

ANNA WESTMAN KUHMUNEN

A Female Perspective on Sami Bear Ceremonies

ABSTRACT Researchers have often seen Sami bear ceremonies as exclusive male activities since the hunting was performed by men. This asymmetrical outlook on men's and women's participation in rituals is partly due to the old source material, which generally has a male point of departure. This view has also been reinforced by later researchers. By introducing Anna Tomasdotter and her account of the Sami bear ritual, a source not frequently used, the author of the article brings to the fore a female perspective on the ceremony. The complementary gender roles in Sami religion are thus put in focus.

KEYWORDS Bear ceremonies, Sami religion, female perspectives, Pehr Fjellström, Jonas A. Nensén, Anna Tomasdotter

The Swedish clergyman Pehr Fjellström's *Kort Berättelse om Lapparnas Björna-fänge, Samt Deras der wid brukade widskeppelser* ['A short account of the bear hunt among the Lapps, and their superstitions connected with it'] from 1755 serves as valuable source material for historians of religions and many other academic disciplines, since it includes a myth and a description of a ceremony connected with

the ritual bear hunt. Historians of religions have analysed the ceremony within the framework of a male hunting culture (Karsten 1955; Bäckman 1981; Holmberg [1915] 1987; Edsman 1994). Gestures and postures have been analyzed (Norlander-Unsgaard 1985) as well as the meaning of separate rituals. Different ritual entities within a ceremony have been interpreted, among other things, as rituals of atonement and purification (Bäckman 1981: 49 f.; Edsman 1994: 50), apotropaic rituals (Paproth 1964), vegetation rituals (Reuterskiöld 1912: 24–26), and rituals for the resurrection of the bear (Edsman 1994: 88). Together with the highlighting of the erotic elements (Bäckman 2013: 174 f.; Pentikäinen 2007: 48) these studies show that the bear ceremony contains many dimensions that have already been addressed by historians of religions. Alternative approaches have also been employed. The myth of the bear and the woman, for example, has been the focus for studies from the current perspectives of eco-feminism and indigenous scholars, where the aim has been to move the ceremony from a hunting to a life-giving context (Kailo 2008: 243 f.; Helander-Renvall 2008: 315 ff.). A characteristic—but also problematic—feature is that personal experiences can become a part of the source material.

The ritual hunting of bear connects Sami beliefs and practices with customs among other Circumpolar hunting cultures. A comparative method has therefore most frequently been applied in the above-mentioned works. Sometimes this has meant the anticipation of a historically common bear ceremony among the different peoples, but other times the comparative approach has simply been used to strengthen an argument by adding examples from other cultures. Although, a critical approach to the use of some of the more general comparisons has been put forward in favor of a limitative approach (Rydving 2011).

The hunting of bear has a geographical spread as well as chronological depth, and each period and place has its own conceptions and rituals linked to the bear. This is one of the reasons why it is preferable to speak about bear ceremonies in the plural rather than in the singular. The bear ceremonies have been seen as one of the very oldest parts of Sami religion, belonging to a hunting society that preceded the reindeer-herding culture, and depicted on rock-carving fields in northern Fennoscandia. The written source material from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, which mostly reflects a reindeer-herding culture, does however show that bear ceremonies were vivid parts of Sami religion, even during that period. In archives we can find nineteenth- and twentieth-century accounts of reindeer-herding and settled Sami and their relation to the bear and in the present day we can follow discussions on human relations to the bear in the mass media and in the vast literature on hunting. Altogether this shows that relations between humans

and bears have been long established but they have naturally changed over time (Sarmela 2009: 79–106).

This article starts from the accounts of two people about how bears were hunted ritually. Between 1820 and 1825 Anna Tomasdotter told the Swedish clergyman Jonas A. Nensén her life story and about Sami traditional knowledge. One of the sources for this article is her account of the bear ceremony and the other is Pehr Fjellström's previously mentioned description. The aim of the article is to highlight Tomasdotter as a producer of ritual knowledge, whose life story until now has been little known and seldom referred to in works on the bear ceremony. She tells of personal experiences from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. This is unique in a Sami context, since women's narratives are virtually absent in earlier sources and are relatively uncommon in later ones. The present article in a sense uses a limited comparative approach since it starts from two descriptions of Sami bear ceremonies that are drawn from a geographically and chronologically limited area and focuses on particularity and conceptuality. Based on a comparison between the two descriptions, one can raise questions concerning gender, age, ethnicity, insider/outsider perspective and the influence of the cultural background on the source material. Another important question raised is what ritual knowledge women possessed and how it was expressed in the bear ceremonies.

A detailed analysis of the existing source material has been undertaken by Carl-Martin Edsman (1994). Using Fjellström's description, among others, he examines the ceremony from a perspective that is strictly that of male hunters. Women are only marginally present in his discussions and if present they are not actors; instead they are shown to be hedged about with taboos and their participation in the ceremony involved performing apotropaic rituals (Edsman 1994: 50, 58, 65). Similar views are expressed in much of the early research (Holmberg [1915] 1987: 41–48; Karsten 1955: 113–122). The asymmetrical outlook on women and men has been taken up for discussion by feminist researchers, and shown to be constructed on several levels. Many of the authors of the source material took a male point of departure in viewing Sami religion, which is reflected in their work, where women's participation is largely absent. To put it somewhat crudely, male clergymen talked with Sami men about their religious practices. Their accounts are thereafter seen as valid for the whole of the Sami community. These views can easily be filtered through the researchers' eye, which reinforces the image of women as marginal and tabooed during ceremonies (Gross 1987; Keinänen 1999: 148). Researchers have to some extent tried to qualify this picture (Bäckman 2013: 117–136; Rydving 1993: 144–151). Inspired by Rita M. Gross some methodological considerations, which expose the

bias, can be used. One approach is to investigate how a male focus affects source material and interpretations; another is to reveal the ways in which women are allowed to speak in the material, instead of merely applying stereotyped ideas about women (Gross 1987: 38 f.). At the same time a complementary view on gender roles that existed in Sami culture must be considered. A comparison between Fjellström's and Tomasdóttir's accounts make such an approach possible.

Two Knowledge Producers in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries

Pehr Fjellström (1697–1764) was the son of the clergyman Per Noreaus Fjellström and came to Likssjuo (Swedish Lycksele)¹ to teach at the Skyttean school (Swedish *Skytteanska skolan*) and later he also became rector of Likssjuo (Rydving 2010: 63). Fjellström's daughter later married another prominent missionary and vicar, Pehr Högström. Fjellström was in that way part of a network, on both a professional and kin level, which produced and redistributed knowledge on Sami religion. The Skyttean school was a boarding school for Sami children founded in 1632. The education of young Sami was at that time part of the mission strategy and all education was bound up with Christian philosophy and religiosity. The children were sometimes taken by force from their education and care in the family. After completing their studies they were meant to return home to their Sami families and work for the abandonment of the traditional religion. The education system together with the Christian mission, taxation and trade were different aspects of Sweden's colonial interaction with the Sami during that period (Fur 2006; Lindmark 2013). The pupils at the school were probably participants in Fjellström's effort to learn more about the bear ceremony.

We know nothing about whom Fjellström spoke to concerning the bear ritual or how the information for the book, from 1755, was collected. Fjellström's manuscript contains no Sami names or place-names that could hint in any direction, which is typical of much of the early source material on Sami culture. The fact that he was well read regarding contemporary literature about the Sami is clear from the way he carefully distinguishes between what he recorded himself and what, for example, Johannes Schefferus had published previously in *Lapponia* (1673). His information comes from the more southerly Sami area, whereas Samuel Rheen's material, which was Schefferus most frequently used source, comes from the Lule Sami area further north (Fjellström [1755] 1981: 9).² It is evident that Fjellström used both previously published sources and oral material, since in some sections he presents several alternative rituals and different interpretations of their meaning. He also writes about people being reluctant to tell him anything

at all about rituals. It is uncertain, however, whether he talked to women, although he does describe rituals in which women took part.

It is not improbable that he used the same method for writing about bear ceremonies as when he wrote his books on the Sami language. Fjellström wrote primers and a grammar of Sami, and made translations between Swedish and Sami. He worked to establish a written Sami language, based on the dialects spoken in the northern parts of Ume Lappmark and perhaps the southern fringe of Pite Lappmark (Sköld 1986: 17 ff.; Bäckman 1981: 38 ff.). His book about bear feasts reflects the same desire to systematize and standardize different Sami traditions from south of Lule Lappmark. It has been pointed out, however, that the Sami words in Fjellström's text are not actually South Sami but instead from the more northern Pite and Lule Sami dialects (Bäckman 1981: 58 f.). This ambiguity as to provenance can also be explained by the fact that Likssjuo was a hub where Sami from a relatively wide geographical area converged. The yearly market for trade and the Sami school brought together in Likssjuo Sami with different traditions who spoke divergent dialects. As a teacher at the school, Fjellström was also in close contact with young Sami and men through whom he most probably learned about the bear ceremony.

A different method was used by Jonas Andreas Nensén (1791–1881), who interviewed and talked to Anna Tomasdotter. Nensén served as a clergyman and curate in Västerbotten. The detailed notes he left behind were written on his travels and during stays in Västerbotten and Norrbotten but the majority of the material was collected from interviews conducted in his home in Kraapohke³ (Swedish Dorotea) and Likssjuo between 1818 and 1841.⁴ His main interests were ethnography, language, and the cultures of northern Sweden, as well as topography and zoology. The material comprises his own observations and records of conversations with Sami, Swedes, and Finns. Phebe Fjellström has held up Nensén as an example of a modern field researcher who collected unique material, and the ethnologist Sigrid Drake has used parts of the Sami material in her dissertation (Fjellström 1986: 37–54; Drake [1918] 1979: XII ff.). His notes are well-balanced and lack the pejorative judgments that can be seen in earlier writings by clergymen on Sami culture and religion. The Sami he spoke to and questioned were both women and men of various ages and social status. Nensén also made careful notes about their background; the maid Maria Johanna Pätas—a former nomad, settled on crown land—, Anders Pålsson, the boy Anders Andersson, the girl Grete Sjulsson, the catechist Lars Persson, and Kristoffer Sjulsson, to name just a few examples (Drake [1918] 1979: XIII f.).

The habit of carefully noting personal data and place-names, and the form he gave to the topics and questions, display the influence of the aca-

demic milieu in which Nensén received his education (Fjellström 1986: 42–51).⁵ We may assume that Nensén had also read Fjellström's book. Nensén belonged to an age when missionary work to convert the Sami was no longer the central activity it had been for earlier clergymen. At this point the Church considered the Sami to be Christians. Thus, the interest of clergymen could focus instead on recording the past. As a result, the later material differs from material written earlier.

Anna Tomasdotter was in her seventies when she told the young clergyman, Nensén, about her life. She was born in 1751 and was only a child when Fjellström's book on the bear ceremony was published, and she had probably not read the book. The conversations between Tomasdotter and Nensén are dated 1820–1825 in Likssjuo. Quite a lot is known about Tomasdotter's biographical accounts. She grew up in a relatively well-off reindeer-herding family whose migration route lay between Norway and Sweden. The family had their winter grazing area for the reindeer in the parish of Hemnes on Ranfjord in Norway and summer grazing area in Dearnä (Swedish Tärna) on the Swedish side of the border. It is clear that she had been strong and healthy as a child. She recounts how her father praised her when, as a young girl, she understood the importance of keeping hold of the dog when herders came with migrating reindeer. There was also the time when she managed to keep up with her father during the hard migration with the reindeer while their two older maids had to stop to rest for the night. She had only two months of schooling. When she was 20 she married Lars Johansson, a widowed reindeer herder from Ranbyn⁶ on the Swedish side. In contrast to Anna's mother, neither Anna herself nor her father was keen on the marriage. Her father thought that Johansson was not well enough off and that he already had too large a family—three sons and a maid. Anna's mother had her way, however. She argued that it was good to have a son-in-law who lived at Stoerevaerie, in the middle of the migration route between Norway and Sweden. She also thought it was a good thing that there were already plenty of reindeer herders in his family, and pointed out that he owned a little bit of everything. Johansson proposed for three years before the marriage came about. The first year he spent the summer with Annas's family working with reindeer in Agkelevuemie, in the second summer Anna's father was with him in Stoerevaerie and finally in the third summer he moved to Agkelevuemie, and it was only then that the betrothal and wedding took place. Anna Tomasdotter had three sons and four daughters, two of whom died very young. She described the birth of the fourth child, Anna Maria, to Nensén. Just as her husband put on a pot of reindeer meat to cook over the fire in the tent, she started feeling labour pains. She sent her son off to cut sedge grass that she could lie down on. Shortly after his return she gave

birth. It took her as long as it took Lars Johansson to cook the meal (Nensén R 649: 249–254).

One evening when she came home after having tried to track a lost reindeer, a *wilks råntjo*⁷ [‘white female reindeer that neither has a calf nor is carrying one’], her husband was taken sick and he died later that same night. At the same time, a wolverine took a black reindeer bull and a calf.⁸ This was the start of a new and difficult time. For several years she lived on the Norwegian side with her son and his wife, but when the son died, Anna Tomasdotter lost both money and reindeer in the distribution of the inheritance. She stayed on for three more years, and in subsequent years she lived and moved with her children’s families and with relatives. Periodically she was in Likssjuo, which is where she met and spoke with Nensén. She died in Grannäs at Suorssá (Swedish Sorsele) in 1833 (Nensén R 649: 252 ff.).

How has the knowledge produced by Fjellström and Tomasdotter been evaluated? Fjellström’s description of the bear ceremony has been categorised as a missionary account and a secondary source for Sami religion. Primary sources—Sami who write about the indigenous religion that they are part of—are lacking from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. In their absence these written missionary accounts have rightfully been treated as a valuable source since they are closest in time to the lived Sami indigenous religion. Nensén has a similar status as a Swedish collector and clergyman, and the material and the people he talked to are referred to as Nensén’s collection. His material was never published and it has not had the same effect on academic writings as Fjellström’s, for example. Jelena Porsanger has taken another position and argues that the Sami knowledge producers in different collections have not been made visible and these people should be highlighted and their information categorised as a primary sources. This is also a point of departure in this article. Material from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries has undergone more solid source criticism. The authors and their works have been assessed in terms of criteria such as cultural competence, their knowledge of Sami language, how much independent data the work contains and what has been copied from other authors. It has also been pointed out that the writers of the source material all come from the ecclesiastical sphere, with the mission of converting the Sami while simultaneously describing their religion. Their accounts were influenced by their religious confession and their personal attitude to Sami religion and they primarily describe men’s religious ideas and practices (Bäckman 1975: 25–49; Mebius 1968: 9–31; Rydving 2010: 57–71; Rydving 1993: 29–41; Porsanger 2007: 80). The resulting bias in the source material, with men’s religious activities being highlighted, often allowed the whole religion to be represented by male practices (Rydving 1993: 146; Keinänen 2000: 123 ff.).

Tomasdotter's narrative and position enables this perspective to be changed somewhat. Through her we also obtain a picture of Sami religiosity around 1800. Tomasdotter perceived herself as a Christian and states that the Bible had helped her during difficult periods in her life, but the indigenous Sami religion is simultaneously present, as exemplified by her description of the bear ceremony.

Bear Ceremonies

The bear hunt and the ceremony that was intended to ensure successful hunting can be divided into three phases: (1) the hunting of the bear; (2) the bear feast; (3) the restoration of the bear. Each phase contains several more or less complex rituals open to different interpretations, but the meaning of the rituals is not the main focus of this article. The first phase involved preparations for the hunt as well as the tracking ("encircling") and killing of the bear. The hunt was followed by various rituals, and the phase ended with the bear being brought to the camp. The second phase consisted of preparations in the camp for the reception of the bear and the hunters. This was followed by the butchering, the cooking of the meat and the feast that was held. In the third phase the bones left from the meal were assembled and buried, and the participants in the ceremony purified themselves before returning to their everyday lives.

Fjellström's description gives the impression that women and men acted within separate ritual spheres during the bear ceremony. Women did not take part in the hunt and the rituals that were performed in connection with the hunt, but later both segregated and shared rituals took place in the camp. The text states that there were sexual restrictions during the whole ceremony that were not lifted until the men had performed several acts of purification (Fjellström [1755] 1981: 29 f.). There are further descriptions of the men's rituals during the cooking. They prepared different parts of the bear meat in separate vessels, one for women and one for the meat that the men were to eat. Women and men then ate in different places in the camp (Fjellström [1755] 1981: 26). Fjellström describes how women were restricted in their movements and were not allowed to walk the same path as the hunters, for as long as the ceremony lasted, and in the coming year women were not permitted to use the reindeer that had pulled the bear. The men for their part were not allowed to use the paths that women were known to have travelled (Fjellström [1755] 1981: 21). Fjellström's, in some aspects, limited view of the different ritual actors, as previously noted, has sometimes led to the interpretation in earlier research that women were hedged about with taboos and excluded from rituals. The bear ceremony as described by Tomasdotter, emphasised in the following paragraphs, shows that women

were actors in the ritual as well as men but mostly just not in the same way and in the same place as men.

The Hunt

Tomasdotter mentions very little about how the actual hunt was carried out but that does not mean that she lacked knowledge about how the men could find bears. Old, experienced bear hunters searched for where the bear had been in the summer, she said. If they saw rowan or sallow twigs which had been broken off, they could start looking more closely for the animal. After the hunters had killed the bear, the men sang a *vuellie* ['chant'], rejoiced, and prepared a meal, she continues (Nensén R 649: 376). Tomasdotter does not use the word "kill" however, she says that the men had "gotten" the bear. The word she used expresses the idea that the killing was a gift from the bear. The hunting method that was used meant that the bear gave itself to the hunter. The men who had tracked the bear and finally killed it were called *borrtots älmah*; *borrtot* is a euphemism for the tabooed word 'bear,' while *älmah* means 'men.'

Through being an active reindeer herder, Tomasdotter knew about the places where the bear lived, moved and hibernated in the winter and how the bear could be tracked. She herself, however, had probably never taken part in the hunt, which explains why she talks so briefly about it. At the same time, a comparison of the two accounts shows that Fjellström, on his part, perhaps overemphasizes the hunt and the killing of the bear. Phase I in Fjellström's book fills 16 out of 32 pages, of which nine pages describe the bear as an animal and the hunt.

The Feast

Tomasdotter's account becomes more detailed when she gets to describing the rituals when the bear arrived in the camp, where the women were prepared. Dressed in fine clothes and with linen cloths on their heads, they waited for the stranger or guest, chewing alder bark (Nensén R 649: 376). As the men advanced the women could hear them chanting a *vuellie*. The men identified themselves with the bear, chanting:

Tie monne patab luotoist,
t. m. (tie monne) patab suovekâtan

So I come from the wilderness
So I come to the smoke-gâetie
['dwelling']

The women responded illustrating the ritual:

Mijeh lepeh vuordemen leipatji, linikum We are waiting with alder bark
and linen cloth.

Returning home marked a new phase in the ceremony, as reflected in the fact that the men were no longer called *borrtots älmah* but were transformed into *suije-pardneh*, the last element of which means 'boys.' They kept this name throughout the ceremony, until they returned to everyday life. *Suije-neit*—in which the last element means 'girl'—or *suije-pardnen akka*, 'the *suije*-boy's woman,' was the name given to the wife of the man who "owned" the bear. The owner in this case was the man who had encircled the animal in its hide, or killed it. Ownership did not mean exclusive right to the prey, since the animal was later shared among all the members of the group. The male hunters were known by a collective name, but special attention and honour was given to one woman, through the name *suije-neit*. *Suije*, which appears in all titles, is presumably identical to Fjellström's *söive*, in *söive neit*; the different spelling can be explained by Fjellström's endeavor to standardize Sami. The word is derived from Finnish *suvi*-, 'summer, thaw,' and in a Sami context it is connected with the day when the bear wakes from hibernation (Korhonen 2007: 33 ff.). In this ritual context the word was used as a euphemism for the bear.

The link between the name and a person's skills are evident in Sami naming rituals. People wanted desirable characteristics in an ancestor to be passed on through the name. The name in that sense shaped a person's future while simultaneously linking them to the past (Rydving 1993: 115–133). In the same way, we may expect different characteristics to have been linked to the names given to the participants in the bear ceremony, which tied them to a mythical time as well as to ancestors.

While waiting for the bear and the hunters the women loosened a brass ring that was usually attached to a purse at their belt. They looked at the bear through the ring. The *suije-neit* was then the first one to spit chewed alder bark juice through the ring. Then the other women had to hit the men with the juice. This had to be done, if you wanted to look at the bear, Tomasdotter says (Nensén R 649: 376). Fjellström describes the rituals in a similar way, telling how the women looked through the ring, spat chewed alder bark juice on the men and dogs that had participated in the hunt, and finally attached brass rings to the men's clothes (Fjellström [1755] 1981: 20).

The significance of the gesture, of the red juice from the alder bark and the meaning of the ritual spitting has interested scholars of religions. Does the red juice symbolize blood? Should the meaning of the ritual be interpreted as a form of atonement or as a way to ward off the bear's revenge (Paproth 1964: 69; Mebius 2003: 112 f.)? Was it a way to relate to the great sanctity and power of the bear? The meaning of the juice and the ritual is complex and difficult to interpret and may also vary within one and

the same ceremony among the different participants (Norlander-Unsgaard 1985: 197; Bertell 2010: 172).

The South Sami *sjieleddidh* ['to adorn'], or *sjiele* ['an ornament'], are used by both Tomasdotter and Fjellström when referring to the above-mentioned rituals. In an addendum to the myth, Tomasdotter also describes *sjiele* as a silver leaf. This was tied to the bear, as yet another way of honouring him (Nensén R 649: 375). In South Sami *sjiele* even occurs with other meanings (Mebius 1972) which reflect local variations as well as individual use. Tomasdotter used the word for several rituals like spitting alder-bark juice or giving the bear something, and for a silver object.

We should, however, pay attention to the gap that exists between the interpretative models formulated by researchers and the source material, that is the etic and the emic perspectives. Tomasdotter's explanation of why the woman was not allowed to see the bear until she had spat alder-bark juice, giving a *sjiele* or to *sjieleddidh* as she called it, does not follow any of the interpretations mentioned above. According to her, spitting the bark juice through the brass ring was instead a way for the women to honour the bear and according to the myth the bear himself gave the woman instructions about how to perform this ritual (Nensén R 649: 376). In other words, it is the woman's relation to the bear that is seen as central, by Tomasdotter, and the relation between women and men is less accentuated by her.

After the bear had been received by the women the animal was taken to a temporarily raised *gåetie* ['dwelling'] for the bear. There the men made up a fire and prepared the bear meat. The dwelling was made of spruce and birch twigs, and women were not allowed to enter it. The men, in turn, were not allowed to use the door when they were to enter the family's *gåetie*; instead they had to crawl in through the sacred opening. It was through the same opening they brought the meal to the women. The bear meat had to be cut into small pieces before being served, and then the women began to eat it with a knife and fork, in the elegant and ceremonial manner of the Swedes, as Tomasdotter described it. It all had to be eaten and no leftovers saved. It was not just how to eat but also what to eat that was regulated. Women were not to taste the bear's blood, heart, or bones. Future bears could turn against the men in rage if the women had tasted the wrong food, and that could cause problems for them next time they were to hunt (Nensén R 649: 376 f.).

Tomasdotter does not describe how the bear was treated, nor does she say anything about the cooking and the rituals performed by the men in connection with the preparation of the meal. Instead she describes rituals in which women were actors, for example, when decorating the bear (and the men) with alder-bark juice. Talking about these rituals she describes a relationship between the women and the bear. Fjellström, on his side, also

describes how women spat alder bark, but he devotes much more space to a description of the rituals performed by the men while cooking the meat. In his account, phase 2 fills 11 out of 32 pages, seven of which concern rituals to do with the men's cooking (Fjellström [1755] 1981: 19–30). Perhaps this is not surprising since food preparation and cooking is an area where the difference between Sami and Swedish gender roles was obvious and attracted the attention of visitors such as Fjellström.

The Restoration of the Bear

After the feast when the bear meat had been eaten, the bear's bones were collected. A little stand of boards and some trees was raised, high enough to prevent dogs from getting at the bones. It is unclear what Tomasdotter refers to when she says they placed the bones, in anatomical order, on the stand, and chanted (Nensén R 649: 376 f.):

<i>Tie monne vuolgab;</i>	Now I go, now he goes
<i>tie sodn tsevvel värit.</i>	to the mountain.

Tomasdotter explained that, if the bones were not handled in this ritual manner, the bear would travel far away and be difficult to find and catch in the future. The necessity of preserving the bones is stressed by both Fjellström and Tomasdotter. Her description, where the platform on which the bones were laid resembles a sacrificial *daektie raevie*, is unique. Fjellström presents several other alternatives which are often referred to among scholars (Zackrisson & Iregren 1974). The men could, according to him, dig a pit, either long or deep, where the bones were placed which was then covered. The burial ritual could vary depending on who was taking part in the ceremony. If Swedes had participated in the hunt, certain rituals were omitted, and the bones would perhaps not be buried in the way the custom dictated (Fjellström [1755] 1981: 30 ff.). After the bones had been placed in the pit, the bear was honoured so that it would not become an enemy of people but instead let itself be captured again, Tomasdotter says.

This third phase of the ceremony, like the first one, is not described in detail by Tomasdotter, nor does it contain any eschatological ideas. Fjellström does not pay much attention to it either devoting only four pages to this phase (Fjellström [1755] 1981: 30–33). Among historians of religions and archeologists this phase has been of great interest because it deals with some of the fundamental ideas in our fields.

Hunters' Language or a Ritual Language

There is evident agreement between Tomasdotter's and Fjellström's descriptions of what rituals were performed during the ceremonies, the differences lie rather in the perspectives they adopt and the meanings they ascribe to rituals. The differences become even more apparent when it comes to their use of terminology. Partly this is related to geographical differences but partly also to differences in knowledge.

One reason why linguistic codes were developed and used in hunting and rituals is that the *bïerne* ['bear'] was assumed to understand the Sami language and human's thoughts. Words for the bear itself and certain parts of its body could, therefore, not be used by humans without risk. In breaking the linguistic rules one risked causing danger to oneself or bringing bad luck on the hunt. The taboo words were therefore replaced by another terminology (Drake [1918] 1979: 329; Edsman 1994: 93–101). There were, however, other ordinary or everyday occasions when the word *bïerne* was to be avoided, for example when the purpose was to keep away from the bear or when you aimed to please it (Pentikäinen 2007: 97).⁹ Fjellström's list of forbidden words (taboo) and the alternative names includes seven items used for the bear itself, twelve for different parts of the bear's body, and four other words which were used during the ceremonies (Fjellström [1755] 1981: 10–12). The terminology used by Tomasdotter differs considerably (Nensén R 649: 343, 344).¹⁰ *Aija* is the euphemism for *bïerne* that she employed most frequently, a name also known by Fjellström (Nensén R 649: 343; Fjellström [1755] 1981: 10 f.), but who mostly used *Söive*. *Aija* means 'grandfather, old man,' a kinship term indicating the human kinship with the bear, but the term also signals respect.

But it was not just the use of the word *bïerne* that was taboo and demanded circumlocutions. Personal names were not used during the ceremony, and the alternative terminology changed depending on the context of the ritual. Place-names was yet another category where this occurred. Even though Tomasdotter did not hunt, as an experienced reindeer herder she knew what vocabulary was used, and what was avoided, by hunters. Accordingly a group of words, mentioned by her, are connected to the landscape. *Aijan-kâte* ['grandfather's/old man's dwelling'] meaning the bear's winter lair is one example of a word not found in a dictionary but used as special terminology during the hunt. Other examples are *gaumo* a euphemism for 'door,' and *ukkse-njalme*, 'door-mouth,' used when speaking about the opening in the den. *Aijan kaddsos* is the euphemism for the bear's blood and obviously a word used in rituals after the killing of the bear. The last element is derived from *kaddset*, 'to sup with a spoon' (Nensén R 649: 344; Drake [1918] 1979: 328). This word was probably used in connection with the ritual

where men drank a little of the bear's blood. Even though these words are all associated with the hunt, none of them are recorded by Fjellström.

The handling of the animal in rituals during the second phase also required a special vocabulary. *Aijan tores/teures* was used for the bear's head and *heves raddest* for the breast. *Fuetteh*, 'the forefeet,' is the only one of Tomasdotter's words that has an equivalent among those recorded by Fjellström. *Ruops aijan lähda* ['red grandfather's fur'] was probably a way of speaking about the bear skin or even the bear itself (Nensén R 649: 343; Drake [1918] 1979: 328). The reference to red alludes to the red alder bark juice.

Words of this type have been described as belonging to a language that only experienced bear hunters could understand. The words are supposed to have been relics of an old taboo language in which the bear was considered so holy that its name could not be used for fear of bringing misfortune or loss of luck (Edsman 1994: 95, 97; Pentikäinen 2007: 45). Tomasdotter's list of words shows, on the contrary, that the "hunting language" was not an esoteric, exclusive language understood solely by male hunters. Tomasdotter demonstrates that women understood at least parts of the hunting language. In this respect the focus on male ritual actors has been misleading. Despite the profundity of Edsman's analysis of the bear ceremony, it does not suffice to draw the conclusion that women were surrounded by taboos and played a peripheral role in the ceremony, as he has suggested (Edsman 1994: 50, 58). As has been pointed out, to be able to understand complex ceremonies it is also necessary to study the pattern of ritual exclusion and participation and how it is affected by gender, age, and also social status. Instead of claiming a strict division between a male and female religion, expressed in rituals and language, where women were excluded from ritual activities, a more nuanced categorization is to be preferred allowing recognition of the complementary aspects in men and women's rituals in bear ceremonies (Gross 1987; Keinänen 2000; Rydving 1993: 149).

Tomasdotter moreover points out that some euphemisms were used especially by female ritual actors. Only the *suije-neit*-women referred to the bear as *Sjele-Kallo*, 'silver (leaf)-forehead,' alluding to the piece of silver that, in the ritual, she placed on the bear's forehead, and *Puold-aija* ['old man/grandfather of the hill']. Generally, *Römsek* was used by women for the bear and *söks muodda* ['thick fur'] for its skin, the latter could also be used as a euphemism for the bear. Other words for the bear and the parts of its body could in turn be used by both women and men alike but with the example *Päretak* for the bear skin, she points out that certain words were spoken only by men. Rather than an over-simplistic male hunting language, Tomasdotter shows that there is difference in the ways that men and women

use ritual language. Language, however, is more subtle than merely being governed by gender; the role a person had during the ceremony also affected the terminology used. Fjellström, despite his linguistic and cultural knowledge, could not perceive this from his male, Swedish clergyman, outsider position. *Römsek* and *Puold-aija* are words that he too lists (Nensén R 649: 343; Drake [1918] 1979: 327; Fjellström [1755] 1981: 11), but his focus on men's religious lives was presumably a contributory factor in his failure to recognise women's ritual language.

While the kinship and closeness to the bear are revealed in language, the bear's presence in the ceremonies is clearly expressed through a series of *vuelieh* (plural). Fjellström writes, without reproducing any lyrics, that the *vuellie* was used throughout the ceremony and says that it varied from one occasion to another and that it was a personal mode of expression which was not fixed or static. He describes the *vuellie* as tone, voice, and sound rather than words. If there were words they are so obscure, that only a few could understand the meaning (Fjellström [1755] 1981: 21–23). The narrative dimension of the *vuellie* is made somewhat visible by Tomasdotter. One could hear from a far distance that the bear was on its way, because of the chanting men. They identified themselves as the bear and the women answered. Tomasdotter does not give an account of all the *vuelieh* in the ceremony, but earlier in 1775, 48 *vuelieh* had been written down. They were from Åsele lappmark, the area just south of where Tomasdotter lived (Wiklund 1912). The lyrics of the *vuellie* agrees, with Tomasdotter's. The honoured guest left the living world, which was expressed by the men chanting "Now I go, now he goes to the mountain." The men could then return to their everyday life. The fact that the last *vuelieh* are the same could indicate that there was a ritual yoik tradition and that not all *vuelieh* were solemnly individual expressions.

Myths about a Woman and the Bear

Tomasdotter's illustration of the language used in the bear ceremony and the gender differences in ritual terminology, means that the previous picture of women's roles in bear ceremonies, presented in earlier research, needs to be slightly more nuanced. This is further illustrated when the myths, retold by Tomasdotter and Fjellström, are discussed. Both considered the myth explains how people are supposed to behave towards the bear, since the bear in the narrative gave the woman instructions on how to perform the ceremony. Fjellström's version has been widely circulated, and it is the one that scholars proceed from. According to this myth, a young woman was forced out into the forest because of her brothers' hostility. She sought refuge in the winter lair of a male bear. He let her into his life, and after a time she bore a son. All three lived together, but when the bear grew old he

told the woman that his time was at an end. In the next part of the myth the bear gives the woman instructions about how he is to be killed and by whom. The bear's instructions are reflected in the rituals. When the brothers were busy slaughtering, the bear's son came along and recognized his father from a brass ring on his brow. The son therefore demanded his share of the prey. When he was refused this, he turned to the meat in the cauldron and asked his father to rise again. The violently boiling cauldron frightened the brothers, so they immediately gave him his share (Fjellström [1755] 1981: 14 ff.). In Fjellström's text the myth is set in a Sami context but the motif was probably widely, and well, known since the last Catholic archbishop in Sweden-Finland, Olaus Magnus, had already written down a similar myth in 1555, in which he connected the Danish royal house to the bear's offspring (Olaus Magnus [1555] 1982: 844 f.).

The myth is given yet another twist when it is related by Tomasdotter. Karl Bernard Wiklund's summary into Swedish—which is included in Drake [1918] 1979—is used here. A bear had captured a woman and she had been with him for some time. When he let her go he ordered her to bind a *sjeäle* [= *sjiele*, 'ornament'] on him. If she should hear that a bear with a *sjeäle* had been shot, she was to go there to demand her share. If this was refused she was to stir the pot so that the bear would rise again. This took place. She stirred the pot while chanting slowly and quietly, "Stand up, *sjeäle*-ear, they will not give me anything." Then there was movement in the pot and the hunters became afraid. She was given her share and the pot calmed down (Nensén R 649: 375; Drake [1918] 1979: 309). In a comment on the myth she explains that a *sjeäle* is a little leaf of silver (Nensén R 649: 375).

According to Edsman, the first version is the key to understanding the bear ceremony as a divinely established order through the mixed marriage of the bear and the woman. The bear let himself be shot after he had taught the woman the rituals that were to be performed in future hunts (Edsman 1994: 82). He also refers to the myth as retold by Tomasdotter, stating that it explains the human relatives' right to a share of the meat. It is basically the same myth, which shows how vigorous it was. The differences are, according to Edsman, due to the hundred years that passed between the recordings of the two versions (Edsman 1994: 83).¹¹ The time dimension is not the only variable however when discussing variations in myths.

Even if the myths agree in explaining the origin of the ceremonies and the purpose of single rituals, the main motif according to Edsman is missing in Tomasdotter's version, since she speaks neither of a sexual relation, nor a man-wife-son relationship with the bear, emphasized by some (Pentikäinen 2007: 47 f.). It is instead the woman demanding her rightful share of the prey which is the central theme in Tomasdotter's

telling. The fact that the two myths were recorded in different geographical areas, and at different times, may only partly explain the differences. There could be other reasons. Distribution of food according to food rules, often based on age and gender, is central among hunter societies and expressed at religious ceremonies. Tomasdotter puts this aspect of the bear ceremony to the forefront through the myth. The theme also shows the relatively strong position Sami reindeer-herding women held in the Sami community at that time (Bäckman 2013: 117–136; Rydving 1993: 144–154). The violation of women's rights is something that Tomasdotter also brings up in her life story. It should be noticed that Tomasdotter lived in a time when Sami life was affected by the growing number of Swedish settlers, and rights may therefore have been accentuated. The context when the knowledge was being shared is another factor to be taken into account. Bell has shown how gender and age affect fieldwork and noticed that love and sex in particular were topics that indigenous women did not talk to male ethnographers about. This in turn has colored the descriptions of women's religion (Bell [1983] 2002).

Age, especially for women, was at least as important a factor as gender in the exercise of religion. Before puberty, girls could move freely between men's and women's rituals. Fjellström describes how children ran between the bear's dwelling and the place where the women gathered during the ceremony. During a later period in their lives, women occupied a special position. Menstruation and pregnancy affected their ability to take part in ceremonies. This was probably the period that Fjellström proceeded from and also the younger men at school whom he interviewed. After the menopause there was another change which again meant increased participation in ceremonies for women. This was Tomasdotter's position when her story was recorded. For her the difference between women and men was presumably not as relevant as for Fjellström and the men he spoke to. Even though she spoke freely about the birth of her daughter, a question remains as to what Tomasdotter, in her seventies, could or could not say to the male Swedish clergyman Nensén who was thirty years younger than her.

A contextualization of the myths shows the possibility of individuals like Tomasdotter to highlight certain aspects of life through the myth. It also shows that a focus on just one myth can be too limited. Tomasdotter's version of the myth is quoted relatively seldom, which may partly be because it was written down later, but also because it was characterized as a folktale and separated from myths in the ethnographic dissertation where Nensén's material was presented (Drake [1918] 1979: 308).

A Different Perspective

Even though Tomasdotter went into much less detail than Fjellström when she talked about the bear ceremony, she succeeded in making women more visible as ritual actors. It is obvious that there was a division between men's and women's practices in the different phases but both men and women were performing rituals, not always together, not always at the same place or time, but through their ritual actions they affected future hunts. It is worth noting that she did not speak of women as being excluded, but we must bear in mind that this could reflect that prevailing social and religious gender roles were so natural to her that she did not notice the exclusion. However, ritual distinction need not necessarily imply ideological or hierarchical distinction.

Tomasdotter expressed how women's rituals were a way of interacting relationally with the bear, rather than with the male hunters, and both rituals and myth stressed, among other things, the respectful attitude that people must display in order to have a successful hunt. This was of interest for both men and women. Or as Anna Tomasdotter explained, the bear received this special treatment so that it would not become angry at the men or refuse to greet them. Tomasdotter also revealed attitudes necessary when hunting. The hunters were not supposed to brag. They should not say "I shall hunt on skis and shoot" but travel humbly and meekly, because the bear can sense the hunter's thoughts, and when they are not good he becomes angry and can turn against people, as she put it (Nensén R 649: 376). It is perfectly clear that the bear was considered to be an animal with special qualities; Fjellström wrote that it was a sacred animal. Tomasdotter, in her narrative also touches on the concept of "luck". To have reindeer or hunting luck is to have a good life. It was not sufficient to be skilled to have a successful bear hunt. The right attitudes, language and rituals and luck were also needed. Nils Oskal has discussed the concept of reindeer luck as a Sami moral system. With good fortune, which has nothing to do with chance, a herder can have a large herd (although not necessarily), but more importantly a beautiful (well-balanced) herd, that survives even if there are harsh periods. Luck can be inherited and last for generations, but it can also disappear. It requires that the reindeer are treated as having an intrinsic value, and one should not talk or think negatively about the animal. It demanded a conciliatory attitude and an ability to comply with the landscape and the pasture areas for the reindeer, with the surrounding world and all its inhabitants, both humans and immaterial forces. Luck is influenced through actions, words, and thoughts (Oskal 1995: 128 ff.). Tomasdotter touches on all these subjects in her narrative, and how women as well as men, through rituals, language and thoughts were responsible for luck; something which makes her a valuable primary source for Sami religion.

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NOTES

- ¹ Place-names are spelled according to the official Sami spelling of today, unless otherwise stated.
- ² *Lappmark* was a term set by the colonial power and denoted an administrative district, within the Sami areas of Sweden-Finland. In the seventeenth century the lappmarks were Åsele, Ume/Lycksele, Pite, Lule, Torne and Kemi lappmark.
- ³ This is the South Sami spelling, but the orthography is under discussion.
- ⁴ According to Drake ([1918] 1979: XII) most of the material was collected between 1818–1841, but Fjellström (1984: 38) is of the opinion that the collecting took place from 1813 up to his death in 1881.
- ⁵ This also applies to some earlier clergymen. Thomas von Westen's so-called "books of confession" from 1720s had detailed notes about where and from whom different information came. Although his books have been lost they are referred to by other clergymen.
- ⁶ Ranbyn was a *lappby*, a term used by the colonial power denoting a group of Sami with their lands. The indigenous system was rooted in the Sami *siida* organization.
- ⁷ The Sami orthography in the article is consistent with Nensén's and is not transcribed into modern spelling. South Sami is used when the word does not refer to Tomasdotter in Nensén's material.
- ⁸ A *wilks rântjo* is a significant reindeer in the herd. She is easily detected because she is larger than other female reindeer and with antlers more like a male animal. A *rântjo* was considered to be very close to its owner. To have one or several such reindeer was considered a way to get reindeer "luck." In her narrative, Tomasdotter creates a parallel development in the human and reindeer world, to illustrate how "luck" can change.
- ⁹ Citing an MA thesis in Finnish by Auli Oksanen 2007.
- ¹⁰ There are more words by Tomasdotter in Nensén's collection but they have not been possible to decipher.
- ¹¹ There is a difference of 65–70 years between the accounts, not 100 years.

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AUTHOR

Anna Westman Kuhmunen is a PhD student in the History of Religions at Stockholm University and a curator at Åjtte, Swedish Mountain and Sami Museum in Jokkmokk. In her research she focuses on indigenous Sami religions. Her forthcoming doctoral thesis deals with Sami foodways from the late seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries.