiding pathway to the past, but which, actually, are a completely new creation of a modern way of life. A third significance that can be ascribed to this neo-shamanism revival is linked to the comforting function that it holds; indeed, overwhelmed by their too-busy everyday life, people find comfort in the idea of being cured through magic, through something that cannot be explained. Neo-shamanism, then, is acting towards a re-enchantment of the world.

Chapter Four: The Kalevala

The present section will deal with the Kalevala and its relevance in the formation and establishment of a Finnish identity. Primarily, the epic will be described in its basic plot but the dominant element discussed will be its relation to the shamanistic values of the Saami minority; for this purpose, the chapter will present those mythical components that reflect the traditional view of Saami shamanism. Secondly, an outlook of what the Kalevala means to the people of Finland and to the Saami alike will be presented. It will be shown how the Kalevala, in its being understood as the most famous example of “invented tradition” in Finland is still bearer of a strong nationalist influence which sets Finland and its people apart from the rest of the world, while acknowledging their place in a broad sphere of action.

The Kalevala is the national epic of Finland, compiled by Elias Lönnrot for the first time in 1835. From a literary point of view, it is a recollection of folkloristic tales, for a long time narrated and transmitted orally from generation to generation and then edited into one comprehensive version. In a non-literary discourse, the Kalevala represents a source of satisfaction for the people of Finland, who was finally unified under one common story (Magoun, 1963): a people able to call itself such, without any external domination imposed by foreign forces. The idea and aim behind the composition of the Kalevala had been twofold: on the one hand, Lönnrot wanted to accomplish something that was as great as what Homer had achieved, a famous epic that everybody would recognize and associate to the specific country it was from; on the other hand, instead, the Kalevala was meant to elevate the Finns, to make them superior to the subjugation of the Russians and the Swedes, to make them important for posterity. The past contributed to the creation of a new identity for the people of Finland, an identity that had either gone lost as a consequence of the succession of outer domination and colonization processes (Vento, 1992), or one that, perhaps, had never even existed. The Kalevala, indeed, symbolized the very existence of the Finns, their being as a nation and as a people of Finland (Wilson, 1976). Those holding the claim that the Kalevala was the object that had brought to life an already-present identity, hidden and repressed for political purposes, were strongly attached to the historical value of the Kalevala: Lönnrot had not invented the stories he had written down, he had simply compiled them, unified them in one finite product but they were stories that already existed, stories with a past, with a significance struck into Finnish territory since time immemorial (Dundes, 1985). It is clearly not a question about truth or falsity: Finland knows that the stories narrated in the Kalevala have never

truly happened; what makes them relevant and necessary is their significance in the struggling battle for recognition, the role played by the epic in the inferiority complex which the people of Finland were suffering from (Dundes, 1985). The power of the symbolic value held by the Kalevala is very visible all around Finland, where the names of many cities recall the main characters of the epic, and where banking, insurance and security services companies go by the name of Pohjola, Sampo, Tapiola, and Kaleva, to cite but a few (Vento, 1992).

The plot of the Kalevala is one that follows the classical epic guidelines: there are heroes, a mystic object that is the subject of quests and a big fight between two strong counterparts. The setting witnesses the region of Kalevala, the land of Finnish forefathers in tension against the land of Pohjola, the Northern part of Finland, what is today recognized as Lapland (Parente-Čapková, 2016). The epic could also be understood as a journey that several men undertake, in order to advance into adulthood and find a suitable bride (Haase, 2015): a sort of rite of passage, reflective of the indigenous character of the Saami but also highlighting the importance of the female figure, who would then represent the missing key to the life of a man. This positive view on the figure of the woman is in clear contrast with the traditional shamanic view of the Saami, but the topic needs nevertheless some elucidation; a later section will provide more information and interpretation on the issue.

- *Epic representations of shamanism: Characters and Elements of the Kalevala*

The Kalevala was thought to be reflective of the ancient Finnish world-view, of its religion and culture (Sihvo, 1973). In order to understand this claim, it is necessary to introduce the three main characters of the epic poem: Väinämöinen, Lemminkäinen, and Ilmarinen. They each represent one of the realms of the shamanic cosmological view, where Väinämöinen is the hero of the realm of Earth, Lemminkäinen the hero of the Underworld and Ilmarinen the heroic figure of the Sky (Giddings). The three heroes will be hereby analyzed separately, in order to better portray their relation to shamanism.

Väinämöinen's first appearance in the myths showed him as the god of chants, songs and poetry. Agricola had described him as one of the deities of Tavastia, but Lönnrot disagreed with it: to him, the gods had never considered the hero of the Earth as a god, but rather as a powerful divinatory figure possessing great knowledge. Literally speaking, his name means "the man of calm waters" and it is associated with his physical appearance; that of a steady and powerful man (Luthy, 1981).

Väinämöinen is in touch with both the earthly realm and with the underworld, as does become evident from rune to rune; he is heavily involved with the humans of the middle realm all throughout the epic, and he is also directly linked to it via his mother, the spirit of the water. Nevertheless, he performs shamanic journeys to the underworld, a realm only spontaneously accessible to the shaman (in contrast to the possibility of commoners of reaching the underworld only in their sleep and with the assistance of the shaman) (Giddings). In the Kalevala, he is often recognized by the name of “*tietäjä*” and his role is associated with that of the shaman (Merkur, 2005). One particular characteristic that he possesses is his ability of entering the realm of the dead, the underworld, which was a special feature that only the shaman had. It is right to question how, considering the intrinsic shamanic characteristics of Väinämöinen, the term “shaman” never appears throughout the Kalevala. One possible answer to this doubt might lie in the linguistic field: the word “shaman” means “he who knows”, and is therefore connected to the verb “to know”. In Finnish, the same verb is translated as “*tieto*”, and the subjective construct of “*tietäjä*” does actually refer to “the one who knows” (Fuente, 2006). Other than from linguistics, an example of this can be found in Martti Haavio, according to whom the main hero of the Kalevala should have been a shaman: “*The poets of the runes on Väinämöinen lived at a time when a shaman, tietäjä, played a central role in the religious and social life*” (Haavio, 1950). There is, however, a slight but influential difference between the tietäjä and the noaide, which needs to be pointed out if one is to analyze the figure of the shaman within the Kalevala. The term tietäjä referred to the shaman as perceived by the people of Finland, the Finns, while in contrast the noaide was the shaman for the Saami. Keeping in mind the primordial fight between the two tribes of Finland, precisely the Finns and the Saami, this differentiation is particularly important in understanding how, in the eyes of the Finns, their shaman was supreme to the Saami shaman: in the rune III, titled “Väinämöinen and Joukahainen”, the two shamans face each other in a singing battle; Joukahainen, the best singer in the land of Pohjola, hears about Väinämöinen and, jealous of his fame and sure to be better than him, sets out on a journey to the South to prove his abilities. The two sing about the creation of the cosmos, and the competition is clearly one based on who knows more; knowledge then, is the main topic of the contest, and it is also the main defining element that differentiates the shaman from the rest of the community. The rune describes both characters as shamans, even though as it has been already mentioned, never using this particular term; in this particular case, Väinämöinen is the ancient and wise magician, while Joukahainen is a

wizard², a derogatory term which tends to be connected with dark magic and evil acts.

Unsurprisingly, Väinämöinen manages to win over his opponent, showing not only his personal superiority as a leading character in the epic, but also the superiority of the Finns over the Saami (Pentikäinen, 1989). There is another particular reason for why rune III has been interpreted as filled with shamanistic symbolism, and it has to do with the presence of the drum. Indeed, even though there is no real mention of the musical instrument, the drum was traditionally associated with a particular animal, either a horse or an elk, in order to make the static object animated during the shamanic journey (Pentikäinen, 1989). Through the singing performance of its owner, the drum would become a real-life animal which the shaman would ride on his trip in between realms.

Väinämöinen is also the participant of another shamanic journey, exemplified by his encounter with Antero Vipunen. Antero Virpunen himself can be recognized as a shaman: he is the Earth Giant, and lies in the mould absorbing Nature's secrets in his sleep (Hyötyniemi, 2006).

*" [...] I am going on a journey
To procure the magic sayings,
Find the lost-words of the Master,
From the mouth of the magician,
From the tongue of wise Wipunen."*

What he has to face might to any common human being seem an impossible problem to solve: Antero Vipunen has long been dead. To the shaman, however, that does not constitute any issue: he has the ability to move between realms undisturbed, and indeed he manages to obtain the words necessary to build his boat and accomplish his task.

From his side, instead, Antero Vipunen embodies the figure of a primordial shaman, the one from which all the sources of knowledge come from. Indeed, he is the character possessing all the verses and words that the heroes need to accomplish their tasks (Waugh, 1995); the character to whom the heroes go in search of assistance and guidance.

² *"Then the wizard, Youkahainen,
Heeding not advice paternal,
Heeding not his mother's counsel
[...]*

Wainamoinen, the magician

[...]

Wainamolinen, wise and ancient"

Rune III, as translated by John Martin Crawford (Lönnrot, Väinämöinen and Joukahainen, 1888)

Lemminkäinen is the second shaman of the Kalevala (Sawin, 1988). In order to understand this attribution to the epic hero, runes XXVIII and XXIX are to be further analyzed.

*“Thereupon young Lemminkainen,
Handsome Islander and hero,
Changing both his form and features,
Clad himself in other raiment,
Changing to another body,
Quick became a mighty eagle,
Soared aloft on wings of magic,
Tried to fly to highest heaven,
But the moonlight burned his temples,
And the sunshine singed his feathers.”*

(Rune XXVIII, as translated by John Martin Crawford (Lönnrot, 1888))

The particularity of this passage is reflected in the transformation of Lemminkäinen into an eagle, the mighty bird of shamanism and the highest source of wisdom in Nordic mythology (Siri, 1998). One of the animals typically associated with shamanistic rites was the bird, and the shaman often imagined and perceived himself as being transformed into one to fly over the heavens or descend into the underworld (Stutley, 2003). Traces of this ideology can be found in the costumes used by the Saami shaman, who would usually wear a dress decorated with bird features, sometimes feathers and in other instances wings (Hultkrantz, 1979). Again, one should remember how the shaman would speak a secret language, often imitating the sounds of Nature, taking inspiration from the cackling of the birds; another element that shows how the bird had a significantly high value for the Saami.

This passage is not the only one where the shamanic features of Lemminkäinen are shown; there is another section, in rune XIII, “Skiing down the Elk of Hiisi”. The first element to discuss is the elk, born in the astral hemisphere and therefore already a mystical character (Pentikäinen, 2010): it had been created from pieces of wood transformed into living essences (Heissig, 1990) from which the connection to Nature emerges³. The elk is understood by the Saami as the spirit able to

³ *“Wicked Hisi heard these measures,
Juntas listened to their echoes;
Straightway Hisi called the wild-moose,
Juutas fashioned soon a reindeer,
And the head was made of punk-wood,
Horns of naked willow branches,*

release the sun in the spring (Huhmarniemi, 2007); this is perhaps the reason why the Sun Elk is one of the recurring figures appearing on the drum-skin. The Elk also appears in many rock carvings and paintings, often found nearby a water source as indication of the separation between the middle realm of humans and the lower realm of the underworld (Mulk, 2014). In order to accomplish his journey, Lemminkäinen has to perform three tasks; two of these are to be carried out in the realm of the Sky, while the third one takes place in the underworld, the realm of the Dead. Firstly, the hero-shaman has to ski the Elk of Hiisi, a demoniac spirit; secondly, he has to bridle the Elk and bring it to Pohjola; and lastly, he has to shoot a swan in the Tuoni River, governed by Tuoni, the girl of pains (Pentikäinen, 1989). To conclude his journey, Lemminkäinen does actually reach the Land of the Dead, which is a realm inaccessible to ordinary souls but to which only the shaman can arrive; the Kalevala hero did not in principle want to go there, he aspired at the high spheres of the Sky, but his arrival to the underworld has been interpreted as falling into trance. C. Ganader (1960), indeed, pointed out how the expression “Tuonela käydä, Tuonelassa vaeltaa” which literally means “to wander in Tuonela” (with Tuonela being another name for the Land of the Dead according to Finnish folklore) refers to falling into a state of ecstasy.

Ilmarinen, instead, is a different kind of hero connected to shamanism. He, indeed, was a smith and his main role within the Kalevala was that of having crafted the Sampo. Nevertheless, according to the shamanic tradition, smiths were considered the possessors of special powers as they could control the fire they worked with (Stutley, 2003). For this reason, they were believed to have a particular baggage of knowledge which must have derived from a shamanic background. The fire was a relevant item for the Saami as it represented the symbol of boundaries between life and death, and between safeness and danger (Huhmarniemi, 2007). Indeed, while on the one hand fire was used for warmth, to cook food and to protect the individual’s life from the outcome of wild animals, it was also associated with terror and fear for its destructive and hazardous side. Its double implication assured a respectable position for those who could master its usage.

*Feet were furnished by the rushes,
And the legs, by reeds aquatic,
Veins were made of withered grasses,
Eyes, from daisies of the meadows,
Ears were formed of water-flowers,
And the skin of tawny fir-bark,
Out of sappy wood, the muscles,
Fair and fleet, the magic reindeer.” Rune XIII, as translated by John Martin Crawford (Lönnrot, 1888)*

Furthermore, a ninth-generation smith would acquire the supernatural power of the shaman, which would have already lied within himself without him fully recognizing it.

As it has been pointed out in some of the previous sections, shamanism perceived Nature as composed by several spirits. One of such spirits is Ilmatar, the female spirit of air who gave form to the Earth (Kalafut, 2005); she is one of the first figures appearing in the Kalevala, and is immediately described as “Nature’s child” in Rune I and is associated with another powerful figure, that of Väinämöinen as his mother.

Another spirit mentioned in the Kalevala was Tapio, the spirit of the Forest. In principle, this spirit was a beautiful girl, but she had the ability to transform herself into an old tree as soon as she turned her back away from the onlooker. When hunters would go into the forest and sit around the campfire, she would be the main subject of their stories; attracted by the interest that the hunters showed towards her, she would stay with them all night, protecting them by malicious creatures and wild animals (Anonymous). The shamanic interpretation is rather self-manifested: the shaman would contact the spirits as a good auspicious for the hunters during open-season, to guard them from the evil and to ensure for them success and a prosperous hunt.

There is, however, one significative element within the Kalevala which seems to contradict the tradition of shamanism of the Saami; it is the role held by the woman. According to Saami customs, the position of the shaman was in principle allowed to men only; women were not even entitled to get in close proximity to the drums (Schefferus, 1673). Later on, this changed and there are many examples of women-shaman. Nevertheless, the Kalevala was the emblem of tradition and of the past, a set of incredibly old stories transmitted from generation to generation, which is why the reader would expect it to be the example of old practices, in opposition to a modernized attitude. In the Kalevala, instead, this view is overcome by the powerful position of Louhi, the queen ruling over Pohjola, who manages to appear in as many runes as perhaps Väinämöinen does (Hiltunen, 2001). Perhaps, however, she is a particular exception as many of the other female figures that appear in the epic are only given a minor role, and they emerge in a few runes only (Hiltunen, 2001). In the epic, she is depicted as an evil character, whose magic and power were the ones that the Finns feared the most (Bonser, 1917). Her main act as recounted in the Kalevala is that of having commissioned the creation of the Sampo, a powerful tool which was able to provide wealth and richness to the person holding it. The Sampo is the quest element, the one that the epic hero had to conquer in order to ensure his well-being. It is therefore clear that the figure of

Louhi is highly relevant, but there are several understandings that could be carried out in analyzing this particular topic. First of all, the mythological significance that Louhi had: she was the human personification of the goddess Loviatar, the daughter of Tuoni, the god of death and of Tuonetar, the queen of the underworld. Louhi was therefore the physical character embodying the goddess of death and disease (Bonser, 1928). This could be reflective of the negative connotations associated with the female figure within the shamanic tradition: women attracted misfortunes. There is, however, a deeper meaning that might be hidden behind the figure of Louhi and her depiction as evildoer: it is one that drifts away from the mythological stories of the folk-foundation of Finland, it is one that has a strong political and ethnic focus. It reflects the big dichotomy of us-versus-them, the century-old dilemma that could in this particular instance see the Finns and their established political and social position opposed to the dominated and rejected Saami, who had to fight hard to obtain their recognition as a separated group from the mainland (Kailo, 2001) as well as the power struggle in gender discourse, man-versus-woman, opposing male to female (Vento, 1992). A fight for the recognition of equal rights seems to be therefore the hidden motif in some scholars' interpretation (Kailo, 2001). A fight which, however, might not have worked out the best way: the North, Lapland, inhabited by the Saami, was portrayed as Pohjola, the evil land where women lived, the terrible area dominated by an evil queen. The South, instead, Kalevala, was the land of well-being, where people worked their lives without causing any significant trouble. And again, Pohjola, a wild and untamed land, home to an uncivilized population who could not do much else than fighting and seducing to please its needs is opposed to the perfectly-organized homeland of the Finns. From here, then, one can assume the subordinate character of women in relation to men, and of the Saami in relation to the Finns. People living without a moral guidance, uneducated and in need of help; people saved from the male/Finnish expertise (Kailo, 2001). There is, however, the underlying question of the identity of the Saami as opposed to that of the Finns: the Kalevala was meant to embody the existence of the Finns, the people of Finland and this seems to purposely leave out the Saami. What is atypical is the fact that Lönnrot used what traditionally belonged to the nordic tribes of Lapland as a source of identity for the rest of Finland, in a tentative of elevating the ethno-cultural elements of the Saami to those reflective of the high culture of other European countries. Nevertheless, he did it using the custom of a group of agents that were not the ones he was about to represent.

- *A Quest for (Finnish) Identity*

National identity is shaped by several different components: political aspirations, cultural constructs, social and personal stances, religious beliefs and linguistic differences are only some of the examples associated with a nation. Building a nation equates the collection of processes and activities that have given rise to events interpreted as belonging to the particular community within which they took place, of “Finnish-ness” in this specific instance (Häkli, 1999). It is the collection of events that took place within the territory that a community comes to identify as its own. It remains, however, that the two most prominent elements in shaping national identity are to be identified with nature and history; nature, because it is the proof of the physical bond of the community with the environment around and history, because it constitutes the connection between past and present, between what existed before and what a nation is at current time (Hoeven). When it comes to nature, the discourse is wider than just the flora and fauna of the forests and lakes of Finland. While on the one hand nature was the standpoint of shamanism and the centre of everyday life for the Saami, in the Kalevala “nature” also refers to the small geographical circle where the events took place. Indeed, even if the epic takes place in the southern part of Finland, and with the unfolding of the story the reader gets to discover new places in Lapland, the fact that Lönnrot borrowed from Karelian folk tales remains. Karelia is a region situated halfway between Finland and Russia, fact that raises questions about the authenticity of a Finnish-ness within the Kalevala itself: the particular characteristics and descriptive aspects of the epic sort of fall out of place in the wider discourse on identity construct. Furthermore, the stories of the Kalevala take place in a rather small geographical area to set the claim that it was a universal attribution for Finland as a whole (Honko, 1990).

For what concerns nature as such, instead, it is important to note how it was transformed and embedded into every aspect of Saami culture: from hunting to fishing, from the cult of animals to the personification of plants as spirits. Perhaps even more interesting is the reflection of nature in today’s Saami culture and way of living; indeed, even though nowadays the Saami live in a blended way where traditional elements are mingled with modern experimentation, between 10 and 15% of the population is still actively engaged in reindeer herding (Helander-Renvall, 2010). The underlying idea behind the concept of nature as viewed by the Saami is that of an environment shared by humans and non-humans, where human beings coexist together with their spirits; nature is a place where the Saami feel at home, safe, and it is the main constituent of their identity (Helander, 1999). Nature is personified and idealized as the protector and nurturing figure, sustaining human beings (Helander-Renvall, 2010).

The other core element in shaping a national identity together with nature is, as said, history. Rising nations needed a past to legitimize and reinforce their present, and to do so many countries used existing subjects such as ethnography, archaeology and folkloristics (Vento, 1992). The history of the past of Finland was connected to external domination from Sweden and Russia, at different periods of time, consequently. So when in 1917 Finland finally obtained its independence from the Duchy of Russia, memory acquired a strong ethnic value and the Kalevala served as the vivid and physical object of that memory (Schoolfield, 1988). Collective or individual as it may be, memory connects the subject to the particular time and space where the event took place. The difference between individual and collective memory is however exactly in that “subject matter” who, so to speak, is remembering. For a memory to be collective, it means that a wider amount of people has to be involved and has to share the remembrance of the particular event narrated (Ricoeur, 2004). With the Kalevala, Lönnrot created that event that people could, collectively, as a community, remember and perceive as their past, as their history. It is no mystery that Lönnrot himself was aspiring at something powerful and incisive, something that would change the perspective on Finnish-ness as viewed from the outside (Kaukonen, 1990). In order to elevate history to a legitimizing factor Finland had to rediscover its heroes, its origins and its most flowering moments (Schmidt, 1986). It is a concept bound to the Romantic era, when preserving the heroic gestures of national promoters was the basic function of history. Thus, Lönnrot started idealizing a fantastic land inhabited by gods and demi-gods, by shamans and queens; he made them real historical figures with specific fates and created the Kalevala. Suddenly, there was a story behind the creation of the world: the daughter of the air, Ilmatar, is fertilized by the sea, and becomes the Water-Mother. For centuries she remains pregnant, never ready to give birth nor in pain for the gestation. It is only when a duck, by mistake, makes a nest under her knees that she feels slightly uncomfortable and with a sudden movement crashes the nest of the bird, dispersing all the duck’s eggs into the sea. They break into tiny fragments that grow to become the Earth, the heaven, the clouds, the stars, the sun and the moon. The universe was thus created. Then all the other figures appeared, from Väinämöinen, who after nine long years of wandering at sea, lost, reaches firm ground to the many heroes of the epic. And finally, the Finns had a myriad of persons to venerate and consider their true heroes. It was the recognition of a real Finnish lineage that had walked on Finnish land long before the Swedes and the Russians had arrived (Wilson, 1975); it was their source of pride towards the past, and in itself, that was something new and astonishing.

And just as astonishing as the inauguration of a new era for Finnish identity was the use of a real Finnish language; a language that had been strongly supplanted by Swedish, the official language of Finland up until the 19th century; a language that had existed long before the binding of the Kalevala, but that had simply never been written down. Eventually, the disregarded language of Finland was being used as a national language. What in principle had only been an oral language, a form of communication that could only be heard was then being used by everybody. The reflection that this had on the epic itself is rather easy to catch: a collection of songs, sung by travelling minstrels, put together in a source of literature which is, intrinsically, about songs⁴. The heroes sing, they battle their ways through musical performances and their fame and recognition amongst their community members come from their singing abilities. Language played a double-sided purpose (Asplund & Mettomäki, 2000): on one side, it awakened the possibilities for the people of Finland to use their own language, it boosted their self-esteem and their recognition as independent from outer domination and impositions; at the same time, however, it was also meaningful outside the borders of the nation-state: around Europe people started being aware of a new country, they started recognizing Finland as a country with its own state of existence and stopped identifying it in relation to the past colonizers.

Cultural demarcations can express longstanding contradictions in the relationship between ethnic minority and majority, and this is the case with both Saami and Finns, and Finns and the rest of the world. Indeed, considering the history of domination and subjugation of Finland, the people of Finland had never really thought of themselves as being part of a true nation. The Finns, now intended as the whole population inhabiting the geographical region of Finland, perceived themselves as a minority in between the big powers and presences of Europe and Asia. The Kalevala embodies this struggle, it symbolizes the strength of a nation that had for long been subjugated and controlled by foreign power (Karner, 1991). The political value that it brought together with the idea of literature should not be undermined: the Finnish epic, indeed, acted primarily and foremost as the binder of Finnish identity. It is the epic representation of the dichotomy of good and evil, idealized in fictional characters divided under two fronts: good on a side, fighting for its independence, for its authority and supremacy, and evil on the other side, the enemy. It could be Finland, struggling but still battling to get rid of the Russians. Since 1809 Finland had been annexed to the Russian Empire: Napoleon, in order to destroy the alliance

⁴ It is indeed said that Finnish people “sang themselves into existence” (Friberg, 1988, p. 12)

between Sweden and England, his worst enemy, had sought help from Russia, asking to invade Sweden by way of Finland. Finland, on its own and with no defence, surrendered immediately and was conquered by Russia. Or maybe it was the Finnish attempt of inspiring its people to proudly accept its culture, in contrast to the dominating Swedish culture. And instead, what perhaps needs to be recognized is that this European-scaled struggle is portrayed as an internal struggle between North and South: Kalevala versus Pohjola, Finland versus Lapland. This is nevertheless peculiar if one is to understand the Kalevala as the representation of the Saami, in contrast to the portrait of the Finns: as it has been shown, many were the elements that drew similarities to the minority group of northern Finland, starting from culture and moving on to religion.

There remains, however, a strong disinterest in the position of the Saami, at least from an external point of view: Finns never claimed to have been related to the Saami, nor did they consider them as part of their heritage. It was a group of people who had come to live in their same territory, but with whom the Finns did not share anything. Traces of this appeared in artistic performances, where Finnish artists were carelessly representing the Saami simply as a subject of their art but without dispensing any form of interest in their culture (Hautala-Hirvioja, 2006). Generally speaking, actually, every encounter that the Finns had with the Saami was purely imagined and followed the Romantic identification of the northern indigenous as “the exotic other”.

To conclude, the Kalevala surely acted as a re-appropriation of a feeling of identity that had gone lost, while at the same time rebuilding the construct that lay behind it: that of identity itself, something that Finland lacked and that Lönnrot crafted making use of traditional tales passed over from father to son, in the natural environment of a chanting periphery. This contributed to make Finland a real centre of the literary world: a country that had built its identity and had come to be recognized from nothing, created *ex nihilo* from mythical heroes who came to embody the power of the entire nation. The ordinariness of the life of travelling groups who moved with their herds of reindeers had been transformed into an idol to be venerated, into something to be remembered for many years to come. Even though Väinämöinen, Lemminkäinen and Ilmarinen, together with Antero Vipunen and Louhi were invented characters, faked to create a common ideal of traditions, they all came to be perceived as historical figures, assimilated into the Finnish past. After all, Lönnrot had been an on-field ethnographer who had carefully travelled the ways of Karelia and east Finland looking for the right stories to be told; he was searching for the real way of living of the Finns, and perhaps had not realized that one single answer was not feasible.

Nowadays, the Kalevala is still used in Finnish schools and households as the example of a cultural

construct manifesting the past of the nation; children read it and learn about the mythical heroes of the epic, they face their forefathers and adore them. That is what Lönnrot had aimed at: an identity, something that the wider community of Finland could proudly identify itself with. And within it there is a part of Saami essence that keeps on existing: it is bounded in shamanism, and in the main characters of the epic. They are the ones that people look upon at, and they are the reflection of the real world-view of the Saami.

Discussion and Analysis: A Case for the Saami

This discussion fragment focuses on the presence and eventual significance of religion in the construction of a Saami identity. Is religion necessary in defining oneself a Saami? In trying to trace such a connection, it is of foremost importance to remember the meaning that religion held for the Saami. Having granted the fact that the word “religion” in itself did not even initially exist in the Saami vocabulary, it should be remembered that it needs to be connected to a concept of “world-view”. Now, the relationship between a person (or a group of people) and a religious movement varies in relation to time and space: it is dependent upon a changing context. The adaptation of neo-shamanism, then, might be reflective of an authoritative connection with the ancestors, in trying to certify one’s position within the main group; at the same time, however, it could also be perceived as generating a sense of belonging for a particular group of people. While the two stances could perhaps appear very similar in formulation, their meaning is categorically different. The first sentence wants to aim at a possible connection between shamanism and an already existing group, the Saami. After having been exploited and forced to abandon their beliefs and rituals, the Saami lost a part of their identity. Nowadays, they might be adapting shamanism in a tentative of recuperating what they got subtracted. The second stance, instead, points at a new group, wishing to emerge in relation to a past people. It all lies in the events following the first Christian missions in Finland, and not merely on a religious level: suddenly, the entire nation was colonized and areas that used to be open and free were bordered. As a consequence, people started being divided, in a very literal sense. Many inhabitants of Saamiland adopted the uses and costumes of the new majority, of the incomers, while a small percentage remained connected to its traditional values. But clearly, it all had to happen in secret: Saami could not use their drums anymore, they could not go close to the water-stem to get a more direct involvement with the spirits and so, generation after generation, the world-view expressed by shamanism was supplanted by a Christian one. Looking for a shared communitarian memory created the bond with that lost ancestral group. It is not that peculiar: westernization and the forced advent of modernity transformed the Saami in a group more circumspect of its own cultural ethos.

Indigenous groups have often been identified with the oppressed and underdeveloped part of a population: the periphery of the population, opposed to a civilized and sophisticated centre. For this reason, indigenous groups have always been considered vulnerable and susceptible to outer impositions. In the particular case of the Saami, they have long been considered the weak and

primitive race, the less progressed one that needed the support of the colonizer to be recognized (Axelsson & Sköld, 2006). Consequences of the state of vulnerability connected to the Saami encompass several fields, from education to political development; they reach economic engagement and social categorization, as well as linguistic and religious involvement. In the religious sphere, the threat that the Saami had to face stemmed from Christian missionaries: they were forced to renounce their beliefs and traditions, to embrace what was extraneous. Shamanism, the Saami religion, was banned and serious penalties were evoked when the imposed-laws were not respected. However, the moving vectors for Saami subjugation and categorization as an indigenous group did not only come from the outside; while the colonizers contributed to this denomination, there was a section of the local population who pressured for a stark contrast between the Saami and the rest. It was the Finns, the other local inhabitants of Finland. Unwilling to leave the nest of European values that the world was slowly identifying Finland with, several Finnish scholars acted to distance themselves from that savage minority which was racially different (DuBois, 2003).

How can one then know which aspects are determinant of tradition and which ones reflect modernity in an indigenous group? While initially it might seem that finding a comprehensive definition of the indigenous group under analysis could lead to finding an answer to this question, the basic problem is the assumed relation that an indigenous group stands as opposed to something else (Tafjord, 2013). It is either traditional or modern only in relation to another group, predominantly the majority group. In this particular case, finding determinant aspects of Saami religion equates setting them apart from the Finnish majority. It is therefore necessary to identify which elements are reflective of Finnish usage and which, instead, are left to the Saami alone. It is a rather difficult task. A Finnish identity existed far before a Saami identity was legally recognized; historically speaking, then, it would be logical to insist on the fact that shamanism kept on existing among the Saami for a longer time than it did for the Finns. After all, the shamanic world-view of the Saami was connected to a tied relation with nature: it was a phenomenon related to a nomadic lifestyle, to agricultural activities and pastures. The Saami have not yet fully abandoned that way of life: while they are now sedentary, they are still deeply tied to nature. For the Finns, the discourse is slightly different: even though their natural surrounding allows for a tight involvement with it, nature is not the main source of sustenance for the majority of Finnish households. Saami, instead, are still implied in agricultural businesses, they do owe reindeer herds and live a life which would be depicted, from a globalized point of view, less modernized. Another

clear point of reiteration of shamanic tradition is the use of the yoik, a musical chant used by the shaman and readapted and performed nowadays in various settings. Yoiking is a way of remembering, a chant that represents something in a very particular way: to the Saami, a yoik is never about something; it is something (Anderson, 2005). The yoik is that which it depicts. The shaman was thought to receive the yoik from the supernatural spirits, and he would perform it for both animals and natural surrounding alike (Ramnarine, 2009). Described and recognized as a musical performance, the yoik possessed a deeper meaning: it was part of the process that permitted the establishment of a connection between the natural world and the outer realm of the cosmos. As used within shamanistic rituals, the yoik was aimed at expressing the relationship existing between the human beings and the rest of the world around them, and it connected that relationship to a value of sacredness. Following the first arrivals of Christianity in the 17th century, yoiking, just like the use of the drums and the invocation of the spirits, was reduced to the personal sphere. Motivated by fear splurging from religious persecutions, the traditional shamanic singing remained hidden in the Saami cultural heritage for decades (Stockmann, 2014). It was only in the 1950s that a revival was appearing: both to enhance their own self-esteem and to maintain what was unique about their people, the Saami started to reintroduce the yoik into their community, with a rather happy welcoming reaction of the local youth. Instead of being a performance imitating the sounds of nature, it acquired a melodic sound often associated with short lyrics directed to manifest the power of nature; also, several instruments were consequently added. One of the figures associated with the revival of the yoik was Nils-Aslak Valkeapää, a Saami musician who used that form of melodic composition in his creations. Initially a poet, Valkeapää grew closer to the yoik as a symbol of his own heritage. It is instead with Ilpo Saastamoinen, a Finnish composer who focused on a one-tone yoik composition with long structure retrieved from the shaman's style of performance, that yoiking became accustomed with pop music insights (Plantenga, 2013). Another example comes from Wimme Saari, one of the most famous Saami yoiker. A recent participant research (Adriaensen, 2007) has shown how yoiking is a serious component in many Saami teenagers' identity (both females and males, between 14 and 18 years old): although a relevant number indicated a partial or non-existent knowledge of Saami language, the vast majority of the interviewed participants recognized the yoik as a symbol of their identity as Saami. Understood as such, then, the yoik can be viewed as a symbol of being Saami, retrieved from its shamanic past.

However, there have been transformations since the lights of dawn of shamanism: while in the

past nature was a non-men place, which human beings shared with the spirits, nowadays one can find buildings, roads, and cars going around just like in any other place of the world. The tied community with one single leader has now become a regulated and organized group, with members in the parliament and functioning systems. What tends to stress the differences between the Saami and the rest is precisely that “rest”; many are the travel brochures which depict the Saami as outsiders, dressed in colourful items of clothing, holding on to their drums (Fonneland T. A., 2013). They have become an attraction, a touristic entertainment for people to go and witness firsthand, to feel closer to nature and to the past. Visiting Lapland is marketed as a trip to another world, where traditions and magic are the predominant aspects of everyday life.

Nevertheless, the understanding of religion did not change for the Saami: spirituality is still embedded in a close connection to nature. Surely however, there have been drastic changes and re-appropriations of what used to once be the fulcrum of spirituality. It would be extremely mistaken to indeed think of the Saami as purely a people of the past. In order to get closer to nature, individuals undergo weeks-long trips to the inner forest, to experience silence and peace and find within themselves the strength that nature empowers them with. A returning flux towards the wilderness, to find what modernity has pushed away: shamanism today is an example of ecological revivalism, a desire of distancing oneself from the modern fallacies which have developed into making the Saami an alienated group. If one is then to see neo-shamanism as a revival of traditions, the form of shamanism practiced today by the Saami might have a confused denomination. While on the one hand it does maintain certain specific elements and is therefore rightly identified as a bearer of Saami heritage, on the other hand modernity and globalization have contributed to a drastic change both in the influence of shamanism on Saami’s life and on the ways in which shamanism is today carried out. Getting closer to nature with a spiritual perception is one thing; the wish of creating a link with a past that does not belong to the individual in analysis is a completely different thing. Identifying neo-shamanism as a continuation of past activities seems to be a reiteration of differences, like underlining in neon colours the stark contrasts between a Saami minority and a world-majority.

Conclusions

There are two kinds of religions around the world: the “big” religions, those which are established and widely recognized all around the world as the religions of humankind, and the “small” religions, which instead only exist in small communities (Redfield, 1973). The focus in this thesis was laid on shamanism as practiced by the Saami, an indigenous group inhabiting the Northern areas of Scandinavia, Finland and the Kola Peninsula in Russia. Particularly, the main point of research was set on Finland, as the homeland of two groups: the Saami in the north and the Finns in the south. Shamanism belongs to the second group of religions, that of the “small” religions: it is a collection of beliefs and practices carried out by a restricted number of individuals. Developing from this construct, however, neo-shamanism emerged. It was the product of globalization: a recollection of seemingly traditional trends, adapted to modern times. Opposed to the small religion-group, neo-shamanism can be considered as belonging to the “big” of today’s society: there are many adherents all around the world, and consequently many neo-shamans spread around the globe.

Traditional shamanism expresses a dualistic division of the world: the human world and its materiality are opposed to the world of the spirits, and each side exists as an individual construct independent of the other. Neo-shamanism instead tends to perceive the world of the spirits as united to the human world, with a full intermingling of activities. While traditionally, the shaman would summon the spirits for communitarian purposes and only in the particular case of real necessity, nowadays so-called neo-shamans look for spirits on an intrapersonal level. Current shamans stress the importance that neo-shamanism has on the individual level, to explore one’s emotions and inner system (Lindquist, 1997) and this is categorically different from what the old Saami shaman was doing. Furthermore, traditional shamanism witnessed a battle between good and evil spirits: some spirits would be beneficial and helpful towards the humankind while others would be just the opposite and bring bad luck upon the tribe. Nowadays, this vision has almost completely disappeared: nature is perceived as entirely positive. Nature has become an expansion of one’s own necessity to see some forms of good in the world, a sort of coping mechanism that creates a place to distance oneself from the sometimes crude reality of the current events. The trance of the ecstatic process which Eliade described in details applies today on a fully new level: the neo-shaman goes into a state of trance not to communicate with the spirits and acquire

information regarding good harvests or on the best place to hunt; the neo-shaman experiences trance for him-/herself, to find a safe corner in which to feel liberated.

This paper interpreted neo-shamanism as an invented tradition (Townsend, 2005): it arose out of a carefully constructed act of bricolage, wanting to grow on the footsteps of core shamanistic values while at the same time conforming to the sphere of time in which it came to appear. Developed on the grounds of globalization and following on the stem lines of modernity, neo-shamanism embodied a series of elements particular to the modern times: individualism, secularism and technology.

Neo-shamanic groups work on a community basis only in so far as meeting regularly as a group; the focus on the practices is individual and each member carries out shamanic rituals on his/her own. The traditional value of shamanism as working for a community, rather than within a community, has disappeared in neo-shamanic practices.

Neo-shamanism is considered as belonging to the core of New Age movements which are characteristic of the current religious times. Nevertheless, it is highly linked to the secularization of the world. While on a theoretical side neo-shamanism is a religion, in the sense that it is a system of beliefs and practices related to the sacred, it does follow the hypothesis postulated by sociologists such as K. Marx, M. Weber and E. Durkheim, according to whom as a result of modernity the world as a whole would develop to witness a decrease in religiosity. The particularity of neo-shamanism in this respect is the fact that shamanism was intended to be its starting point, the apices from which neo-shamanism was meant to follow. As it has been pointed out throughout the development of the chapters, shamanism never considered itself to be a religion as postulated by the Western mind: it was a way of life, a world-view. There was, however, a sense of spirituality embedded within the core elements of shamanism: this is what allowed for it to be considered a religion.

Lastly, technology needs to be mentioned: while religions used to be restricted to the community which professed them, as a result of technology there was a widespread of beliefs that developed further away from its geographical fulcrum. Many adaptations of shamanism started being created, and with time neo-shamanism grew more popular. This process, however, was not one-sided only: while neo-shamanism was displaying its core elements to the world, through the use of the interweb, there were several people interested in the positive outcomes that could be generated from a close involvement with these practices. There was a revival of laments, of drums performances, of trances and that made people become more acquainted with shamanism.

One of the most important roles that shamanism plays today is the establishment of a line of succession between past and present. It is carried out through the transmission of old religious traditions, but more importantly through the use of a Saami language. It needs to be kept in mind that shamanism was an oral religion, without any form of written text and purely transmitted orally from generation to generation. The magnitude of Saami language as the vector of transmission of a shamanic background is even more important in this case: language generally transmits the spiritual meanings of a people, as their spirituality is embedded in the linguistic forms that they use (Pentikäinen, 2009). Furthermore, Saami is considered an endangered language that not many people can still speak fluently. Even children of Saami heritage sometimes only understand it orally, but have no real grammatical knowledge of it. The shamans, instead, are the few remaining speakers of the local language (Pentikäinen, 2004), acting as the guardians of traditions and at the same time representing the physical link between the past and the present. Perhaps, then, this could explain why so many individuals long for becoming a shaman in the contemporary milieu: they hope to be the actors in a revival of traditional customs. What is however happening is that, due to the vast changes brought to the traditional form of shamanism that they wished to bring back to life, that traditional aspect has gone lost.

Now, in the milieu of Finland shamanism (and consequently neo-shamanism as a tentative of revival of a traditional form of spirituality) has to be divided into two sets. On one side, shamanism as implied by the Saami, the modern descendents of the ancestral shamans of the past and on the other side shamanism as adopted by the Finns. Even if at a first glimpse these two forms might seem to be a logical and geographical adaptation of the same initial branch, the results that this paper has produced are significantly different.

The Saami maintain a tradition of shamanism very close to that of their former generations: the factors of modernity that have been introduced as a consequence of globalization do not diminish the cultural significance that shamanism held in the past. The changes that Saami society witnessed were the result of temporal and spatial factors, and shamanism came to follow on those lines. The connection between the Saami and their form of shamanism is tightly based upon their definition of heritage. Remaining linked to shamanism and performing it helps maintaining the bond with the past, which due to historical events had been stretched to the limit.

The results of this analysis point to, perhaps, what could be defined as a category mistake: the Saami, for their part, would not identify with the term “neo-shamanism”. To them, carrying out

practices of shamanism has remained rooted in the traditional form of spirituality that their forefathers used to adopt. Identity is a difficult concept to nail down, one which possesses many definitions and which can be moulded according to the disciplined in analysis; nevertheless, it represents the awareness of an individual of being a persisting entity. Ethnicity seems to therefore constitute a major share within the construction of identity and what the Saami have tried to do in performing shamanic rituals throughout time has to do with this particular element.

The Finns, instead, were not culturally linked to shamanism in any way. While it is true that Saamiland is a part of Finland, geographically speaking, both the Saami and the Finns have long persevered following a rather independent stance: practically speaking, the Saami did not want to be Finns, and the Finns did not want to be Saami. Even more, for centuries the Finns have tried to eliminate any sort of definition of being Saami, with derogative actions aimed at not recognizing the Saami any sort of individual identity. Perhaps, this is the point of departure from which to understand the Finnish appropriation of shamanism. Ashamed of their past actions or in a tentative of redeeming themselves from those acts of disavowal, the Finns decided to embrace what was traditionally Saami. This is not the only possible reason, however: Finland, as it has been explained in detail, longed for a recognized identity at a European and wide level. After having been dominated and subjugated by foreign domination, it deeply wanted to be recognized as a nation of its own. Clearly, its people nourished the same desire. The problem with that was, however, that unlike with the setting of geographical borders, a people could not arise out of nowhere. In order to establish itself as a true people, the Finns had to find a connection with the past; a past, however, that was not depended on its dominators, that was not connected to its occupants. Thus, the adoption of Saami traditional elements and stories: as chapter three on the Kalevala discussed, those were the sole inhabitants of Finland who had kept true to themselves. There is another interpretation possible, which links new forms of shamanism as interpreted by the Finns with psychotherapy. In the 19th century, psychiatry was considered to be associated with magic; people would be fascinated by it, while at the same time they were trying to get away from those indigenous roots (Wilce, 2011). Then, throughout the course of the 20th century, people started becoming more and more engaged with that: a sort of hybridity developed, and neo-shamanism started becoming appealing to more individuals looking for personal stability and security. A complete transformation from the initial values that shamanism held for the Saami, the Finnish interpretation of it is necessarily to be traced back to a discourse of exoticism and interest

in diversity: a cult of the different, adapted in ways that had very little (or sometimes nothing at all) to do with the true cultural values from which they declared to be taking inspiration.

As it has been shown, a particularly important element within the practice of shamanism is the drum. Historically speaking, drums were used by the shaman as a form of communication between the two worlds: the drum symbolized the vector between the physical world and the outer world and it was the material element that connected the shaman to the spirits. It also had an explicative function, in the sense that it made visible to the community as a whole the effects of the spirits. Parts of the drum, indeed, would move: the drum embodied a map, a map with special characteristic as it could only suffice its purpose with the common intervention of the spirits and the shaman together. Even though there were drums that belonged to members of the community who had nothing to do with the shaman, directly, the signification of such instrument to the shaman him-/herself should not be undermined. It is under this particular light that it is peculiar to realize that none of the drums found were crafted by Finnish individuals: what is today visible in museums all around the Scandinavian Peninsula is the production of Saami craftsmanship. The Finns adopted these elements, symbols of cultural significance and identity for the Saami, and foreshowed them to the public; whether a process of acculturation or amalgamation, there is a positive remark to be made in relation to it: introducing elements of typical Saami heritage, with their own cultural value, moved the Finns away from the negative connotation with which they had historically been associated in relation to their northern counterpart.

It is in this sphere of diversity, in this distinction between two peoples that one is to understand neo-shamanism. While for the Finns neo-shamanism is a practice of connection with nature, a search for spirituality and an inquiry into a sense of self-ness, for the Saami it has a different significance. It is a remembrance of their past, it is a symbol of everything that has been and consequently, it is a cultural creation. Saami neo-shamanism, while being categorically different from Finnish neo-shamanism, holds true to the traditional values from which it came to arise. The prefix "*neo*" simply has an historical meaning: an innovation, which in its core is still linked to the events that preceded it. For the Finns, neo-shamanism is a revolution, it is the creation of something completely new; the sense of new, however, does not come from the "*neo*", but from "*shamanism*" itself. Shamanism witnessed a full shift: from being the spiritual form of life of a

minority group, it became the flag to be waved to be recognized as part of a big, global, community.

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