HELSINGIN YLIOPISTO

Awakening of the witches

Personhood, Identity, and Healing in Contemporary Witchcraft Practices in Post-Secular Finland

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Abstract:

This thesis examines how contemporary witches in post-secular Finland construct identity and engage in healing practices, with a focus on Noitaopisto (The Academy of Witchcraft Finland). Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork, text analysis, and digital observatory data, it sheds light on how participants build their noita (witch) identity through experimental and embodied learning in shared online and offline spaces. Witchcraft is analysed as an embodied, relational mode of knowing that challenges dominant narratives of rationality, secularism, and biomedical care. The thesis discusses how witches negotiate belonging through fractal trajectories of origin stories, communal healing, pedagogies of institutions, embodied practice, and ethical negotiations. It reveals how witches negotiate their identities at the intersection of spiritual, vocational, and affective labor as they thread their way through social fields towards visibility or protective invisibility. Placing identity-making in a larger context, it considers various forms of public self-disclosure for witches, identification with others, and worldviews about relations concerned with responding to digital infrastructures and entrepreneurial activity. Situating these practices within broader anthropological debates on ontology, diverse healing practices, and care as an ethico-political relation, the conclusions speak to the implications of witchcraft as an evoked lived existence and a cultural practice, and its resistance to incorporation into contemporary dominant biomedical or religious frames. Horizons for the future present the need for research on plural regimes of transnational comparison, and additional entanglements of emergent digital capitalism, AI, and esoteric entrepreneurship. The work shows that contemporary Finnish witchcraft is a personal process of self-discovery and shared movement of cultural creativity and resilience.

Tiivistelmä:

Tämä pro gradu -tutkielma tarkastelee tapoja, joilla nykypäivän noidat rakentavat identiteettiään sekä navigoivat parantamisen käytäntöjä jälkisekulaarissa Suomessa, keskittyen erityisesti Suomen Noitaopistoon. Pohjaten etnografiseen kenttätyöhön, tekstianalyysiin ja digitaaliseen havainnointiin, tutkimus valottaa, kuinka noituuden harjoittajat rakentavat identiteettiään kokemuksellisen ja kehollisen oppimisen kautta erilaisissa jaetuissa virtuaalisissa ja ei-virtuaalisissa tiloissa. Noituus ilmenee kehollisena ja suhteellisena tietämisen tapana, joka törmää paikoin kulttuurisiin oletuksiin rationaalisuudesta, sekularismista ja biolääketieteellisestä hoivasta. Tutkielma jäsentää, kuinka noidat neuvottelevat kuulumisen kokemusta erilaisten fraktaalisten kehityskulkujen läpi aina alkuperäistarinoista yhteisölliseen parantamiseen, instituutioiden pedagokiikkaan, kehollisen harjoittamiseen sekä eettisiin vuoropuheluihin. Yhdessä nämä käytänteet paljastavat, kuinka noidan identiteetti rakentuu hengellisen, ammatillisen ja affektiivisen työn risteyskohdissa samalla kun noidat navigoivat sosiaalisten kenttien läpi kohti näkyvyyttä tai turvaavaa piilottamista. Laajemmassa kontekstissa tutkielma tarkastelee noitien erilaisia julkisia itseilmaisun muotoja, samastumista toisiin sekä suhtautumista digitaalisten infrastruktuureiden ja yrittäjyyden ympärille rakentuviin maailmankuviin. Sijoittamalla nämä käytännöt osaksi laajempia antropologisia keskusteluja ontologiasta, moninaisista parantamiskäytännöistä ja huolenpidosta eettis-poliittisena suhteena, johtopäätökset korostavat noituuden merkitystä elettynä olemassaolona sekä kulttuurisena käytäntönä, jolla on mahdollisuus vastustaa vallitsevia biolääketieteellisiä ja uskonnollisia viitekehyksiä. Tulevaisuuden näkymät osoittavat, että on tarpeellista tehdä vastaavaa tutkimusta erilaisissa monikansallisissa vertailevissa konteksteissa sekä tarkastella kehittyvien teknologioiden, digitaalisen

kapitalismin, tekoälyn sekä esoteerisen yrittäjyyden yhteenkietoutumia. Tutkielma osoittaa, että nykypäivän suomalainen noituus on paitsi henkilökohtainen itsensä löytämisen prosessi, myös resilienssi ja luova liike.

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1 Introduction

1.1 Research Context and Background

Kalevala, Finland's national epic, concludes by introducing the Lutheran Church and marking the suppression of vernacular religiosity and the beginning of state centralization. The conclusion has been read as an era of rupture as a plural religious landscape gave way to a centrally organized form, led by Romanticism in Europe and propagating nationalist ideology. Finnish history was thus built upon the encounter of local tradition and foreign power, producing composite histories of religion, progress, and cultural identity. However, even as witchcraft has been cast to the periphery of official histories, it has again gained public interest. New magical practices have emerged as increasingly relevant in Finland over recent decades. Esoteric literature and tarot cards have found a place in mainstream bookstore shelves alongside self-help books. Witches appear as characters in television drama programs and spiritual storytelling is done daily via the internet. The witch is a culturally translatable character who appears in folklore, persecution narratives, fantasy fiction traditions, and, more recently, in practitioner-centered stories complicating mainstream definitions of identity, power, and authority.

Decentered Finnish witchcraft today reflects broader cultural currents in contemporary communities and identity formation. Instead of being grounded in myths or the media, representations of magic and healing now originate from the experiences of the practitioners themselves. Practitioners' stories reveal how virtual encounters have built networks of witches with resources to share teachings and rituals, fostering new kinds of communities. Encounters with these groups challenge the idea that witchcraft is purely historical or fictional; instead, they reveal practices connected to current social issues like gender, power, and care. As Susan Greenwood (2000) states, ritual within Pagan magic is a liminal state that resists cultural rationalization and creates a "place between worlds" where practitioners negotiate meaning (p. 2). *Noita*, the Finnish word for witch, is a spiritual identity and way of organizing personhood. Through ritual, symbols, and group practice, practitioners are able to reshape their sense of self as well as their role within broader social realities.

The increase in witchcraft also aligns with shifts in labor, consumer culture, and knowledge production. Neoliberal restructuring has reorganised people's work, self-care, and social lives. Consequently, witches are inclined to integrate spiritual practice into these

contemporarwy working modes by selling herbal remedies, divination services, and offering internet courses. Virtual shopping spaces and social media push the commodification of knowledge, aligning with broader tendencies within late capitalist economies to affective labour and person branding as the norm. Online witchcraft groups, though, don't simply replicate these economic rationalities. Reciprocity, intuition, and affective exchange remain at the forefront of practitioners' thinking on value and belonging. Online witchcraft groups become fields of experimentation for thinking about living in other ways. As Whitehead and Wesch (2012) describe in Human No More, online cultures perform hybrid subjectivities that disrupt lines between embodied, virtual, and technological modes of being (pp. 1–6). Through mediating online and offline networks, Finnish witches reveal how current magic adapts to and rearranges these innovations in crucial ways.

Anthropology's traditional aspiration of "making the strange familiar and the familiar strange" presents a valuable model for interpreting these developments (Geertz, 1973; Miner, 1956). Finland is typically represented as a logical, secular, and modern nation-state, yet magical ontologies persist and coexist alongside scientific ones, offering plural possibilities for knowledge. Witchcraft may be defined as a response to dominant logics such as biomedical rationality, capitalist productivity, and bureaucratization of care and welfare. As Moore and Sanders (2014) emphasize, culture must be treated as historically situated and performative rather than fixed (pp. 1–3). Finnish witchcraft demonstrates this position in reflexive self-creation and cultural innovation practices. Finnish witches are not rejecting modernity per se, but reconfiguring what it means to live ethically in its fractured landscape. In the face of this background, this thesis examines how knowledge is produced, shared, and evaluated among practitioners of Suomen Noitaopisto (The Academy of Witchcraft Finland). It situates Finnish witchcraft in a plural, relational ontology that critiques yet engages with neoliberal logics of care, healing, and identity, contributing to broader debates on spirituality, community, and transformation.

1.2 Research Questions and Aims

In this thesis, I analyze how contemporary witches connected to Suomen Noitaopisto construct and negotiate their identities in Finnish society's shifting landscapes. The main research question for this enquiry is:

How do contemporary Finnish witches create and negotiate identity in relation to spiritual practice, healing, and value?

This question lingers within the everyday realities of magical life, where the *noita* subjectivity is performed, enacted, and negotiated in relation to greater cultural shifts. It examines how magical practice, embodied expertise, and spiritual technologies become essential aspects of everyday life, especially where institutions such as religion or healthcare are perceived as deficient. Following these intersections, I aim to show how witchcraft challenges hegemonic understandings of health, value, and rationality and offers counter-hegemonic ways of knowing, being, and healing. The focus is on mapping networks of belonging and exclusion generated through these practices and situating them within broader debates on reflexive spirituality. Witch identity is explored here as a response to, and critique of, modernity, scientific rationalism, and the welfare state, and simultaneously as operating with logics of plurality, fragmentation, and spiritual individualism.

1.3 Structure

The thesis is structured into five chapters, each expanding different aspects of the research focus. Chapter one establishes the ethnographic field and outlines the general research questions. Chapter two concerns methodological choices and interrogates the ethical dilemmas of studying contemporary witchcraft. It considers researcher positionality, informed consent, and representation of marginal spiritual practice within anthropological writing. In chapter three, theoretical analysis is developed, first by situating witchcraft practice within Finnish esoteric influences and processes of history. It then considers the controversial role of "magic" in anthropology, from its explanatory potential to problems of misrepresentation. The final part of that chapter presents a framework for situating witchcraft as an ontological, mimetic, and creative mode of world-making. It presents an argument for the acceptable acknowledgement of magic as an epistemological force, in which the conversation can follow Finnish witches' mixing of scientific, esoteric, and experiential forms of knowledge in their daily lives. The theorizing provides a productive lens through which to view witchcraft in the following thematic chapters.

Chapter four focuses on identity, personhood, and knowledge, concerning the Finnish *noita* identity-making practices. It discusses how the figure of the *noita* is evoked at the level of personal identity, yet simultaneously sustained as a collective marker in the

practicing communities. The practitioners utilize the *noita* category to position themselves within Finnish society, while reversing the dominant rationality, secularism, and scientific legitimacy discourses. Theoretically, the chapter draws from fractal personhood, mimesis, and magical consciousness, each enabling a critical examination of the ontological stance of the witch-self and the types of knowledge that this entails. The examination thereby draws out Finnish witches' signification, enactment, and performance of *noita* identity through ritual practice, bodily learning, and relational self-formation. It also asks how such identity practices are legitimized or subverted in secular, digital, and/or cultural realms in which power, belief, and epistemology are provided. The chapter places the witch not as a simple individual religious choice, but as an emerging cultural project in which embodied practice, ethical thought, and group legitimation forge new registers of belonging.

Chapter five then moves to witchcraft as a potential care infrastructure that operates in tandem with perceived failures of biomedicine and state-based systems. It discusses how informal networks and spiritual practices are organized in response to embodied, affective, intergenerational wounds not necessarily visible or named in official or external systems of care. Noitahaavaseremonia (the ceremony of the witch wound) is the subject of this chapter, which invokes visions of trauma and awakening experiences in attempting to produce shared kinds of healing. This chapter questions what types of healing the contemporary Finnish witches are trying to tap into, how their ritual vocabulary responds to ancestral and affective trauma, and how institutions (i.e., Noitaopisto) can cross epistemic and regulatory fault lines. It also examines how, in some ways, the institutions may resist or reproduce neoliberal logics of self-responsibility, commodified well-being, or entrepreneurial spirituality.

The final chapter takes a step back and reflects on how these themes emerge and what their significance is for understanding personhood, identity, and well-being in contemporary Finland. It interrogates how belonging, legitimacy, and agency are constructed and negotiated while being attentive to witchcraft as a key arena of alternative epistemologies in late capitalist culture (Magliocco, 2004; Valkonen and Valkonen, 2014). Anthropologically, the research resists rationalist reductions of magic and affirms Susan Greenwood's arguments about understandings of magical consciousness as a genuine production of knowledge. Ultimately, this thesis opens up creative ways for understanding how Finnish witches are reimagining spiritual, social, and economic life, and illustrating how liminal spaces (or sites of ritual, digital spaces, and healing practices) are constructed

as generative places where transformation, tradition, and belonging are constantly negotiated.

2 Methodology and Ethics

This chapter discusses the methodology and ethics of my field ethnography of Finnish contemporary witchcraft, as a result of the mutually entwined position of being practitioner and anthropologist. Out of experience and informed by professional education, the research is attentive of anxieties about representation, scepticism, and belief, and research ethics with spiritual and other stigmatized groups. Through a reflexive and lawfully aware ethical practice, I consider how my identity impacts the research process and the negotiation of trust in offline and online spheres. Methodologically, the research is guided by participant observation, interviews, and feminist and decolonial theory-facilitated digital ethnography that subverts traditional fieldwork dualisms. The data allows us to critically examine the fluid and dynamic aspects of contemporary spiritual groups of witchcraft using a patchwork ethnography approach (Günel et al., 2020).

2.1 Ethical Awareness and Positionality

Magic has never been reducible to simple categorization or language, but a transformative and lived practice. Magic is a world disposition, a lens with which to see and openly step into the flows of life. It is not necessarily an isolated practice, but social, lived at times openly and implicitly by many in embodiment and sensing. This research has aimed to uncover such interactions, centrally addressing how practitioners do witchcraft as healing and sense-making. My own encounters with witchcraft, starting at the age of twelve, provide the basis for my worldview and a mode of relating to the world, and have been a core part of my research process. Like Greenwood (2005, p. 3), I do not disregard participant epistemology, as it represents both an epistemic position and a methodological standpoint. As Greenwood describes, magic is not in a disembodied mind but in affective, embodied, and relational events (ibid). These aspects unsettle observer and observed dichotomies of the past, proposing that research could itself be a transformation.

I am both an insider and critical outsider because I am a white Finnish anthropology student with a Lutheran background. As participant and researcher, my own experience with witchcraft gives an insider perspective, but I am also careful not to over-identify. Like other students in Noitaopisto, I form my views from personal experience and voluntary practice, living between scepticism, belief, and inner understanding in different social contexts. This follows Michael Taussig's (1993) belief that scepticism and belief are two

sides of the same coin and not opposing but instead equally productive forces that shape each other. Reflexive fieldwork practice involves negotiation between research and academic knowledge and, respectively, individual belief and general criticism of religious knowledge, in a manner in which my position does not dominate the voices of the people I am writing for. This conflict between belief and scepticism makes it possible to comprehend how witchcraft practitioners place themselves within a world of frequently incompatible worldviews. It also places the importance of identification with my insider-outsider status at the forefront.

Moral practice in conducting research among spiritual and marginal groups is governed by strict regulations aimed at protecting the rights of participants and the confidentiality of information. Per the GDPR and the Personal Data Act of Finland (1050/2018), all personal data utilized within this study has been encrypted and stored securely, with access limited to the researcher. Participants have been informed of their rights, which include the ability to withdraw at any time. Interview information, field observations, and online sources have been anonymized to ensure confidentiality. This study also adheres to the American Anthropological Association's (AAA's) 2012 ethical codes, emphasizing the participants' autonomy, welfare, and informed consent. Particular care has been taken to protect participants' anonymity and self-representation, given the sensitive subject matter of spirituality and healing. Given the AAA's emphasis on ethical reflexivity, I worked constantly to consider how my background, beliefs, and academic framing impacted the relationships I formed and the interpretations I offered.

One of the key ethical issues was to navigate consent in online settings. While the leadership in the teaching program officially approved taking part at Noitaopisto's online courses as a researcher, ensuring transparency with all participants was more challenging. I countered this by actively self-presenting as a researcher in the online discussions, participating in the discussions, and posting about my research in relevant Facebook and WhatsApp groups. I also clarified myself at in-person meetings. Nevertheless, ethical issues emerged, such as in a small, special society where participants might be identifiable even after anonymization. To buffer these issues, I used pseudonyms and stripped identifying information where appropriate. This position recognizes my dual responsibility as a researcher and practitioner of the community.

Autoethnographic qualities emphasize the ethical dilemma of researching spirituality from the inside out. My field presence was guided not just by intellectual interest, but also by

relational, affective, and somatic engagement. As Greenwood (2005) suggests, magical knowledge is conjured up by participation, not observational disengagement (pp. 1–3). Therefore, the ethical limits of the other and self, as well as the researcher and subject, are necessarily open. I have aimed to stand in for an everyday world as best I can, though one filtered through my specific vision. Also, recognizing that much anthropological theory comes from Western male traditions, I deploy them critically. I am open to Indigenous, feminist, and decolonial theories as an ethical stance within knowledge-making.

2.2 Methodology and Data Collection

The study applied an ethnographic approach to analyze contemporary witchcraft as a site of identity, healing, and epistemological transformation. Combining traditional anthropological practices with new digital and reflexive ethnography directions, the study employed interviews, participant observation, and digital methods to create an integrated picture of online and offline Finnish witchcraft communities. The first fieldwork was conducted between August 2022 and January 2023 and was about Noitaopisto's distance learning sessions, which took place every other week. Further observations included two days at Pakanalliset syysmessut (Pagan Autumn Fair), a Kekri ceremony, students' house meetings, and frequent visits to Magiapuoti, a witch shop run by one of the teachers. The collected information had 40 pages of handwritten notes, 73 pages of electronic scribbled notes, 171 pages of typed field notes, 70 screenshots, 36 photographs, and a single video recording. This was supplemented by participant interaction in two WhatsApp groups and Noitaopiston's Facebook group. Four student participant interviews were conducted, two in Helsinki and two through Zoom, from 49 minutes to over two hours long, recorded with consent, and transcribed for analysis.

The data were coded and analyzed using thematic, narrative, and content analysis grounded in participant observation and with Atlas.ti software. All interview quotations provided were first in Finnish and translated into English by the researcher. Faced with the fragmented and mixed nature of the field, research was theoretically guided by patchwork ethnography, as conceptualized by Günel, Varma, and Watanabe (2020). The methodology acknowledges that fieldwork is often conducted in fleeting visits, episodic encounters, and hybrid forms of engagement. Rather than having these pieces constructed as a limitation, patchwork ethnography sees these as contributions to larger cultural processes. It answers the challenges of current anthropology criticisms, notably feminist and decolonial ones,

against the ancient ideal of extended, continuous field stays. The Finnish witchcraft milieu is patchwork, mediated, and mobile, making patchwork ethnography highly applicable. Rituals on the internet, temporary encounters, and hybrid practices leave traces that can be analytically "sewn" together. With a view to the ethnographer's multiple locations and positioning, this research methodology reads fragments, not as lacking, but as constitutive of the meaning of the disordered realities of contemporary spirituality.

Ritual is a performance involving a magical consciousness, which allows the practitioner to flow between more-than-human worlds and effect change (Greenwood, 2005, pp. 90–91). Characteristically for Finnish witches, this kind of performance is made possible through media like livestreaming, video recording, and virtual chat forums. Such locations index and make religious practice possible, adequately merging record and immediacy. Involvement here is not observed to become institutional or formal membership but rather is temporary, followed through passing affective resonance, transient exchanges, and lateral relationality. This temporary aspect invites ethnographers to pay close attention to fleeting form and atmosphere without imposing coherence on resistant-to-linear-explanation practices. It also demonstrates how we continue to rework ritual and identity through the intersection of events, media, and locations in new witchcraft cultures and why we may need methodological flexibility when researching hybrid spiritualities.

The patchwork metaphor also helps to reflexively consider field fragmentation and researcher positionality. The field is not a homogenous "site," but rather a patchwork of relations, traces, and encounters, all contributing partial viewpoints to simultaneous larger cultural processes, with each sewing patch analytically pieced together, while recognizing that meanings are always partial and situated (Günel et al., 2020, p. 3). This sewing together is done with careful attention to the power relations that circulate through religious hierarchies and computer grids, access to resources, and symbolic regimes of recognition in communities. Spiritual power can be gifted to individuals through cultural or social capital that determines who has the authority to speak, teach, and oversee offerings. The researcher's position and approach factors in assembling the patches and deciding the meanings that resulted - a reminder that ethnography is both situated and partial. One can see that the landscape of Finnish witchcraft cannot be read as either uncomplicated or utterly chaotic. Instead, it exists in a state of flux and layered complexity, reflecting the intricate realities it seeks to represent.

3 Theoretical Framework: Modernity, Witchcraft, and Personhood

Central anthropological debates around modernity, healing, personhood, and magic frame the focus of this thesis. Rather than theory remaining an abstract point from practice, it was addressed through the mundane practices of the Finnish witches of the Noitaopisto community. In this case, witchcraft is not understood as a cultural revival or belief system, but instead as an embodied critique, disrupting rationalist binaries and proposing alternative forms of living in a post-welfare neoliberal world. The central questions guiding this work were: How do the Finnish witches construct and enact identity through magical praxis? How do they reframe healing and care beyond biomedical or institutional categories? And what does this reveal about perceived conflations of magic, modernity, and alternative forms of value? Questions such as these position witchcraft at the central point of engagement as a window to understanding how spiritual practice generates epistemological and ontological alternatives to disrupt monolithic definitions of rationality while presenting new ways of living socially.

This thesis engages with feminist, Indigenous, and postcolonial critiques alongside anthropological theories of magic. The focal readings include Michael Taussig's theory of mimesis, Susan Greenwood's account of magical consciousness, and David Graeber's contributions on value and plural ontologies. Greenwood (2000) discusses the somatic and syncretic basis for magical praxis in dissolving knowledge and the edge of belief, focusing on bodily and affective modalities of consciousness (p. 2). Graeber (2015) develops the theory of ontological realism, arguing that anthropology must recognize multiple worlds as equally real. (pp. 3-5). Typically, such theories position witchcraft as an epistemological counter to the modernist oppositions of rational/irrational or modern/premodern. Finnish witchcraft is not a leap from modernity but a way of working through its contradictions and thus calls into question our thinking on how critical, ritual, and care practices are implicated in social change.

This tension enters directly into discourses of modernity itself, with Pels (2003) and Latour (1993) urging us to regard modernity as an open totality against which Others are possible, rather than, in Pels' terms, 'a closed system of principles' that must reject the Other. Indeed, witchcraft is not reducible to postmodernity; rather, it functions in relation to modernity as a hybrid mediation of tradition, innovation, and critique. Finnish witchcraft is set in the context of larger currents of religion, colonialism, and cultural

transformation, whilst not excluding its very latest forms. In Noitaopisto and elsewhere, we find witches re-making identity, care, and belonging in practice, intertwining spiritual, political, and mundane concerns. The anthropological challenge here is not the pathologization of witchcraft as Other, but understanding how it functions concerning broader claims about health, state, and personhood in the everyday life.

Finnish contemporary witchcraft must be unpacked as comprehensible regarding several intersecting structures and histories. Religious and colonial histories are written into how alternative spiritualities are imagined and experienced. However, transnational Pagan communities are locally situated and self-constituted, navigating their existence outside legal systems and secular states through both tension and dialogue. Virtual reality furthermore provides an emergent platform in which witches can now expand their networks, distribute information, and conduct rituals through media. Such a form of witchcraft constitutes a relational, plural ontology that rejects institutional religion and instrumental rationality. The interface between body ritual, mediatized digitality, and secular order accounts for how the Finnish witches negotiate transnational and local sense-making and belonging. These practices challenge anthropology to consider beyond its limits of thought regarding what is regarded as knowledge, community, and care in a rapidly accelerating world.

3.1 Situating Contemporary Witchcraft in Finland

Contemporary Witchcraft in Finland is deeply entangled with historical, national, and colonial processes. As Raisa Maria Toivo (2016) illustrates, early modern Finnish religious culture did not prevent the Lutheran efforts to suppress local vernacular beliefs altogether. Instead, it remained shaped by collective ritual and vernacular religious practice incorporating Christian elements into pre-existing local cosmologies, such as charms, healing rituals, and protective magic (pp. 141-146). As opposed to many European contexts where witch trials involved a diabolical compact, Finnish cases instead reflected local conflicts of society, and male cunning folk (Finnish tietäjät) were also affected, challenging the gendered accounts of witch persecutions (Toivo, 2016, pp. 141-146).

Nationalist romanticism during the 19th century, for example through the Kalevala epic, attempted to revive and restructure ritual traditions into a unified Finnish cultural identity. Even so, as Ulla Vuorela (2009) argues, this revitalization occurred under colonial and racialized reasoning, attributing value to Finnish culture as authentic and

modernizable in opposition to the Sámi cosmologies' marginalization. Vuorela's (2009) concept of "colonial complicity" examines how Finland, even though it was never a colonialist power, exercised colonial activities through internal colonization, epistemic structures, and the appropriation of Indigenous Sámi spaces and knowledge systems (pp. 19-20, 36-38). New witchcraft groups, in attempting to reclaim pre-Christian spirituality, risk reinscribing colonial dynamics by borrowing Sámi forms such as the noaidi, a traditional Sámi spiritual practitioner, but without engaging with the specific ontologies, histories, and contemporary political struggles of Sámi peoples. Vuorela's (2009) criticism of Finnish education, anthropology, and development work is also a more general warning: spiritual or academic endeavors may reproduce hegemonic knowledge systems in the name of universalism or common indigeneity (pp. 32-39). The re-awakening of magical and animist rituals in Finland must therefore be read, not simply as regional histories of enchantment, but against intersecting legacies of exclusion, appropriation, and epistemic violence.

During the last decades, there have been proliferations of so-called "new" religious movements in Western Europe and North America, many of which draw on 1960s countercultural politics and earlier spiritual heritage (Morris, 2006, p. 271). These trends are typically highly syncretic, combining ritual magic, nature awareness, and esoteric symbolism in tailored spiritual systems. They redefine conventional concepts of religion by prioritizing subjective experience over institutional dogma. Characterizing the defining characteristics of modern Paganism as a worldview, Brian Morris highlights its ecological and feminist stance, radical polytheism, decentralized politics, and an "acceptance of esotericism – the idea that the divine is in the human personality" (Morris, 2006, p. 272).

In contrast to the widely debunked account of modern witchcraft as a mere echo of pre-Christian European practice or a nature spirituality, Morris situates recent pagan movements in the broad frame of Western esotericism and ritual magic. He calls them "the latest manifestations of hermetic traditions" (Morris, 2006, pp. 272–273). This renders contemporary witchcraft unique among traditional and new religious movements, emphasizing magic as a practice rather than a doctrine or belief system. From this perspective, the classical division between magic and religion no longer holds categorically true as both are seen to be means by which practitioners engage with supernatural powers and establish their spiritual worlds (Morris, 2006, p. 276). Magic here serves as a means of individual spiritual negotiation, with practice being central (Morris, 2006, p. 277).

Contemporary witchcraft draws part of its institutional and symbolic fabric from some of the early twentieth-century figures such as Margaret Murray and Gerald Gardner. Although Murray's pre-Christian survivor theory of fertility cults has been widely discredited for decades, it nevertheless shaped popular and scholarly discourse regarding the historic continuities of witchcraft. Gardner developed Murray's theories to create Wicca by drawing upon ceremonial magic, Western esotericism, and British folklore. This modern magical religion unifies ritualized nature worship with initiatory and magical practice. Even though Wicca is one thread in contemporary Paganism's larger, syncretic realm, it has strongly influenced many ritual modes, cosmology, and organizational templates (Morris, 2006, pp. 278–282).

In Finland, new spiritual movements emerged in three overlapping phases (Niemelä et al., 2001, p. 14). Church-based revival movements like Evangelicalism and Lestadianism emerged in the 19th century. Non-mainstream Christian and esoteric movements like Pentecostalism, Theosophy, and Spiritualism emerged in the early 20th century. Since the 1970s, Wicca, Transcendental Meditation, and ISKCON New Religious Movements became globalized and built a presence, expanding Finland's spiritual world (Niemelä et al., 2001, p. 14). Consequently, contemporary Paganism and Wicca are relatively recent phenomena within the Finnish religious sphere. The first structured Pagan community, the Center of Mielikki and Hare (Finnish branch of the Fellowship of Isis), started in 1979 (Hjelm, 2006, p. 35). Since the 1990s, organizations such as Lehto ry and Pakanaverkko ry have continued influencing Pagan and esoteric discussion in Finland. In parallel with these developments, New Age spirituality has also come into public focus through events such as the Hengen ja Tiedon messut (Spirit and Knowledge Fair), which has thousands of visitors annually and has increasingly been drawn to by private entrepreneurs as well as spiritual communities (Sohlberg & Kokkinen, 2020, p. 286). Esoteric bookstores and witchcraft shops such as Era Nova, Noitapuoti, and Tarotpuoti continue to be centers of material exchange and community construction in contemporary witchcraft.

Contemporary Finnish secularism is accompanied by extremely high levels of religious seeking and ritual activity, a phenomenon widely referred to as the Nordic paradox (Pessi et al., 2009). Since the 1970s, global spiritualized practices like yoga and meditation have mixed with folkways to produce individualized, eclectic spiritualities. Witchcraft is increasingly included within this broader universe, not a monolithic religion but a flexible practice focusing on individual freedom, healing, and cosmological exploration. Despite

continued stereotypes connecting witchcraft with fantasy or moral danger, Finnish witches increasingly identify themselves as teachers and healers. Sites like Noitaopisto facilitate decentralized learning, esoteric knowledge-sharing, and the development of shared identities outside institutional religion. This is part of a larger international trend in which magical and Pagan practice responds to fragmentation, ecological fear, and distrust of modernity (e.g., Hanegraaff, 1996; Greenwood, 2000; Harvey, 2007; Taylor, 2010).

The category of religiosity, as Talal Asad (1993) critiques, is not universal but rather a discursive formation shaped by Western epistemologies and the historic entanglements of modernity, colonialism, and secularism (pp. 27-30). The hegemonic definition privileges institutionalized, doctrine-based religions and excludes practices unsuitable for standardized frameworks. Contemporary Paganism and Witchcraft are generally decentralized, non-hierarchical, and experiential, and made illegible or invisible to these prevailing religio-political frameworks. The Finnish legal boundaries of recognized religion, in turn, reflect this reasoning in refusing most pagan and eclectic practices legal recognition. A prime example of this is the failed 2003 application by Suomen Vapaa Wicca Yhdyskunta (Finland's Free Wicca Society) to be officially recognized as a religious organization, refused by the Ministry of Education because the belief system was regarded as too vague (Hjelm, 2006, p. 42).

Little concerned with official recognition themselves, Finnish witches today seem barely bothered. The vast majority of interlocutors were either indifferent or even hostile toward formal religion, conflating it with institutional control and disempowerment. Rather than seeking legitimation through state paradigms, they typically embed their practice into existing legal frameworks, e.g., marriage or death rituals, but do not seek formal religious status. In interviews, most avoided hierarchical organizations, favoring individualized, eclectic approaches. While others draw inspiration from Wicca, others find it too formalized and construct personal spirituality from pick-and-mix magical traditions, folklore, and cosmology. These paths challenge conventional religious values by embracing autonomy, adaptability, and individual meaning above institutional belonging or orthodoxy.

The growing popularity of individualized and decentralized spiritualities has often been interpreted not as a retreat from spiritual life, but as a shift to experiential and embodied forms of approach to the sacred (Greenwood, 2000, pp. 1-3). Such an interpretation situates new spiritualities in a broader cultural shift. As Carrette and King (2005) argue,

spirituality is increasingly involved in neoliberal values of self-optimization, consumerism, and personal responsibility (pp. 1-6, 14-16, 22-24). While feminist and environmentalist streams stress immanence, autonomy, and care for the earth, popular culture also commodities occult aesthetics and magical imagery. Contemporary witchcraft is shaped by such intersecting influences, creating hybrid practices that reject institutional religion but remain located in therapeutic cultures and commodity exchanges.

Empirical data regarding the number of practitioners of Witchcraft or Paganism in Finland is still challenging to obtain, partially due to the decentralized nature of the practices. Although Karhun Kansa is the only registered pagan religious community, most practitioners do not belong to any group; instead, they gather in small circles or practice in solitude. But the spread of witchcraft on internet forums, social media websites, and in popular culture points to increased visibility and popularity. As Hjelm (2006) points out, the internet has significantly introduced individuals to Wicca and other forms of Paganism in Finland, particularly because of the low population density and long geographical distances (p. 36). The influence of cultural products such as books, television programs, and films has also worked to further the revival of interest in witchcraft and alternative spiritualities. This intersection of popular culture, new media, and individualized religious seeking is a key trend in the contemporary Finnish religious landscape.

A useful comparison can be drawn between North American and Finnish public debates over the role of religion in the public sphere. Laurel Zwissler (2019) identifies a disconnect in North America between academic understandings of religion and widespread assumptions, formed under the influence of Protestant models that imagine religion as private, apolitical, and transcendent or other-worldly in focus (pp. 3-4). This recalls Max Weber's (1905/2001) Protestant ethic thesis, which attributes Calvinist values of individualism and self-discipline to the rise of capitalism and the compartmentalization of spiritual and material life. In Finland, the Protestant ethic also influenced the socio-political environment through the entanglement of national identity and Lutheran moral authority. Even though the Church Law of 1869 initiated a gradual separation between state and church, it was finalized in the 2000 Constitution, which re-established the Evangelical Lutheran Church as a national church rather than state (Sorsa, 2015, pp. 7-11). Today, although it continues to carry out some public duties such as collecting taxes, the church's political role has declined, mirroring broader patterns of secularization and religious pluralism (Sorsa, 2015, pp. 11-12).

However, the position of religion in the public arena remains very contentious in Finland. This can be observed in recent Finnish controversies over religious hymns such as Suvivirsi being sung at school graduations and whether religious groups, including non-Christian groups, can visit public schools. Such case occurred in 2024 when Noitaopisto's representative visited a public secondary school in Vantaa. The event upset local parents and politicians, such as city councilor Milla Pyykkönen, who wrote in a local newspaper that witchcraft had no place in public schools. According to her, witchcraft is on an entirely different level than Christian traditions which have positively influenced the development and culture of the finnish society. She stated that: “Noitaopisto cannot be regarded as an actor promoting general knowledge" (Pyykkönen in Vantaan Sanomat, 2024, translated from Finnish to English). This reaction indicates that alternative spiritualities are considered illegitimate or dangerous within secular public institutions. The event expresses a broader tension within Finnish secularism: whether public institutions must be secular by default or pluralistic spaces incorporating diverse religious and spiritual perspectives.

Zwissler (2019) observes that North American public debates are structured by a rigid binary between secular progressivism and conservative Christianity, with each side perceiving the other as irrational, dangerous, or morally bankrupt (p. 5). Following the work of Janet Jakobsen and Ann Pellegrini, Zwissler contends that this binary thinking ignores the potential for religion to be the basis for progressive politics, as well as ignoring the possibility that secularism can also be a force that constrains (pp. 5-6). This dialectic fuels most of the so-called "culture wars" over issues such as reproductive rights, gender roles, LGBTQ+ inclusion, and national security, often reducing complex social tensions to a false binary of religious authoritarianism and secular liberation (pp. 5-6). These debates, as Zwissler also notes, underscored in highly racialized and classed terms normative intersections of religiosity, whiteness, and middle-class respectability, and marginalized less normative intersections of religion, power, and identity (p. 6). These frictions clarify that the issue is not simply church-state separation, but the deeper entanglement of identity, cultural memory, and belonging in a secular-nationalist imaginary.

3.2 The Dysfunctional "Magic" as an Anthropological Category

Peter Pels (2003) argues in the introduction to magic and Modernity: Interfaces of Revelation and Concealment that any attempt to define "magic" is faced with the same

structural issues Talal Asad faced when trying to define "religion" (p. 16). As Pels puts it, "the effort to build a definition not only has to contend with the issue that its compositional elements are the result of some given history but that any universale definition of magic – or of witchcraft, or of fetishism, or of shamanism – is itself the result of a history of Christian discipline and of Occidental science" (ibid). This refers to how definitions are never value-free but embedded within traditions of disciplinary power. It is therefore impossible to untangle concepts such as witchcraft and magic from the complicated histories that created them and the role they now play. They remain products of narratives about modernity, rationality, and otherness. For anthropology, reconciling with magic is recognizing that the idea is entangled in histories of domination, translation, and production of "knowledge" itself.

Following the anthropological history of the occult conception, Pels (2003) places conceptions of magic and ritual as either esoteric survivals or regular symbolic systems. These roads, he contends, are dialectical achievements of the Enlightenment's pursuit of an apparatus of human freedom, while the project frequently had the opposite ending result (pp. 17-18). In this contradiction, magic was always positioned as being part of the "premodern" and racialized Orientalist Other (Said, 1978). Meanwhile, anthropologists helped to reproduce Occidentalist fantasies concerning the "modern" and "rational" West (Carrier, 1995). But what was actually translated was not otherness itself. By comparing other societies with their own, anthropologists enabled "domesticated exotic magical discourses" to exist, which were later utilized by Europeans as forms of cultural critique of their own social contradictions (Pels, 2003, p. 6).

This paradox demonstrates how modernity selectively excluded certain forms of magical thinking while reappropriating others and produced enduring global knowledge about witchcraft, shaped mainly by Enlightenment-era ideals of rational improvement. The hegemonic conceptual category of fetishism demonstrate this process. Fetishism - as the term was coined in the 1760s by Charles de Brosses to describe African materialism and shamanism - romanticized it as a cure for rationalism, coinciding with Enlightenment intellectual instruments (Pels, 2003, pp. 8-9, 17). The categories themselves thus are not neutral, but rather figurations defining the modern West against an exotic Other.

Academic study of magic moved to center stage, especially in the 1850s, amid intense imperialism, bourgeois anxiety, and romantic yearning for re-enchantment (Pels, 2003, p. 9). Evolutionist schemes of E. B. Tylor and James Frazer, in particular, reagrded magic as

inferior precursor to science and religion. For instance, Frazer ([1890] 1922) characterized magic as an erroneous type of thinking that would ultimately be superseded, and Tylor ([1871] 1920) categorized belief in spirits as cultural "survivals" of a bygone epoch of thought. These represented modernist presuppositions that scientific education and industrialization would inevitably displace magical thinking. This building illustrated how Enlightenment rationality functioned to marginalize magic but openly privileged it as an analytic counter-example.

The shift from universal theories of pragmatic magic to locality under the rubric of witchcraft was mainly marked by E. E. Evans-Pritchard's Witchcraft, Oracles and magic among the Azande (1937). His ethnographic work illustrated the rational system within which witchcraft operated in its cultural logics. This marked the turning point in rejecting the presumption that magic wasn't rational but practical in everyday life. Nevertheless, as Pels (2003) states, Evans-Pritchard's search for universal rationality was set against British colonial rule and anxieties regarding modernizing colonial societies (p. 13). His book became drawn into wider functionalist and modernization narratives of the 1930s–1950s, emphasizing rationalization and disenchantment (Pels, 2003, p. 17). Although he destabilized earlier evolutionary hierarchies, the broader schema continued to anchor the analysis of witchcraft in colonial rationalities of rule. Thus, Evans-Pritchard forged anthropology's recognition of witchcraft as coherent on its own terms but simultaneously upheld modernization paradigms that further defined magical activity as destined to disappear in the march toward "modern" rationality.

By the 1970s, anthropology had taken a reflective turn, partly driven by shame at the ethnocentric presuppositions embodied in categories like witchcraft and magic. According to Pels (2003, p. 17), this was when debates around the occult emerged as a counter-hegemonic discursivity to those of modernization. These debates paralleled critical anthropology's experience with globalization, which had long abandoned homogenous accounts of social change. Postmodern revivals of a magical sort and renewed interest in the substance of truth prompted scholars to think about how magic wasn't so much a survival from the past as fully within processes of the present. For instance, Africanist anthropologists Jean and John Comaroff showed how witchcraft reflects and comments upon the modern transformations of work, capitalism, and the state. Their work shows how witchcraft cannot be read in terms of cultural residues but must be read as a form of active response to world social and economic change (as cited in Pels, 2003, p. 17). This

way of thinking undermines the simplistic binary oppositions between magic and modernity, so much so that these now seem less sustainable than to underscore their mutual constitution within various practices and processes of meaning making.

Pels (2003) explains two peculiar aspects of magic and its relation to modernity. One is their supplementarity: modernity constantly defines itself in relation to what it is not (i.e., magic) but remains haunted by "correspondences and nostalgies by which magic can come to haunt modernity" (pp. 4-5). The second is the "magic of modernity" itself, in that institutions such as consumerism, bureaucracy, and media produce magic by creating spectacle, commodifying, and disciplining. Pels provides an example of how magic and modernity are not to be conceived of as opposites but as constitutive forces that depend on one another, each constituting the other. This challenges anthropologists to attend less to the reified definitions and more to the everyday practices and power relations through which these categories collect meaning. In the study of 'witchcraft' and 'magic,' what remains relevant is less the practices themselves than the power and interpretive relations that emerge when anthropologists translate them across cultural contexts (Pels, 2003, p. 17). The most significant anthropologists at the time, Susan Greenwood and Tanya Luhrmann, have in their account transformed academics' approaches to witchcraft, belief, and magical practice.

They both focus on ritual action and personal experience but theorize differently. Greenwood (2000, 2005, 2009) develops a phenomenological and participatory understanding of "magical consciousness" and has relational and experiential learning as the key learning modes. By contrast, Luhrmann (1989, 2020) outlines a psychological and cognitive explanation of "real-making" processes and examines how in practices of the body and training, gods and spirits become real. Both Greenwood’s and Luhrmann’s approaches carry their own methodological assumptions and engage with broader debates about experience, knowledge, and agency in anthropology, making these previously implicit issues visible. Their scholarship demonstrates how contemporary research has been grappling to step away from naive rational-irrational dualisms and begin to include belief as embodied, enacted, and replicated in practice. Susan Greenwood has an experiential anthropological perspective, and the central research method is participant observation. She introduces in her book Magic, Witchcraft and the Otherworld (2000), the otherworld as "a spiritual domain that is said to coexist with the ordinary everyday world;

at once primordial, yet always flowing through time and space, and within the individual" (p. 1).

The metaphysical world is entered through dreams, rituals, and trance states, offering an epistemology of emotion, intuition, and relationality. Greenwood argues that ritual magic provides a space for the value of qualities excluded by Enlightenment rationality, particularly those of emotion and femininity (2000, p. 2). She argues that magicians' selves are created through engagement with the otherworld, and magic as a path of the soul involves learning to control and channel cosmic forces. Her work challenges anthropology to view magical experience not as symbolic misrepresentation but as legitimate knowledge. Tanya Luhrmann offers an alternative framing, particularly in How God Becomes Real (2020), where she is concerned with how gods and spirits come to be experientially real in learned traditions. Central to her theory is the "faith frame," which describes how enduring commitment to the presence of invisible beings encompasses "a special way of thinking, expecting, and remembering" (Luhrmann, 2020, p. xii). She claims this kind of faith does not naturally arise but must be cultivated through self-awareness training, stories, and ritual attention (pp. xii–xiv).

For Luhrmann, ritual is not merely an entrance to an autonomous metaphysical realm but actually structures attention in a manner that makes divine presence felt (2020, p. xi). Her explanation reveals how spirit-belief comes into existence and gets sustained through embodied cognitive processes. This approach differs from Greenwood's participatory ontology in perceiving magical and religious practices as psychologically mediated, but without necessarily invoking the metaphysical existence of the entities themselves. It points towards how prayer, storytelling, and imagination preserve the experiential life of gods and spirits. Greenwood severely criticizes Luhrmann's account and, more especially, her early work, Persuasions of the Witch's Craft (1989), for finding the beliefs of magicians incoherent. It is Greenwood's view that this preserves the intellectualist stream that disenchanting magical practice as pseudo-science or symbolic performance. She opposes the idea that it is not strange to have several opposing beliefs, but instead a human cognitive capacity. The intentionality of will provides unity where discourses appear inconsistent, and the meaningfulness in magical practice.

As Greenwood states: “Luhrmann’s view is essentially sceptical of magic, and does not examine the internal nature of morality. I argue that for magicians the essence of morality comes not from a cover for pseudo-scientific theory but from contact with otherworldly

reality, which provides a form of internal knowledge." (Greenwood, 2000, pp. 40-42). Anthropology thus needs to redefine knowledge to legitimate other-worldly experiences as real, and to work towards magical consciousness as a genuine and ontologically valid means of encountering a more-than-human world. Despite their differences, Greenwood and Luhrmann share a common aversion to reducing belief to propositional agreement. Greenwood's reflexive fieldwork duplicates Luhrmann's performative model in this respect: both accept that belief is performed and negotiated on the grounds of practice. Their disagreement is part of the broader anthropological struggle: whether magical experience occurs ontologically or as cognitive-symbolic events. Greenwood is a paradigm-theorist calling for magical awareness as a subtle epistemology, and Luhrmann is an agnostic, looking for processes in which individuals come to believe. Luhrmann's now classic articulation of "people believe because they worship" (2020, p. xi) is flipping common sense on its head; Greenwood, by contrast, affirms magical will as a resistant moral and epistemic space.

They record material tension in religious studies with profound implications regarding how researchers manage reflexivity, scepticism, and receptivity to their own experiences of the occult. They make evident the power of methodological tendencies projectively but thicken in practitioners' ontologies without compromising critical sensory perception concerning processes. A second, wider theoretical framework for magic is in Michael Taussig's theory of mimesis. In Viscerality, Faith, and Skepticism (2016), he sees mimesis not just as imitation but as a practice of transformation that cultivates magical capacity through performance (p. 469). For Taussig, mimesis-producing capacities establish ontological ambivalence in which magical power does not exist due to disbelief, yet for the very reason (p. 460). The paradox trick occupies the middle position: "The trick is still magical after its secret has been explained. What's revealed is not just the trick but a new horizon of reality" (Taussig, 2016, p. 458). From this perspective, magic does not hide reality but refigures perception through embodied, mimetic practice. Practitioners perform to re-construct their worlds by performing visible and invisible rituals that knowingly transgress the boundaries of self and others. Discomfort generated in tension across the terms of disclosure and secrecy creates a flexibility that sustains magical efficacy. Taussig's text illustrates how magic moves in this generative instability, overthrowing rational demystification through new enchantments.

My own approach draws upon the perspectives of theoretical relativism and ontological realism, which are described here. I advocate for us to take seriously several epistemologies as established ways of coming to terms with the world, rather than reducing them to symbolic code or cognitive errors of magical mentality. My starting point is David Graeber's case against ontological reductionism. When Graeber (2015) argues "radical alterity is just another way of saying 'reality", he is resisting the strong temptation to render cultural difference incommensurable. As he warns in a footnote, the ontological turn in anthropology risks reifying differences as intranslatable metaphysical worlds (Graeber, 2015, pp. 27-29). Instead, he argues for a mutual unknowability existing as a human condition, and radical alterity as no more or less valid in this as to be reasonably treated as another side of reality itself (ibid). Graeber's technique exhibits anthropology that does not fear multiplicity, never locking itself up within metaphysical systems of totalizing frameworks. In the case of the study of magic, we should accept the practitioners' worlds as being real, but additionally make explicit the conditions under which those worlds are communicated through historical conditions, and the conditions of wider, power-laden, regimes of invention, which he shows can be productively demonstrated to reclaim anthropology as representing lived experience, while remaining resolute in our attention to relationality and social invention.

Graeber's earlier book, Toward an Anthropological Theory of Value (2001), moves in this direction in its argument against deterministic theory collapsing culture into economic or ideological superstructures. Instead he argues for an anthropology that puts human creativity, meaning-making, and the social creation of value front and center as open-ended processes (pp. xi–xii, 45–47). Humans, Graeber insists, are constantly generating ontologies through ritual and social practice. In this analysis, magic is a form of creative social action, a toolkit of techniques by which people exert agency and reshape the world. In his words, writing about the Malagasy context: "Because it is precisely this unfetishized quality, the fact that magic locates the source of social creativity in human action rather than outside it, that makes it possible to yield such an apparently realistic understanding of kingship - in fact, one remarkably close to what a social scientist might have. (2001, p. 240). This illustrates how magic is symbolic and a constructive practice of world-making that is expressive of human agency.

Bringing these strands together, I theorize magic as a relational, mimetic, and creative world-making practice. Following Pels (2003), I want to highlight that modernity and

magic are not opposites to one another but are intertwined constructions that have shaped the histories of colonialism, capitalism, and the Enlightenment. Greenwood's magical consciousness theory underpins a participatory ontology with magical experience as a genuine meeting with an embodied, present, more-than-human world. Luhrmann, in contrast, aims for the cognitive and phenomenological emergence of belief and how ritual mindfulness enlists spirits in practitioners. Taussig makes it complex to theorize mimesis as the power to carry magic over the threshold of doubt, creating enchantment in doubt. Finally, Graeber provides an ontological realism with theoretical relativism to help place this as multiplicity and creativity in how humans make meaning. Together, these theorists provide an approach that refuses reductive binaries and instead recognizes magic as simultaneously historical, relational, and ontologically real. It follows that magic is a transformative mode of being with reality, one that is simultaneously critique and creativity in its ongoing negotiation with modernity.

3.3 Fractal Personhood and Magical Healing: Constructing the Witch-Self

Englund and Leach (2000) and Federici (2004) argue that hegemonic explanations of modernity rest on implicit assumptions of individual personhood and therefore are essential to deconstructing the autonomous Western self. Federici (2004) traces the historical and gendered foundations of these notions, particularly in the context of capitalist development, while Englund and Leach (2000) emphasize that such critique uncovers multiple and relational subjectivities veiled by modernity (p. 228). This section draws from past arguments regarding ontological re-orientation to examine how Finnish witchcraft cultivates recursive and relational personhood, in which healing and identity are entangled. In ritual practice, lived experience, and interaction with ancestral and cyber lineages, the Finnish witches perform subjectivity that subverts Euro-modernist ideals of the individual. Rather, subjectivity arises through transformation, permeable borders, and relation to human and nonhuman powers. Therefore, the pervasive Euro-modernist understanding of the subject as a bounded, self-governing atom is challenged, revealing other visions of the subject. These framings invite us to rethink what it means to be human and how identity may outrun personal control. The witch-self of relation and transformation reveals subjectivity to never be stable but always assembled by shifting relations, disclosing a state of being in which healing is a world-making and self-making practice.

Marilyn Strathern (1988) codified the concept of the dividual, challenging Western presuppositions about independent individuality by proposing a relational theory of personhood. In Melanesia, human beings are not considered independent but as dividuals, configured persons created through relations and exchanges (pp. 273-274). Strathern deconstructs Western agency models, situating the individual as self-author of action, instead emphasizing that agency is distributed throughout relational webs. Even in Western contexts, responsibility operates diffusely, suggesting that bounded causality obscures more radical relational logics (pp. 271-273). Strathern's model shows how social forms enact agency and deflect Euro-American conceptions of subjectivity, production, and moral responsibility. Roy Wagner (1991) advanced this stance by developing the notion of fractal personhood, wherein personhood is both singular and plural, with relations nested within it (p. 163). A fractal person is neither a person nor a collectivity, but both simultaneously. Here, the self does not manifest as an bounded individual, but rather as a building of interrelations with human beings and forces, forming non-linear, unanticipated but enduring patterns of relationality (Strathern, 2020, p. 91; Wagner, 1991).

This fractal, relational construction of a person fits with the work of Doreen Massey. Massey (2005) argues that space is neither neutral nor static but relational and constituted by power-saturated relations. Her theory of moral geographies refers to how the spatial relation constitutes who belongs, who does not, and whose practice is approved (pp. 151-154). According to her, space is always morally meaningful, and such ethical dispositions are not localized but involve global accountability (p. 188). Strathern (2020) further illustrates how kinship deconstructs genealogical assumptions, showing that spatial and temporal closeness do not guarantee relational significance (pp. 145-147). Relations have to be performed and reiterated, and this brings us to understand the *noita* as not being in an essential immobile place but as comprising dynamic moral geographies of material and virtual places. In such configurations, identity is formed through ethical negotiation at various scales of belonging and exclusion. Finnish witches, therefore, produce subjectivities receptive to geography and written into larger frameworks of relation, ethics, and power that trace over time and space.

Brenda Farnell (1994) takes these arguments a step further by situating agency within affective dialogue and kinesthetic movement and not within institutional liberty. She theorizes the practice of agency in the materiality of body-mind and its relational dealings

to form bio-cultural beings (p. 933). Massey pushes the thinking further by showing how subjectivity is spatially stretched out and negotiated in a "geometry of social/power relations" (1994, p. 4). Strathern (2020) similarly points out that relations are not stable but in the process and must be re-tuned repeatedly (pp. 3-4). The practice of ritual in Finnish witchcraft creates such relational ontologies by dissolving movement, narrative, and cosmology into performative acts of agency that cannot be analyzed into interiorized individualism. The bodily nature of ritual instructs us to enact healing as a relational act. Agency here cannot be separated from environment, gesture, and affect, all porous together as a witch-self assemblage of interdependent forces.

Greenwood's (2000, 2009) 'magical consciousness' is a different mindset to approach relational revelation in revealing witchcraft. Greenwood defines magical consciousness as a way of seeing that recognizes interdependence and multiplicity. For those socialized in Euro-modernist ontologies, this seeing can be profoundly therapeutic. Greenwood (2000) argues that magical practice repairs the dual nature engendered by materialist and dualist worldviews by default. She describes interaction with realities other than the mundane world as "a healing process, a psycho-spiritual path leading to transformation" (p. 117). Drawing conclusions from Lévi-Strauss, she puts magical healing in proximity to psychotherapy, pointing out that both are individual and communal transformations (pp. 118-119). Ritual involves meeting the self, erasing ego boundaries, and accessing cosmic energies to facilitate re-enchantment over modern rationalist disintegration (pp. 119-121). In this case, healing cannot be divorced from the transformation and re-orientation of selfhood. Finnish witchcraft, therefore, positions healing not as a complement to ritual but as its condition in itself, creating continuity between individual well-being, communal belonging, and cosmological participation.

However, the reduction of witchcraft into a mere therapeutic practice risks incorporating it into neoliberal health systems that commodify wellness and personal responsibility. These systems place individuals as self-entrepreneurs who must maximize mental and spiritual health through consumption and self-regulation (McGee, 2005; Salmenniemi et al., 2020, pp. 1-2). Salmenniemi et al. (2020) state that therapeutic cultures advance selfhood based on psychic interiority, authenticity, and perpetual reinvention, aligned with neoliberalism (pp. 1-3). Here, witchcraft may be employed inappropriately as an optimization strategy of self-help rather than a political or relational practice. Commodification relocates spells, rituals, and crystals as lifestyle commodities by stripping collective possibility from them

(pp. 5, 10-11). Finnish witches negotiate this challenge through practices focused on relation and resistance. The practice of Finnish witches shines light on the tension between healing as collective transformation and its appropriation by consumer capitalism. The struggle is one component of larger negotiations of authenticity, spirituality, and capitalism that contextualize how witchcraft circulates in Finland and globally.

The biomedical dominance in Finland further complicates identifying witchcraft practices. The biomedical paradigm excludes anomalous, magical, or strange experiences as pathological or abnormal. Visions, premonitions, and conversations with spirits are similarly addressed as malfunctions or neurochemical balances (Andell et al., 2020, pp. 189-191). Reduction obscures their therapeutic significance. Andell, Bergroth, and Honkasalo (2020) argue that uncanny experiences are significant events that become transformative concerning self-knowledge, care practices, and crisis resilience (pp. 192-196). By introducing the uncanny into healing assemblages as an actant, they disrupt biomedical neutrality and enable epistemological diversity. The Finnish witches' practice confirms multiplicity by including uncanny experience in socially, emotionally, and spiritually transitive healings. Rather than pathologizing them, witches place them as selective pickings of meaning-making events, expanding therapeutic culture and disrupting institutional hierarchies, diminishing knowledge and experience anchored to the center of alternative healing cultures.

Complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) is claiming more space in the Finnish healthcare systems. Practices like spiritual healing, energy work, and herbalism make visible alternatives to biomedical practice. National data shows that approximately 51% of adult Finns attend some CAM annually, or use a provider (20%), self-care (28.8%), or natural products (27%) (Pyykkönen et al., 2023). The holism and intuition give rise to other embodied knowledge not present in biomedical networks. Salmenniemi et al. (2020) note that CAM is upending biomedical boundaries, which can serve as a second epistemology (pp. 6-7). Kemppainen et al. (2017) report that CAM use rates in Finland are 28–46%, evidencing cultural embeddedness despite institutional disqualification, similar to European averages. Based on Foucault's (1978) theory of biopower, reviving witchcraft and CAM should be interpreted as a type of resistance against institutionalized disciplinary practices of domination and normalization over subjectivities and bodies (pp. 139-140). Witchcraft resonates with these logics at their fullest expressions, taking ritual and cosmology as a performance of agency in arenas and loopholes where biomedical care is

contested to leave individuals wanting. Rituals lie beyond therapeutic assemblages, which entangle knowledge, affect, and ritual into patterns irreducible to science or commodity.

All these practices collectively testify to Finnish witchcraft being far from exclusively therapeutic. Instead it constitutes a relational ontology that remakes personhood, care, and healing beyond biomedical and neoliberal rationalities. *Noita* identity transcends the the singular domain of the autonomous subject and fractures into fractal assemblages of affect, space, and cosmology. Strathern and Wagner's theorizations are attuned to the vulnerability of personhood as a constellation of relations. Massey's ethically geographies show how witches accomplish the task of decentring hegemonic imaginings of place and legitimacy. Greenwood's sensitivity to magic demonstrates how relational knowing makes possible change through knowing. What comes next is a politicized knowing of healing that resists institutional regimes of knowledge and calls forth plural care ontologies. Finnish witchcraft is a religious practice and a worlding that unravels contemporary subject-forms and calls forth possible alternative futures. Witches perform permeable and recursive selves, through relational healing, and spells that re-imaginate care, subjectivity, and community.

4 Fractals of Becoming Witch: Constructing the *Noita* Identity

In Noitaopisto, becoming a witch played out as a multifaceted and iterative process that could not be captured in a single moment. Instead, it developed over a fractal process, with smaller stories and practices repeated at different sizes, to build a known identity. This chapter tracks the dynamics of awakening, the making of identity, and political self-making, and how they encountered one another to formulate the *noita* subject as both individual and collective. Enlightenment borrowed moments of divine vocation, healing from transgenerational trauma, and coordinating with somatic awareness, situating students' senses of change as bodily and affective practices. Identity-making expanded and prolonged this awakening into daily practice, coordinating intuition, social acknowledgment, way of life congruence, and ethical contemplation in consequential belonging. Political self-fashioning placed the witch in broader vectors of visibility, history, and cultural negotiation, illustrating how the dislocations of personal becoming were a detour inward and outward, yet also caught up with intersectional responsibility and broader legacies of struggle for legitimacy. By so doing, the fractal comparison shows the two levels mirroring each other, from consciousness to embodied practice as witnessing ontology, shared consent as a basis for individual testimony, and political tactics speaking to intimate self-knowing. This chapter places learning about witchcraft as a recursive and social process. It considers how Noitaopisto not only produced practitioners of a magic but also created a shared epistemic and social self.

4.1 Awakening the Witches

4.1.1 Origin Story and Divine Calling

Krista's experience with Hekate, the triple moon goddess, the goddess and the protector of all witches, demonstrates how stories of origin lend legitimacy to new witchcraft groups. This mandate from a higher power roots Noitaopisto's origins in something sacred and roots the institution's identity in spiritual strength. Origin tales are symbolic resources that grant transhistorical legitimacy to insecure projects. Krista's account does not propose a singular personal experience; instead, she creates a shared interpretive context for the students. In this retelling, Krista's description of Hekate generates a public point of reference where it collects participation, solidarity, and orientation. The presence of the goddess turns the ordinary environment of a crystal shop into a sacred portal of transformation. In describing this encounter, Krista legitimates her authority not in

bureaucratic qualifications but in divine election, positioning herself as a mediator of divine will. This is consistent with anthropological arguments that legitimacy in other spiritualities is sometimes based on embodied, affective encounters rather than institutional validation (Haraway, 1988; Harding, 1991). By describing her vision as both individual and collective, Krista situates Noitaopisto within an unbroken tradition of spiritual transmission outside rationalist modernity's epistemological hierarchies. Thus, the account is a beginning and epistemological establishment of the school. It combines divine authority, embodied practice, and a communal identity in a shared moral geography.

The divine call in Krista's vision also complicates the origin story by normalizing authority in vulnerability. Krista's account of uncertainty, preceding her purification ritual, and her eventual recognition of Hekate places doubt before clarity, making authority relational and not static. This recognition process organizes authority as becoming, not possessing, inviting students into similar becoming styles. These accounts are what Harding (1991) calls situated knowledges, where authorship is conditionally contextual, affective, and relational. In framing her calling as an enfolded conversation with Hekate rather than one-way revelation, Krista joins feminist epistemologies concerned with co-creation and mutual exchange (Haraway, 1988). The iteration of this tale in multiple contexts- the crystal shop, Pakanalliset Syysmessut, and cyberspace- highlights the familiar resonance (Fieldnotes 15.8.2022). Each retelling allows participants to adopt the originary narrative, anchoring their awakenings in the shared endeavor. Divine vocation is thus an act of performance, enacting belonging and inscription upon those in the circle of recognition. In this manner, Krista's encounter accomplishes what Luhrmann (2020) calls a faith frame: a shared orientation that renders spiritual realities existentially fundamental. The story roots Noitaopisto's birth within moral geographies of witchcraft, where legitimacy cannot be distinguished from relational, embodied, and divine recognition.

4.1.2 Healing Trauma as Collective

The collective practice of healing at Noitaopisto puts into perspective how witchcraft functions as a means of relating to historical persecution. Krista's Hekate channeling practice intentionally worked with somatic memory of witch trials, e.g., being burned, drowned, and hanged (Fieldnotes 15.8.2022). These body traces provide a personal comprehension of exposure that is shared knowledge, unrolling trauma as historical

inheritance and affective fact of the here and now. Healing rituals accomplish more than to comfort signs of illness, injury, and bereavement; they offer the potential for re-formation of identity in the knowledge that an act of acknowledgment of violence and survival exists to be named in safe holiness. Rituals humanize the identity of belonging and translate fear, silence, and shame, rather than as failures in us, but as heritage from larger patterns of oppression. The process is evocative of what Greenwood (2000, 2009) describes as magical consciousness in which embodied experience becomes meaningful through collective confirmation. By bringing inherited trauma to the center stage as the primary object of practice, Noitaopisto writes onto a moral geography where what heals is not set apart from awakening. These rituals position students into a place of belonging to a lineage of survival that goes back in time, refiguring pain into legitimacy and solidarity. This experience created through collective action makes possible awakening not merely to be accounted for as a spiritual awakening, but also retrieves more profound dignity, visibility, and voice. The Noitaopisto, therefore, locates the witch identity as reparative and subversive, driving epistemic borders forward by calling forth our bodily histories to the leading edge of shared transformative practice.

The treatment focus also teaches us how witchcraft frames trauma as a site of power and belonging. Krista's vision was located in the support of overcoming fear in persecution, and labeled vulnerability as a doorway into community (Fieldnotes 15.8.2022). Operationally, here, trauma is an epistemic state that prescribes the way witches interpret pain as threat or power. By participating in rituals and doing affective work, the students started reconstructing their body experiences as proof of resilience, not vulnerability. It is similar to the religious frame proposed by Luhrmann (2020), wherein intersubjective interpretative agreements provide the foundation for the experiential life of spiritual truths. In Noitaopisto, locating trauma as a moral act validates the once-marginalized. Healing does not dissolve persecution, but situates it within a transmutation horizon that collapses agency within a circuit of shared care. Through the iterative retelling and staging of trauma, students develop what Haraway (1988) calls situated knowledges tied to affect, history, and relation. These practices invert the intellectual void of rationalist modernity, claiming the body memory as valid spiritual evidence (Harding, 1991). Therefore, Noitaopisto marks a transformation of the inherited traumas through community care, where waking is an act of reclaiming histories of repression and building collective intentions to care. Identity here works as a collective agent, where the work of healing is a

shared endeavour that resists erasure through acts of contending visibility, and continues in the sites of remembering tied to care.

4.1.3 Institutional Vision and Educational Goals

Noitaopisto's institutional vision continues the tale of awakening to the landscape of systematic education and agency. Krista's channeled plan through Hekate had outlined the particulars of the curriculum, the budget, and anticipated long-term educational pathways (Fieldnotes 15.8.2022). This level of detail exemplifies how otherwordly guidance became actualized in implementable institutional strategy by merging spiritual legitimacy with organizational pragmatism. The institution sought to avoid framing awakening as a privatised, personal process and instead frame it as a mass-broadening or pedagogical activity. This rendered witchcraft not just a private practice but rather one that could be positioned as an accepted area of knowledge and therefore required systematic training. In their initiative to roll out a potential three-year professional degree in their vocational training, Noitaopisto aimed to universalize esoteric knowledge into professional and credentialed learning and make witchcraft a viable career choice. This vision renders awakening a pedagogical process, professionalising other epistemologies, and disrupting mainstream approaches to knowing. Noitaopisto then links individual empowerment and institutional legitimacy, placing the witch identity within educational organizing infrastructures that legitimate belonging and knowledge. Awakening, therefore, interjects and becomes mediated into institutional spaces, so that the emergence of the spirit is never disconnected from the production of sustained learning systems.

The topic of educational aspirations at Noitaopisto shows how awakening is relationally wary, rooted in pedagogy and institutional motivation. The formal classes and experiential exercises, leading into work-based pathways, illustrate how awakening is corporeal, an iterative process within formalized spaces (fieldnotes 16.8.22). Krista's requests for 'working training,' through crystal attunement or professional certification, make awakening an ongoing discipline, rather than limiting awakening to one epiphany. Krista's work with crystals also aligns with Haraway's (1988) assertion of situated practice, that looking for knowledge cannot be separated from knowledge, nor that legitimacy springs from relational and embodied labor. By employing mystical knowledge to guide vocational design, the educational institution dissolves distinctions between rational expertise and intuitive knowledge from the Enlightenment (Harding, 1991). Awakening is therefore

institutionalized as a communal transformation process, bringing together spiritual depth and professional development, i.e., students are introduced into practice. In turn, they are educated into new subjects of society - astrologers, alternative healers, tarot readers - emerging 'witches'. This schooling organization situates witchcraft within a broader moral geography of recognition, whereby awakening becomes institutionally resilient. Therefore, Noitaopisto embodies awakening as educational, relational, and transitional vocational forms, entering a spiritual renewal into learning and communal infrastructure.

4.1.4 Embodied Learning and Energetic Practice

The local and communal practice embodied within Noitaopisto illustrated how awakening manifested in the work of the senses and the work of affect. Crystal exercises in body consciousness asked students to listen to heat, pressure, or oscillating vibrations with guided work (Fieldnotes 16.8.2022). These exercises established an everyday language of energy, putting knowledge into bodily feelings instead of theorizing more abstractly. Awakening thus occurred not as a mental epiphany but as a physical realignment toward the felt presence of magical power. Greenwood (2000, 2009) illustrates how shared magical awareness is constructed through mutual validation of sensory perception, a dynamic in these practices. Students' descriptions of heaviness, resistance, or soothing calm were actively validated by Krista, creating legitimacy through relational acknowledgment. These attunement practices demonstrate how awakening is irrevocably entangled with embodied engagement, confirming that knowledge is being constructed by the body as much as the mind. By putting affective resonance and body sensitivity at the center stage, Noitaopisto extended epistemic validity to energy and affective spheres. Awakening was not merely narrated in terms of divine vocation but enacted through quotidian bodily practice.

Dynamic practice continues to reveal how awakening came to be understood as iterative, relational, and ethically burdened. Crystal exercises were not technical; they situated bodies as agents of spiritual and communal relating (Fieldnotes 16.8.2022). Sensations generated from attunement became sources of knowledge sharing, which shaped how students recognized one another as sites of awakening. This relational building aligns with Haraway's (1988) situated knowledge, where validity is derived from embodied practice instead of observer detachment. Harding (1991) offers a similar critique of disembodied rationalism, promoting epistemologies embedded in affect and materiality, resonating

through the pedagogy of Noitaopisto. Awakening here is personal and collective, occurring through mimetic processes where bodily resonance is enabled by collective confirmation of the faith-frame (Luhrmann, 2020). Exuberant exercises were laboratories of becoming where crystals mediated energy, recognition, trust, and epistemic belonging to one another. Placing learning in sensing, Noitaopisto placed awakening as a dynamic practice of bodily engagement, affective co-presence, and responsibility. In this way, embodied learning functioned as a chief mechanism by which witches were awakened to community, legitimacy, and change-making practice.

4.2 Constructing the *Noita* Identity

4.2.1 Negotiation of Identity and Intuition

The construction of the *noita* identity in Noitaopisto is strongly mediated by intuition, meaning that the individuals create their own meanings and engage in critical discussion with spiritualities. Krista's lecture, "Mikä on noita," introduced witchcraft as a lifestyle, a worldview, and, for others, a religion. The feminist lens which is evident in Devon Cole's song "W.I.T.C.H." played at the beginning of the lecture and Krista's address to the students to "embrace fully into everything new this year has in store for you and select the things which, at a deep level, through your intuition, sense right to you" (Fieldnotes 6.9.2022) emphasizes the active agency of subjective judgment in the construction of identity. Elisa, a student of Noitaopisto, exemplifies this in selective participation, connecting with plant magic, tarot, and kitchen witchcraft but not angelic or draconic imagery. Her thoughts suggest that negotiation of identity is indeed an intentional assessment of which of the spiritual domains appeal and those which are rejectively critiqued, exemplified in the iterative, reflective process of the *noita* self. By positioning herself in dialogue with inherited religious frameworks, Elisa underscores that the witch identity is actively curated rather than passively inherited, aligning personal ethical values with mystical engagement (Greenwood, 2000; Taussig, 2016). As she explains:

> “The angel aspect has puzzled me because I’ve never thought of them as part of witchcraft, but I strongly connected them to Christianity. And I don't know, and I'm maybe a little in an anti-Christian period at the moment. Also, because we're marrying next summer and my partner insists on a church blessing, which I thought I would never want in a million years, I've committed to doing it. So when we've been looking at the wedding ceremony and so forth, it's so gendered, and since I have non-binary people around me, it feels awful. So I'm in a big anti-Christian phase currently; it comes and goes, sometimes it's

> stronger, sometimes it's lighter, sometimes I'm really into it. But sure, because I so equate angels with that, I have this strong sense of "not these, not here." But I don't know, and I'm probably pretty much alone in that, or maybe not. ... And then dragons - I've always thought of them as a fairy tale, but it's interesting why I have that cut-off: witches are "real" but dragons aren't - where's the line? It's all so nebulous and probably specific to every individual" (Fieldnotes 6.9.2022).

Elisa's hesitation with inherited religious signs attests to identity curation occurring in dialogue with broader cultural and spiritual spaces. Her selective use of practices demonstrates a capacity to individual ethics, emotional response, and instinctive tendencies, confirming that while the *noita* identity is collectively constructed, it is not entirely taken on. The tension between resonance and rejection mirrors a cyclical process of discernment in which intuition guides engagement, ethical alignment, and relational positioning. In this dynamic process, the *noita* self is situated as reflective, relational, and critically engaged, performing an emergent identity rooted in personal and collective spiritual registers (Fieldnotes 6.9.2022; Greenwood, 2000; Taussig, 2016).

4.2.2 Community and Collective Recognition

Mutual recognition and collective learning are the keys to the *noita* identity, as students negotiate material and spiritual pathways in relational spaces. Noitaopisto centers these engagements by geographically positioning formal learning alongside caring networks of peers so that practitioners can cohere their personal practice with collegial norms without strict adherence to any one tradition. Elisa highlighted that the school "feels like her own" due to teacher competence and social support (Fieldnotes 6.9.2022). This emphasizes that affective dimensions of belonging are no less important than learning in identity construction. Krista supported these practices with body practices of cyclical temporality, saying, "life isn't necessarily linear, starting here and ending here, but a circle with different phases, with birth being one gate and death another" (Fieldnotes 6.9.2022). These practices enact Taussig's (2016, pp. 453-456) definition of body techniques, showing how knowledge emerges through material, body, and sensory practice in shared environments. These practices put students into standard cosmologies, emphasizing that identity is enacted and relational rather than pre-given.

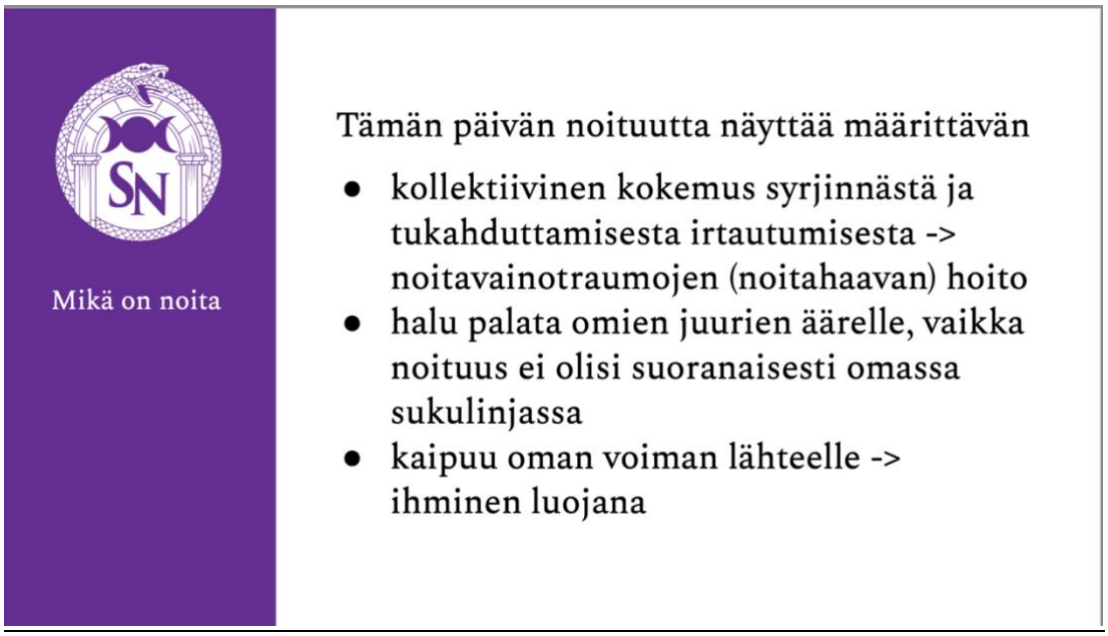

Figure 1: A screenshot of Noitaopisto lecture titled "Mikä on noita".

Collective belonging and continuity are mediated by symbolic and visual culture and tied to individual practice and common historical and spiritual traditions. Picture 1, showing Noitaopisto's logo with the triple moon and Ouroboros intertwined, is just one of the ways symbols anchor students into cycles of communal meaning (Fieldnotes 6.9.2022). Greenwood (2000, pp. 93-94, 137, 157) emphasizes the importance of magical identity in responding to historical trauma and facilitating collective healing, showing how communal participation is practical and ontological. Through involvement in these social and symbolic networks, the students co-negotiate the boundaries of individual intuition and intersubjective norms, experimenting with practices and moral options in conversation with others. Identity emerges as responsive and performative, co-produced through co-constitutive relational experiments in relationality, experimentation, and ethical judgment. The *noita* identity is therefore not fixed or unconnected; it is dynamically brought into existence within the dynamic interaction of community, practice, and symbolic continuity.

Relational responsibility and ethical participation further anchor identity, as communal obligations shape practice and self-understanding. Kaarina highlighted that witchcraft is inseparable from serving her community: “I don’t practice witchcraft from an individual need, but I’ve been set up for this purpose. And I’ve followed a calling” (Fieldnotes 6.9.2022). This perspective is also held by Strathern's (2020) argument that identity is relational, accomplished through ongoing social and environmental relations rather than being possessed separately. Students enact this relational identity by negotiating mutual

norms, braiding individual ethics together, and participating in collective rituals to create a dynamic and co-constructed sense of self. Through these processes, *noita*'s identity is belonging and discernment, and affective, material, and social dimensions are synthesized into a dynamic ensemble of spiritual and ethical practice.

4.2.3 Embodied Practice and Lifestyle Alignment

Embodied practice is also among the strong agencies whereby *noita* identity is performed since students are instructed to infuse magical lore into mundane action and decision-making. Noitaopisto identity work involves skills and sensibilities in which becoming knowledgeable about one's is coordinated with doing something in a certain way through rituals, spells, and symbolic action. Säde underlines that identity claims without prolonged labor will not suffice. However, transformative practice is about assuming and inhabiting positions for a duration: students have to assume religious ideals and the material of witchcraft practice. The intertwinement of habit, scholarship, and spiritual contemplation illustrates how the *noita* self is created into being, since karmically each action recapitulates the moral and symbolic characteristics of identity. By placing magic in the everyday, practitioners anchor intangible belief within the immanence of experience, rendering a sense of self, moral obligation, and coherent identification with a community. The lived process demonstrates a lived ontology of witchcraft, where knowledge, intuition, and practice overlap to create identity based upon relational, ethical, and material engagement with witchcraft.

Säde asserted that both action and belief are required of witchcraft, outlining:

> "I can't. I can't say I'm a witch if I don't do anything. If I don't live the lifestyle or live by that ideal, then I can't say that I am that. Otherwise, anyone can say to be anything. (Sighs). I could say, for example, that I am a plumber, but I have never worked as a plumber during my entire life. As a matter of fact, the only thing that I know about pipes is that you connect them, which makes the buildings function — apart from that, I know nothing. So, who are you actually? I get that it's about who you are and that you've opened your eyes to another type of world— another reality — but if you don't do anything in any way with that other reality, then. You've just opened your eyes. And you're all fine, this is here, I know this and that, and so on, but again, if you don't do something about it, then. No. You have to do it, or your actions must catch up with it. Yes, it is a matter of identity, but you must live the life too. It doesn't mean that you do it actively all the time. I am not running around ritualising on a hill daily, but I do obviously ritualise. I have my altar. I have my tools. I am always working on some reading. I actively ritualise. That's what makes me a witch. It's actively present in my life. I have conversations with my guides, and I do things. ...I

> don't think you can claim to be something if you don't live the lifestyle. Like, I can't claim to be a Jehovah's Witness, because I'm clearly not involved. I don't live that lifestyle. I can claim to have been one once, but not now."

Daily usage and way of life reinforce *noita* identity so that ethical, religious, and material dimensions unite in congruent practice. Instruments, altars, and ritual items are functional equipment and symbolic signifiers that mediate the practitioner's interface with the individual and community (Latour, 1993, pp. 6-12). The routine with magic also solidifies connections and positions the practitioner within the continuing cycles of spiritual receipt and obligation. This process places the *noita* self as active, responsive, and material-based, highlighting witchcraft at Noitaopisto as simultaneously ontological, performative, and ethical.

4.2.4 Ethical Consideration and Cultural Reflexivity

The *noita* identity at Noitaopisto is produced through a consideration of ethics for engagement, specifically the balance between engaging in cultural and religious practices that hold potential risks. Students critically reflect on the historical and social context of their practice, asking themselves how appropriate and how connected it is to them. For example, Elisa's testimony expresses critical reflection as she moves away from using deities from Asian religions. However, generally, eclecticism is used as a license to do so in today's witchcraft. As she put it, "I was interested in some of Wicca, but the dualism of god/goddess was limiting for me because I don't like working in gendered systems" (Fieldnotes 15.3.2023). Moral attention is a decision-making practice that integrates value with ethical action. Massey's (1994) moral geographies concept illustrates this negotiation, revealing how it constitutes a spiritual claim concerning space, history, and responsibility. These choices expose the reflexive character of *noita* practice, affirming that moral reflexivity cannot be severed from identity formation. In action, the *noita* self is not only individual devotion but also context-sensitive and socially responsive, depicting the tension of the balance between freedom, respect, and vigilant criticality.

Kaarina also enacts relational ethics of witchcraft through demonstrating her practice to be indistinguishable from being in service to others: "I am not without witchcraft and witchcraft isn't without me, right here, in this particular place" (Fieldnotes 22.4.2023). Her concern through identity introduces extra social, ecological, and spiritual webs wherein responsibility is beyond individualized practice. Ethical practice is also an issue of inherited trauma, as Greenwood (2000, pp. 93-94) contends by repeating the witch wound

as an ontological and historical break to be healed by spiritual labor. Noitaopisto affirms such reflective practice through mentoring, peer discussion, and somatics, enabling students to critically reflect on magical tools and rituals' histories, significations, and effects. Through actively negotiating these ethical concerns, the students establish a *noita* identity that is ethically responsible, culturally conscious, and responsive to personal values and communal responsibilities.

4.2.5 Relational and Communal Dimensions

In addition to focusing on intuition, bodily practice, and lifestyle alignment, the *noita* identity in Noitaopisto is also built up through relational, communal engagement. Identity is a collective process of co-implied engagement with others, guides, spiritual beings, and the practice environment. Kaarina offered that witchcraft cannot be understood without sharing the principle of responsibility, establishing the self concerning communal care, ethical responsibility, and inheritance. Kaarina noted that the witch-self is enacted in communication with others, not simply as self-revelation, and in service, teaching, and assistance of others; in fact, Kaarina pointed out that relationality manages both the mundane aspects of magical life and the moral dimensions of magical practice. The relational framing underscored the importance of continuity of both individual and collective identity, and carnality of magical work within frameworks of trust, apprenticeship, and shared experience. Strathern's (2020) model restates that identity is not possessed but inhabited by ongoing relational processes, demonstrating how Noitaopisto fosters spaces where students renegotiate commitments as they try things out and practice anew. Through mentorship, speech, and everyday rituals, the *noita* identity is constantly being made and remade, showing that relational and communal elements are part of becoming a witch in Finland today. As Kaarina reflects:

> "I am who I am, but if witchcraft weren't part of my life, then I wouldn't be a witch. I wouldn't practice witchcraft or be a channel. I'd be doing something else with my life; I'd have another purpose. But yes, it is about who you are or aren't as you either have that connection to witchcraft or you don't. You either believe in it or you don't. In that way, it exists, and that existence is the foundation of all witchcraft. If you don't believe in witchcraft or don't know about its existence, then you can't practice it either. That knowledge, communication, and channel have to be there. That knowledge comes to you from somewhere-either unconsciously, subconsciously, or intuitively as you start walking the path, like Krista keeps saying, that you step onto a path and start moving in some direction, and the path forks, and you make a decision on which path of witchcraft goes on throughout one's life. In my head, all of the witches I've met,

> their witch paths go on throughout their lives, even to death and beyond. A witch is never a finished witch." (Fieldnotes 6.9.2022).

Viewing identity construction in Noitaopisto through this lens reveals how relationality can connect the personal, collective, and ethical. Magic, an inherently social practice and process, is constantly engaged within collective trust and mentorship, as it is an ethical consideration of our contemporary responsibility. As students perform values, they can negotiate meaning, spirituality, society, and historical perspective, placing personal identity in a context of culture and ecology. The relationality of these interactions means that *noita*'s identity is always in a state of flux, although relative, to community needs and environmental and spiritual resonance. Noitaopisto constitutes a form of witchcraft through relations, embodied practice, ethical selection, and intuition, always happening in a state of personal, collective, and ontological fluidity. In these points or places of relating the individual and practice, they become and re-become; this is not a practice about being a witch singularly but an act of co-creation as we extend, expand, and co-create worlds, engaged through the agency of human and nonhuman relations for remembering the past and an attempt to, most presently, be responsible in ethical practice.

4.2.6 Ontology of Becoming

In Noitaopisto, *noita* identity is imagined through becoming-in-process, not an essence, which aligns with an ontology of becoming. Identity is enacted via habitual repetition with practices, groups, and materials that produce together the witch-self. Witchcraft is learned as an emergent space of possibility where intuition, ethical sense, and relationality are gathered together to form emergent forms of being. Greater than a fixed term, being a witch is a recursive negotiation between self-perception and external discourse, emphasizing that knowledge, power, and belonging are relationally constructed. This understanding is cultivated within the school's pedagogy, in which magical development is presented as an iterative process wherein loops of experimentation, reflection, and ritual action create an evolving subjectivity. Field observations also show that students return to previous lessons and reinterpret rituals, showing mastery is not innate but instead emerging through iterative engagement with familiar and structural aspects of magical practice (Fieldnotes 6.9.2022). In stressing becoming over being, Noitaopisto highlights that identity is not merely performed but emerges through ethical, material, and affective entanglements across time and space, allowing for plural realities to coexist within the practitioner's experience.

Elisa's reflections emphasize this ontology of process, as she described witchcraft as being "a combination of worldview, lifestyle and belief in magic" that is always central regardless of the practice ebbs and flows. She explained: "My practice has ebbed and flowed in strength over the years, but my identification with witchcraft has remained centered in values and worldview it embodies" (Fieldnotes 6.9.2022). Säde also emphasizes the active negotiation of self: active engagement ensures coherence between belief, lifestyle, and moral responsibility. Kaarina's description of walking a forked road, where the "road of witchcraft unfolds throughout one's life," also shows that becoming cannot be divorced from relational, temporal, and moral dimensions (Fieldnotes 6.9.2022). Together, these accounts position the witch-self as emergent, dynamic, and not reducible to ethical, material, and relational ones, illustrating how ontology in Noitaopisto is bound to be processual and iterative. Becoming-ontology weaves strands of intuition, relationality, somatic practice, and ethical judgment into one rich tapestry, indicating that identity is neither entirely individual nor entirely determined.

By classifying witchcraft as an emergent and adaptive existence, Noitaopisto allows its practitioners to oscillate between ambiguity, the syncretic overlap of various symbolic registers, and the syncretic reconciliation of former and present systems. Identity evolves from sustained exposure to community, materials, ethical consideration, and the nonhuman world, emphasizing the porous and co-constitutive nature of the *noita* self. This observation positions witchcraft as a constant negotiation of self, world, otherworld and practice in which students are involved in creating both their interior lives and relational and communal ground. Through recursive practice and reflection, the *noita* is an ever-emergent being, highlighting that magical identity is an emergent process of ethical, social, and spiritual world-making.

4.3 Visibility, Community, and Political Self-Making

4.3.1 Public Visibility and Social Legibility

Public visibility is the central process by which *noita* identity is negotiated against society's expectations and rationalist norms. Identification as a *noita* is politically and relationally a performative process, subject to tactical decisions about what aspects of practice to make visible or to conceal. Noitaopisto is a case of institutional visibility, as the school courses in Finnish high schools provoked alarm among parents who viewed teaching about witchcraft as "encouraging dangerous superstition" (MTV Uutiset 2025). The school’s framing of

witchcraft as educational and self-help oriented reflects a deliberate translation of spiritual practice into socially legible terms: “Students have gotten answers to things that worried or scared them…I’ve explained, for example, how to use a spirit board safely and given answers to experiences that felt unexplainable” (MTV Uutiset 2025). This dynamic illustrates that *noita* identity emerges not only through personal experience, but also through their active negotiation of public recognition, negotiating a tension among authenticity, ethical responsibility, and credibility in public spaces. Visibility is made relational based on the audience's cultural presumptions and subject to the ongoing calibration of what is socially acceptable or intelligible.

At the personal level, legibility in public is performed through selective revelation and tacit conduct, highlighting the ethical components of relational identity. Säde's account illustrates how effortless knowing proceeds unobtrusively in workplace environments:

> “Over half of the time, everything I handle with my clients comes through as channelling. They have no idea, and I don’t always realise it either until afterwards. These aren’t things I’ve previously spoken about - I don’t even know how I knew this or that thing. Some of it comes so automatically, just for that specific person in that moment, the things they need to hear. And that probably makes me exceptionally good at my job, because I can draw on that. I also give every client Reiki healing automatically. I don’t say anything about it, I just begin.” (Fieldnotes 6.9.2022).

Similarly, Kaarina describes situational calibration:

"It's tangible on an individual basis when I meet someone - I may sense that this person needs something from me. I never 'heal' anyone with my energy if they don't want it, but if I get that kind of feedback, I may offer something of myself." And at a collective level, I practice meditation and try to introduce more light and call in higher energies to help healing processes on a big geographical scale" (Fieldnotes 6.9.2022).

These instances show that visibility operates by ethical discretion, relational attunement, and context sensitivity, confirming that witchcraft identity is done and not merely claimed.

Historical and cultural memory also comes into play in the negotiation of public identity, especially in the case of practitioners linked to marginalized or persecuted traditions. Kaarina finds her visibility in Sámi cultural history, citing that witchcraft and shamanic practice were previously suppressed: "Yes, the word for witch does exist in Sámi too - it's noaidi, and it's pretty close to the Finnish word, and I think the meaning has remained pretty stable across Uralic languages.". Witchcraft existed in the northern regions for a

long time. I never use the word *noita* in my writing because I don't want to scare people. The witch hunts here and in northern Norway were awful; witches were burned there. The tales exist here, here around. But people think it was so long ago, until it was prohibited. People take it that all the witches got burnt, drums confiscated, and any traces of their 'satanic' or pagan practice eliminated (Fieldnotes 6.9.2022). This shows that public expression of *noita* identity entails sophisticated ethical and historical negotiation, with relational, political, and cultural considerations shaping how witchcraft is made legible. Visibility thus becomes an iterative, contextually embedded, and socially mediated practice.

4.3.2 Contextual Disclosure and Tacit Practice

Negotiation of witchcraft identity is highly context-specific in relation to social and professional settings, with self-disclosure adjusted to gauge perceived risk, audience, and relational factors. Practitioners reveal aspects of their *noita* practice selectively, being authentic and socially legible, replicating broader identity management processes subject to potential scrutiny (MTV Uutiset 2025). Fieldwork indicates that professional and sensitive settings often need partial or complete covering up to maintain ethical barriers while continuing to practice spiritual work. Säde illustrates this dynamic in her counseling practice, explaining how intuitive channelling and Reiki seem to function automatically and secretively:

> "More than half the time, everything I work through with my clients comes through as channelling.". They have no clue, and I don't always realize it myself until afterward. These aren't things I've ever discussed before - I don't even know how I knew this or that thing. Some of it is just so natural for that specific person at that particular time, the things that they need to hear. And that probably makes me a fantastic job, because I can draw on that. I also automatically offer all clients Reiki healing. I don't say anything; I begin" (Fieldnotes 6.9.2022).

Kaarina's experiences support the idea that tacit practice enables relational and ethical responsibility in local and collective settings. According to her:

> “It’s visible on an individual level when I meet someone - I may get a sense that this person needs something from me. I never ‘heal’ anyone with my energy without permission, but if I get that kind of message, I might offer something of myself. And on a collective level, I meditate and try to increase light and invite higher energies to support healing processes across a wide geographical area.”

These accounts clearly demonstrate that occult practices are not passive or unimportant; they continue to have active effects and are a form of spiritual labor. Tacit engagement allows practitioners to align ethical obligations, private self, and professional responsibility with each other without formal recognition, stressing that invisibility is a deliberately skilled and relational mode of enactment.

This situational secrecy highlights the intertwining of witchcraft within social stratifications, cultural memory, and moral practice. Practitioners must navigate normative assumptions regarding magic, doubt, and professional decorum in having relational, emotional, and spiritual efficacy (Fieldnotes 6.9.2022). Tacit knowledge, transmitted via embodied techniques, intuitive spontaneity, and unconscious channeling, highlights the operational reality of witchcraft beyond visible signifiers. These practices weave subtle but profound nets of influence, showing how religious labor is effective without being made public. Strategic modulation of visibility and tacit performance demonstrates the relational, ethical, and political dimensions of contemporary *noita* identity, showing how spiritual expertise can be done even when practices are socially hidden (Säde, Kaarina, Fieldnotes 6.9.2022).

4.3.3 Cultural and Historical Memory

The negotiation of *noita* identity is structurally influenced by cultural and historical memory, particularly regarding Sámi heritage and the passing on of intergenerational trauma. Kaarina emphasizes that public expression of witchcraft is bounded by awareness of historical persecution:

> “Yes, the word for witch exists in Sámi too - it's *noaidi*, and it's quite close to the Finnish word and I believe the meaning has stayed pretty consistent across Uralic languages. Witchcraft has long existed in the northern regions. In my work, I never use the word *noita* because I don’t want to scare people. The witch hunts here were brutal and in northern Norway, many witches were burned. For Sámi people, witchcraft and shamanism are deeply embedded in the culture, but they were banned by the church and the state. To this day, people still don’t dare bring it up, even though Sámi shamanism has lived on to the present. I have friends who still practice traditional shamanism - using drums, for instance - and the joik [traditional Sámi singing] is also part of that forbidden heritage. It comes from a deep understanding of the culture and can be used to joik sacred places like mountains, waters or reindeer. The joik carries the community forward, but it was heavily condemned. I myself don’t joik, I never learned that tradition, but I do play the drum.”

The testimony illustrates how collective memory informs present ways of public identity, and reaffirmation also expresses hesitation based on culture and ethics. That silence in the symbolic practices of drums, joik, and Sámi dress invests an ethical layer of disclosure or stemming out of disclosure, confirming within the historical context of embodied Sámi practice, which Kaarina frames within her inheritances. Kaarina's working of these inheritances gestures towards *noita*'s identity as spatially positioned within relations of memory, resistance, and survivance. What is most palpable to us are the embodied and performative processes as carriers of memory, writing resilience, ancestral knowledge, and people's everyday ritualized practices, and claiming their relational and ethical responsibility. The relation between history and agentic ways of individual identity exposes that identity is not wholly separate but contextualized in relation to inherited social, cultural, and political positions.

Trauma persistence as a collective within culture is reflected in secrecy, invisibility, and the artist's representation in the magickal, where historical consciousness continues to shape relational life. Even hidden activities are potent, demonstrating continuity between generations and places (Fieldnotes 6.9.2022). Symbolic action, for instance, strategic drum or joik use, writes persecutory memories onto statements of cultural resilience. *Noita*'s identity thus appeals to historical consciousness, where revelation, concealment, and ritual are charged with ethical accountability for individual and collective practice (Kaarina, Fieldnotes 6.9.2022). Such interwoven practices attest to how the visibility of witchcraft is a complex negotiation facilitated by historical, cultural, and social paradigms and not merely by individual preference or agency.

4.3.4 Emotional Belonging and Community Validation

Noita's identity is solidified by community validation, wherein relational and affective elements produce belonging and recognition. Participation in collective rituals, fairs, and online communities allows practitioners to project individual practice onto collective recognition, illustrating that identity is relational, socially situated, and co-constructed through various settings. Elisa emphasizes this affective dimension of belonging: "For example, the Autumn fair - I was so happy there. I really felt like I was among my people, accepted. It was just an excellent feeling… I wasn't just some lonely hihhuli (eng. weirdo) anymore. I felt like I belonged somewhere" (Fieldnotes 6.9.2022). These experiences highlight how social recognition and emotional resonance are fundamental to identity

formation, transforming disconnected self-concepts into integrated communal selves. Collective spaces provide validation that secures engagement with magical practice while locating personal experience within overarching shared spiritual and cultural frameworks.

Face-to-face, embodied interaction becomes increasingly significant to developing relational identity and trust. Kaarina observes that while online formats allow accessibility and ongoing communication, physical presence strengthens affective and epistemic dimensions: “We’re still at the beginning in terms of collectivity… who knows how big this witch collective could become? I’d love to participate in in-person teaching, but my job and young kids make it hard. So this [online format] is perfect for now, but long-term, I would absolutely love to get into physical contact with other witches" (Fieldnotes 6.9.2022). This reflection shows how relational connections and knowledge-sharing are amplified in co-presence. Identity is thus materially and socially enacted, instead of cognitively constructed or symbolically represented.

Community functions as a site where belonging is continuously negotiated and folded into self-awareness. Rituals, events, and informal interactions allow witches to calibrate visibility, test acceptance, and refine social and spiritual presentation. Affective affirmation within these circles fosters emotional safety, allowing reconciliation between private, internalized practice and publicly readable identities. This dynamic demonstrates that *noita* identity is cooperatively created through social interaction, with ongoing negotiation required between personal authenticity, relational recognition, and ethical matrices inscribed in community practice (Elisa, Kaarina, Fieldnotes 6.9.2022). Recognition, belonging, and mutual affirmation are thus central to sustaining a secure and integrated witch identity.

4.3.5 Protective Invisibility and Reflexive Agency

Other witches actively limit disclosure of their magical practice, preferring private engagement to public visibility or social activism. This strategy allows individuals to maintain spiritual integrity at a personal level while reducing risks of judgment, stigma, or unwanted attention in professional or social networks. Maria reflects on this protective mindset, saying:

> “I guess I live in some kind of pink bubble… I think things are pretty good. Probably many would disagree. But maybe it’s because I haven’t gone around broadcasting it. I haven’t had any negative experiences myself, so I assume it’s

> okay for others too. I mean, some believe in elves or Santa Claus, so I don't really care what people do in their own homes. It's kind of an invisible position in the sense that witchcraft isn't taught anywhere, except now maybe a little. But mostly, it's only talked about in historical contexts like witch hunts and folklore. Modern witchcraft in my life has been very invisible, a personal thing. I haven't really thought about its societal position at all because I don't care what society thinks about my personal matters."

Humor and comparative strategies often work to normalize secrecy, dispelling tension between public expectation and private spiritual practice. By joking or likening to profane habits, practitioners make occult practices ordinary, accessible, and morally unobjectionable. Maria, for example, emphasizes: "I wouldn't go around telling people I have haemorrhoids either," drawing attention to intimate concerns or even the unusual that could be a topic of jokes. This is to manage individuals' present social view (Fieldnotes 6.9.2022). These strategies demonstrate invisibility, which is, therefore, not passive but rather active reflexive negotiation, in terms of maintaining a sense of personal safety, moral responsibility, and relational attentiveness to others.

Double epistemologies operate as witches simultaneously engage with dominant rationalist paradigms and private enchanted worldviews. Practitioners as brokers are in social and professional spaces, often scientifically or psychologically framing their work, translating into accepted cultural terms, the energy work or understanding of spiritual knowledge they might otherwise consider an authority. In the context of a private practice, the magical work is entirely agentic, shaping thought and action and relationships. The agentic reflexivity of witches, or individuals engaged in spiritual work, allows witch practitioners to maintain integrity and conduct placemaking in plural social worlds. The reflexivity of witch identity demonstrates the adaptive, negotiated, and contextually responsive attributes of contemporary *noita* identity (Maria, Fieldnotes 6.9.2022).

4.3.6 Media, Virtual Spaces, and Communicative Labour

Media images are central in building visibility, credibility, and perceived legitimacy of contemporary witchcraft practice. Titus Hjelm (2006) identifies three widespread Finnish media discourses that have habitually built Wicca and witchcraft: alignment with Satanism during moral panics, infantilized portrayals as fictional or humorous, and empathetic coverage revolving around practitioners' perspectives. These discourses influence how witches perform in public, conditioning language, bodily language, and the strategies they employ to perform themselves sincerely. Practitioners navigate these mediated spaces

carefully, recognizing that visibility carries the potential for social consequences (Hjelm, 2006, pp. 37-39). Public expression is thus not only performative but strategically responsive to maintaining relational, ethical, and spiritual integrity and minimizing risks associated with cultural misinterpretation.

Virtual spaces enable witches to co-produce their public image and negotiate legitimacy across diverse social and cultural registers. As Ilana Gershon (2010) argues, communicative medias are never neutral: they are shaped by culturally constructed media ideologies - the beliefs and assumptions people hold about how different medias transfer meaning and intent (p. 389). These ideologies influence how witches interpret and perform spiritual work online, particularly in spaces like Facebook groups, WhatsApp chats and online rituals. Media ideologies, like language ideologies, are multiple, competing and often contradictory, yet they guide decisions about how and where to speak, who can speak and what counts as appropriate discourse (Gershon, 2010, p. 390). Interpretation in online spaces also can be tricky when other social cues are not present: does a floating laughing emoji sent by a participant on an online lecture express joy or possibly a dismissal through humour on the topic of the lecture?

Online and offline channel participation requires ethical calibration, relational awareness, and persistent negotiation of interpretive resources. Practitioners must assess reception of messages, considering audience assumptions, medium affordances, and social norms. As Gershon (2010) shows, medium choices carry social weight: they can index formality, intimacy, legitimacy or even disrespect, especially in emotionally significant contexts (pp. 389-391). According to Gershon (ibid.), a shift from public posts to private chats, or not participating in some conversation but participating in others, is a sign of deliberate communicative labor, negotiating social meaning and responsibility. This sustained practice ensures magical activity harmonizes with individual morals and social expectations, staying epistemically independent. Virtual realms thus prolong relational, affective, and ethical labor, showing how *noita* identity is performed, staged, and guarded through mediated ecologies.

4.3.7 Value Creation and Relational Cosmology

Embodied and mimetic practice in witchcraft generate forms of value that exceed conventional economic measurement, developing social and spiritual value. Graeber (2013, p. 224) points out that value can be cosmological and assist in the formation of worlds as

well as simply mirroring materiality. In Noitaopisto, ritual involvement, shared learning, and symbolic performance generate relational and affective responses, linking individual practice and collective recognition. These practices allow practitioners to assert agency over their spiritual knowledge and set communal standards, proving witchcraft as an epistemic, ethical, and aesthetic practice. The social effects of involvement – such as validation, guidance, and intersubjective bond - are indistinguishable from self-development of magical craft, proving a relational cosmology in which value is gained through action and presence rather than measured materially.

Magical practice bridges differences between internal authenticity and external legibility, harmonizing epistemic independence and social affiliation. Practitioners are engaged in a perpetual negotiation process about the level of enchanted, internalized knowledge disclosed, maintaining individual understanding and social intelligibility in consonance. Rituals shared by groups, sabbaths, and online forums are arenas where individual perception is confirmed and calibrated, enabling witches to enact authenticity while remaining recognizable according to cultural and institutional rationalities. Magic is valuable, socially speaking, to both the practitioner and the community, due to the support and acknowledgments they receive, as well as their shared memories, which exist outside any organized, formal systems.

Witchcraft repositions reason among other forms of knowledge, blending relational, fractal, and embodied practice of being in a late modernity. By synthesizing intuitive, affective, and experiential knowing and social negotiation, practitioners reassert that reason is not singular but inadequate. Embodied rituals, symbolic performances, and mimetic learning point to relationality and continuity with previous, spiritual, and cultural patterns. Such relational cosmology enables witches to be simultaneously at different epistemic registers, negotiating between public credibility, private enchantment, and moral responsibility. In this way, *noita* identity is co-produced in shared modes of practice, underlining the point that spiritual value, knowledge, and belonging cannot be separated from relational and embodied performances of magical life (Graeber, 2013, p. 224).

5 Witchcraft as Alternative Care: Healing, Wounds, and Moral Economies

Witchcraft is an alternative care system that heals individual, ancestral, and communal wounds through ritual, magical, and community practice. Healing is embodied and somatic, and places embodied energy and experiential knowledge above cognition or biomedical definitions of body and feeling states. The Noitahaavaseremonia (Eng. The itch wound ceremony) demonstrates how group trauma and marginalization are transmuted into therapeutic meaning-making and as a co-created community. Witches negotiate ethical responsibility while challenging neoliberal appropriations of wellness that prioritize self-management over relational care. Plant, ritual, and crystal practices illustrate how affective labor, consent, and relational attunement generate therapeutic and spiritual value for clients. These practices occur within moral economies where reciprocity, respect for spirits, and mutual responsibility determine outcomes and practitioner identity. Magical healing also provides a framework for rephrasing uncanny experiences obscured by biomedical models, creating epistemic sovereignty and verifying alternative knowledge. Practitioners navigate a tightrope among public skepticism, ethical responsibility, and legitimacy, maintain relational ties, and reconfigure conventional boundaries between care, identity, and well-being in virtual and material contexts. Witchcraft is subsequently a socially, ethically, and ontologically negotiated form of alternative care.

5.1.1 Experiential and Embodied Healing

Somatic and experiential healing in contemporary witchcraft centralizes the body both as a tool and a place of knowledge production. Practitioners account for interacting with crystals, herbs, tarot cards and pendulums as an aspect of energetic communication, where physical feelings are signs of harmony and healing effect (Fieldnotes 25.8.2022; 14.8.2022). Pain, numbness, or heat are not interpreted as disease signs but as communicative messages from plants, tools, or spirits, locating diagnosis and treatment in relational and animist ontologies rather than biomedical ones. This moves to the foreground to signal that healing cannot be divorced from subjective experience, centering on attunement, perception, and reflexive body awareness. The practitioners undertake repeated experimentation, observing, and recording response patterns across time to build both technique and insight, showing how embodied knowledge evolves collaboratively and independently within witchcraft communities. By foregrounding sense perception over

legitimation by external authorities, participants creatively counter hegemonic healthcare epistemologies, cultivating a form of expertise attuned to attunement, energetic literacy, and context-sensitivity, reframing what is taken as legitimate healing knowledge (Fieldnotes 25.8.2022; Krista, Fieldnotes 15.8.2022). This process also encourages ethical practice because attunement to the energetic condition of others supports consent and relational accountability in therapeutic practice.

Embodied healing also values mutual negotiation of meaning since solitary experience is placed within shared epistemic contexts. In mutual exercises at Noitaopisto, students explain that they sense energy from crystals or herbs differently, illustrating the subjective variability central to magical healing (Fieldnotes 25.8.2022). This quality suggests dialogic thought, shared confirmation, and looping back, leading to an embodied knowledge production in community. Sensory reactions are logged, cross-verified, and translated into shared, leading to relational calibration of healing instruments and paths. Through this co-tuning, individual lived experiences are re-signified as collective knowledge, improving individual performance and group cohesion (Fieldnotes 14.8.2022). Embodied experimentation contrasts biomedical reductionism, showing healing efficacy is often relationally mediated and episodic - rather than universally generalizable - practices (Merja, Fieldnotes 14.8.2022). These practices rewrite the body as an active participant, and the therapeutic effects can not be disentangled from attention, awareness, and responsiveness. In participating, through sensory awareness and energetic attunement, both shared and reflected on together, participants in witchcraft situate epistemic sovereignty as relationally responsive and ethically driven.

The embodied healing of relational and energetic dimensions is oriented towards co-creating with human and non-human participants. Crystals, herbs, and pendulums are all understood as co-workers, or acting adaptogenically, to personal energies and states, achieving the outcomes sought (Fieldnotes 25.8.2022; 14.8.2022). Practitioners have the responsibility to engage in the bargaining of respect and permission, with plant entities or the spirit of the forest. This aspect of responsibility creates a moral and ethical framework towards one's participation and ongoing engagement with non-human forces. These complex ties sustain restorative practices beyond a singular technique and integrate repair within interpersonal bonds that are bodily, environmental, and soulful. The recursive and situated nature of these practices work so efficacy takes root in the embodied and lived experience of the practitioners, conditions verification in a collectivity of witnessing and

attuning with self (Krista, Fieldnotes, 15.8.2022). The terrain of embodied healing is a negotiation of social power, personal agency, and ethical duty. It brings a mundane reality into communion with things, constructing a richly intentional practice suffused with spirit. Through remapping sensation as diagnostic and co-participatory, practitioners of witchcraft rethink healing as an embodied dialogue between body, mind, and energetic environment, illustrating that relational, animist ontologies forge robust epistemic frameworks capable of producing knowledge, health, and ethical entanglement in a single gesture (Fieldnotes 25.8.2022; 14.8.2022).

5.1.2 Ritual, Community, and Validation

Communal rituals and group learning spaces are principal validation sites, where knowledge excluded in biomedical contexts comes to be validated. Participants describe Noitaopisto workshops, fairs, or webinars as spaces where their sensorial, emotional, and spiritual experiences are acknowledged without judgment (Fieldnotes 6.9.2022; Elisa, Fieldnotes 6.9.2022). Their sharing as a group transforms such experiences from individual phenomena to legitimate ways of knowing, reinforcing both personal trust and epistemic self-assurance. Rituals, ranging from water charging with a pendulum to crystal work, are simultaneously pedagogy and therapeutic practice, highlighting how embodiment, attention, and intentionality contribute to affective and cognitive knowing (Krista, Fieldnotes 15.8.2022). Recognition not only emerges from teaching but also via relational feedback, peer observation, and communal reflection, thus legitimizing subjective experience while creating standards for ethical practice. It is a process that undermines biomedical hierarchies by reinscribing intuition, sensory perception, and energetic attunement as credible epistemic resources, showing that community ritual is both a modality of care and a means for creating legitimacy in alternative healing communities. Validation, therefore, is not symbolic but enacted through participation, co-presence, and the iterative negotiation of shared experiential norms (Fieldnotes 14.8.2022).

Participation in these communal rituals solidifies collective agency and builds networks of relational support that mediate moral and social boundaries of care. Students commonly report a sense of belonging and safety in those spaces where alternative epistemologies are not merely tolerated but actively drawn into practice (Fieldnotes 6.9.2022). Co-learning allows practitioners to negotiate visibility, to decide what is possible to share publicly about their practice, and to establish ethical guidelines for collaboration with human and

non-human collaborators. Through experimenting with healing technologies, rituals, and energy practices, practitioners distill together the meanings and practices of magical care, producing norms for safe, relationally responsive practice (Fieldnotes 14.8.2022). These interactions secure relational identity, writing trust, respect, and mutual responsibility into everyday community norms. Group work relational dynamics also ensure that healing knowledge is collective, socially accountable, and grounded in lived experience, disrupting assumptions that expertise necessarily comes from formalized medical training (Krista, Fieldnotes 15.8.2022). Communal involvement, therefore, operates as a legitimacy mechanism, writing moral authority into the processes of co-constructed practice and ethical attentiveness.

Shared practice, particularly in formalized rituals, enables the co-construction of meaning, ratifying relational identity while promoting epistemic and emotional development. Practitioners account for the iterative negotiation of symbolic, energetic, and affective experience as being at the heart of how magical care operates and how efficacy is perceived (Elisa, Fieldnotes 6.9.2022). These practices establish networks of care, whereby participants' experiences are validated, explained, and integrated into collective frameworks that honor personal autonomy and relational responsibility. Ritualized practice, such as group energy work, spell-craft, or plant magic, demonstrates how knowledge is generated collaboratively rather than hierarchically, embedding learning in lived experience (Fieldnotes 14.8.2022; 15.8.2022). Through feedback loops of observation, feedback, and reflection, collective epistemologies within community members place spiritual and emotional intuition at the forefront of healing praxis. These collective practices show how relational validation cannot be separated from the moral and social organization of care, highlighting how witchcraft communities produce legitimacy, resilience, and trust through participatory, embodied, and collective mediated systems (Fieldnotes 14.8.2022). Communal ritual is therefore also a means, epistemology, and relational infrastructure for alternative healing.

5.1.3 Negotiating Authority and Alternative Epistemologies

Practitioners repeatedly negotiate against biomedical rationalism and magical epistemologies and, by so doing, convert experiences habitually pathological as hallucinations into symbolic meaning. Uncanny and sensory experiences are visited as diagnostic and transformative knowledge sites, prioritizing relational, energetic, and

symbolic over symptom reduction (Fieldnotes 19.11.2022; Andell, Bergroth, & Honkasalo, 2021). By verifying such experience in ritual participation, meditation, and intersubjective observation, witches interrupt hegemonic biomedical discourses that present non-normal seeing as disordered or dangerous. This redefinition demonstrates that epistemic power is socially mediated, contingent on communal recognition, and rooted in lived body experience rather than institutional certification. The reinterpretation of personal and collective experience indicates how competing paradigms generate ethical and therapeutic power, allowing people to reclaim agency over their vision and healing paths. Magical practice is, therefore, epistemic resistance and relational negotiation, creating a counter-discursive space where knowledge, care, and moral accountability converge with experienced knowledge and communal accountability (Krista, Fieldnotes 15.8.2022).

Virtual and material spaces operate as parallel locations for negotiating non-biomedical healing modalities' legitimation, disclosure, and authority. Online forums, social media debate, and TikTok activity expose practitioners to public scrutiny, biomedical critique, and ethical dialogue, necessitating the subtle regulation of visibility (Fieldnotes 25.8.2022; TikTok comment on Noitaopisto). Practitioners strategically unveil insight, experience, or teaching to balance relational openness with protective discretion, thus demonstrating secrecy as a strategic form of ethical practice. Physical workshops and group rituals provide bounded spaces whereby experiential knowing can be experimented upon with safety, observed, and sanctioned, as opposed to the unregulated interpretations of online consumers (Elisa, Fieldnotes 6.9.2022). This doubled navigation of virtual and bodily spaces solidifies the relational ethics at the center of magical practice, where revelation is calibrated to produce communal trust, minimize harm, and maintain the integrity of relational and spiritual grids (Fieldnotes 14.8.2022). Power is thus co-created because it emerges from the iterative interplay of collective legitimation, participant agency, and contextual constraint, rather than being imposed unilaterally.

Visibility, concealment, and revelation are negotiated continually to ensure moral accountability in other epistemologies. Practitioners control their openness relative to social, institutional, and familial ones, prioritizing relational responsibility over performative revelation (Fieldnotes 19.11.2022). By disclosing or concealing magical talent and intelligence, witches pre-empt ethical dilemmas about potential influence, damage, or misinterpretation, navigating between empowerment of shared knowledge and protective positions. This strategy puts relational ontology front and center of epistemic practice,

emphasizing that knowledge cannot be separated from the responsibilities present in webs of society and affective ties. Once more, ritualized and embodied action allow for controlled experimentation, reflection, and communal verification so that learning and healing are ethically grounded and experientially verified (Fieldnotes 14.8.2022). This attuned visibility supports the embedding of individual, collective, and intergenerational orders of ethics, demonstrating how other kinds of healing practices are not separable from ongoing negotiations around legitimacy, care, and authority in post-welfare, neoliberal contexts (Hänninen et al., 2019; Andell, Bergroth, & Honkasalo, 2021).

5.1.4 Energetic Cooperation and Magical Tools

Magical items, such as crystals, herbs, and pendulums, are viewed as dynamic partners, and their influence depends on personal and situational energetic states. Participants in Noitaopisto discuss interactions with objects as adaptive, changing their responses across bodily, emotional, and energetic states of being (Fieldnotes 25.8.2022). This way of thinking prioritizes the body and sensory experience as a part of epistemology and accepting reactions and intuitive responses as meaningful measures of efficacy. For example, a student experienced stinging pain while holding an aragonite crystal. This was understood as an energetic interaction between the stone and her condition; in the case presented, the stone was working, i.e., not inanimate and inert (Fieldnotes, 25.8.2022). These considerations focus away from biomedical models of objectivity and instead predicate relational, experiential, and iterative learning as foremost. Witches cultivate rich action competencies through habitual experience, testing, and community discourse. Things become instruments that enable them to transform subjective experience into generalized functional knowledge rather than objective knowledge. This relational epistemology reframes healing as a work of co-creation. Within such objects, perceived agency contributes to and accompanies practitioner intent and the practitioner’s materials, symbols, and contextual energy, which, to an extent, emerge separately" (Fieldnotes 14.8.2022).

The work with plants and the spirit consciousness of plants hinges on ethical collaboration, consent, and mutual respect. Practitioners offer warm greetings and gifts, asking permission to harvest or use materials, to spirit deevs and other forest inhabitants (Fieldnotes 14.8.2022). These practices show that magical effectiveness is intertwined with the ethical component of the act, illustrating the moral ontology that positions relational

accountability as the primary concern of therapeutic outcomes. Witches stress consent and co-production in sharing power with the practitioner while still honoring the autonomy of non-human participants. The practice is in stark contrast to exploitative or extractive forms of utilizing resources, depicting spiritual and material power as constitutively entwined. Ethical mindfulness is brought to bear on human subjects, so collective practice doesn't cross relational or energetic boundaries (Krista, Fieldnotes 15.8.2022). This way, knowledge-making and healing aren't dissociable from relational negotiation of trust, collective responsibility, and the formation of being in attunement with living systems, showing how other epistemologies embed morality within technical practice.

Effectiveness and efficacy of magical equipment are gauged primarily in experience and group terms rather than necessarily by standardized biomedical assessments. Shared practice, shared thinking, and experiment repeated multiple times generate feedback loops that allow practitioners to fine-tune technique, attune energetic participation, and integrate observed effects into matrices of collective knowledge (Fieldnotes 15.8.2022). Even the relaxed, playful interaction, such as charging water with pendulums, is a learning experience, recalling the importance of experimentation alongside observation and reflection. Participants emphasize experiential resonance - how something feels, responds, or engages - is the most significant measure of usefulness, attributing authority to living, relational experience (Fieldnotes 15.8.2022). By preferring intersubjectively acknowledged and collectively verified evidence, magical societies construct epistemic orders that introduce ethical, relational, and sensorial dimensions into healing practice. Such orders oppose reductionist rationalist assumptions, demonstrating that knowledge, efficacy, and legitimacy in magical care are co-produced through dialogue, bodily trials, and mutual attention between humans, spirits, and material companions (Fieldnotes 14.8.2022).

5.1.5 Pragmatic Integration and Therapeutic Legitimacy

Witchcraft is a complementary system of care integrated with biomedicine and mainstream mental healthcare, providing emotional, spiritual, and relational care (Good, 1994). Noitaopisto participants routinely describe witchcraft as expanding their healing toolkit, addressing experiences that the biomedical frameworks might not address, such as sensory experience, energy imbalance, or intuitive awareness (Fieldnotes 19.11.2022). This synthesis is not a replacement for formal care but rather a complement, enabling practitioners to navigate complex emotional and psychological landscapes with more

resources available. Interviewees emphasize that witchcraft offers a greater sense of agency and autonomy in self-care that allows experimentation with practices that work for lived experience while still accessing mainstream health services. Through ritual, embodied practice, and communal validation, practitioners cultivate alternate epistemologies wherein healing is imagined relationally, with the person's subjective experience foregrounded as a central indicator of effectiveness (Elisa, Fieldnotes 25.8.2022; Fieldnotes 15.8.2022). This frames witchcraft as a pragmatic, context-specific modality, whereby outcomes, affective resonance, and the capacity to facilitate personal and collective thriving are privileged over external certification or scientific evidence.

Validation of therapeutic practice within witchcraft communities relies primarily on practical and experiential outcomes rather than official biomedical sanction. Effectiveness, participants consistently emphasize, is measured by tangible improvement of well-being, emotional balance, and relational harmony rather than adherence to scientific logic (Fieldnotes 19.11.2022). As one informant explained, "If you believe in it and it helps, then it's perfect - it helped you, and that's what matters" (Fieldnotes 19.11.2022). This pragmatic approach privileges individual and collective experience as an expert witness to therapeutic efficacy. Trial and error and observation via iterative feedback allow practitioners to revise techniques, tailor practices to the specific, and incorporate input from communal practice. Importantly, this adaptive process makes healing dynamic, responsive, and relational, and it fosters competencies in discernment, ethical negotiation, and reflexive engagement in care networks. By prioritizing functional outcomes and lived efficacy, witchcraft rearranges legitimacy in healing in a way that demonstrates spiritual, emotional, and social spheres to be constitutive of holistic well-being that cannot be fully captured by conventional biomedical measurement (Elisa, Fieldnotes 14.8.2022; Krista, Fieldnotes 15.8.2022).

Healing in witchcraft is arranged as relational, adaptive, and contextually located rather than universally determined or externally legitimized. Practitioners mediate boundaries between public, socially authorized knowledge and individual, creating spaces in which alternative epistemologies are respected and tried out on an ongoing basis (Fieldnotes 25.8.2022). The practice involves iterative interaction with the tool, ritual, and social networks, integrating observation, reflection, and shared discussion to test outcomes. Witchcraft thus represents a flexible therapeutic system that privileges responsiveness over protocol, ethical reciprocity over hierarchical power, and subjective resonance over objective evidence (Fieldnotes 19.11.2022). In prioritizing lived experience and pragmatic

efficacy, such practices undermine dominant biomedical assumptions equating validity with reproducible evidence. Participants demonstrate that the importance of healing emerges in relational, iterative, and morally attuned interaction, reasserting social and affective dimensions in health practice. Witchcraft, in this context, provides an ethically and relationally coherent model of care that complements formal modalities, promoting agency, resilience, and integrative well-being in ways that formal healthcare institutions alone cannot achieve (Andell, Bergroth, & Honkasalo, 2021; Fieldnotes 14.8.2022).

5.2 The Noitahaavaseremonia: Healing the Witch Wound

5.2.1 Ancestral Memory and Ritual Gesture Embodied

The Noitahaavaseremonia placed the body front and center as a site of ancestral memory, where gesture, breath, and visualization mediate historical trauma. Ritual movement, such as facilitated breathing and root visualization, enabled participants to access embodied sensations linked to intergenerational witch persecution (Fieldnotes 15.9.2022; Greenwood, 2000, p.117). These somatic practices made historical accounts embodied experience, locating memory in the body rather than in thought. Tightness or pain or heat along the spine became markers of inherited trauma, opening dialogue between present awareness and collective histories (Annex 1). Experiencing cut or tangled roots made intergenerational loads visible, while framing these experiences as transmuted through mindful movement. Ritual hand gestures functioned as diagnostic and therapeutic instruments for participants to recognize psychic and energetic closures connected to gender, colonial, and social oppression (Starhawk, 1982). Engaging in repeated cycles of physical involvement, participants acted together in ways that acknowledged working with trauma, thereby elaborating somatics and visual imaging and converting injury sustained into release of emotion (Fieldnotes 15.9.2022; Farnell, 1994, pp.931-932). This somatic practice reoriented healing to embodied, active, and engaged participation, rather than passive receptivity.

Corporeal practices in the ceremony further reinforced relational ontologies in situating the body at the crossing between human, spiritual, and elemental powers. Facing cardinal directions, participants were led through a visualization to receive offerings from elemental beings, meshing sensory experience with symbolic interpretation (Fieldnotes 15.9.2022). Synchronous breathwork with imagery facilitated attentional concentration, creating heightened awareness of endogenous and exogenous energies, illustrating the path

through which embodied practice co-produced change and knowledge (Greenwood & Goodwyn, 2016, pp.1-3). Root visualizations, crystal cutting of evil energies, and enacting ancestral memory cultivated moral responsibility, guiding participants to navigate relational power dynamics written into history and intergenerational trauma (Fieldnotes 15.9.2022). These rituals translated historical pain into sensory experiences, giving epistemic potential to thinking, discrimination, and therapeutic action. Integrating movement, imagination, and ritualized movement, the Noitahaavaseremonia demonstrated that bodily practices interweave intangible histories into material healing processes (Farnell, 1994, pp.931-932; Greenwood, 2000, p.117). This practice put the body's power to contain, process, and transform communal memory at the forefront, sustaining therapeutic impact through bodily activity over thought.

The processes have been described as ‘ritual’, and in this case as both evocative and transformational, as participants reclaimed some form of relational agency over histories of silenced, and perhaps suppressed, knowledges. In this case, through controlled and body-concentrated breathing, they engaged with material cultural symbols by means of crystals that, in this case, stood for the painful and buried powers of an ancestor (Fieldnotes 15.9.2022). Participants' energetic cutting of sickly roots allowed them to assert relational autonomy, reinterpreting imaged legacies of trauma as pliable, rather than fixed (Fieldnotes 15.9.2022). This activity by gesture emphasized iterative learning, by repeated engagement, establishing embodied understanding about body response and affect, both ancestral and otherwise, and in particular the interwovenness of perception, cognition, and the memory of embodiment (Farnell, 1994). Visualization drills allowed internalization of trauma within current psychic and emotional lives, making earlier oppression a personally relevant experience that could guide current magical practice (Starhawk, 1982). By locating the moving body as an active agency and site of knowledge production, participants rendered symbolic accounts of persecution into modalities of care that could be embodied and acted upon. This emphasized how bodily ritual was not symbolic but constitutive, wherein gesture, breath, and visualization facilitated healing and participant reconnection to ancestral, spiritual, and relational continuities (Fieldnotes 15.9.2022; Greenwood, 2000, p.117).

5.2.2 Relational and Synchronistic Perception

The Noitahaavaseremonia emphasized entanglement between participants, non-human actors, and natural forces, demonstrating how social interaction achieves magical consciousness. Participants indicated that they felt shifts in energy, bodily sensations, and subtle environmental signals as meaningful indications of ritual efficacy (Fieldnotes 15.9.2022). Synchronic phenomena such as snapping bells, candle wax drips, or accidental timing were interpreted as messages from Hekate or elemental agency, aligning attentional balance with emergent relational processes (Fieldnotes 15.9.2022; Greenwood, 2000, p.117). These phenomena signaled that healing and awareness were not produced exclusively internally in situ but co-produced during encounters with human and non-human co-researchers. Attentional rituals towards such synchronisms reaffirmed ethical engagement, prompting believers to record, respect, and respond to furtive signs without subjugating hierarchical meaning. By its focus on relational responsiveness, the ritual reworked magical perception as a socially and cosmologically embedded process, bringing affective resonance, intuition, and embodied sensitivity together into practical and therapeutic applications (Fieldnotes 15.9.2022; Farnell, 1994).

The exchange between participants and elemental and spiritual agencies established that relational attunement facilitated emotional release and cognitive understanding. Circulation towards cardinal directions and envisioning earth, air, fire, water, and Hekate's gifts depicted co-creative alignment in which participants actively participated with energetic state negotiation with environmental and spiritual flows (Fieldnotes 15.9.2022). Synchronistic events legitimized ethical attention, as the unexpected occurrence of sensory stimuli created attention to self, other, and non-human agency interdependence. Synchronistic events also legitimized embodied knowledges, revealing that embodied seeing was a legitimate kind of epistemology that could transform historical trauma into mobilizable awareness. By promoting response to micro-gestures and broader ritual patterns, participants became relationally literate, intensifying the capacity for co-producing healing outcomes through attentional, affective, and ethical participation (Fieldnotes 15.9.2022; Farnell, 1994, pp.931-932).

Synchronistic seeing was also a process of bridging past and present trauma, allowing representation to rewrite inherited witch wounds in an available, relational frame. Coincidences and perceived omens were part of the ritual narrative, clearing the space for

reflection, ethical judgment, and imaginative problem-solving (Fieldnotes 15.9.2022). Participants' relational matrix of participants, elemental agents, and objects created a feedback loop, in which embodied feeling, visual imagery, and external synchronicities mutually supported insight and emotional management (Greenwood, 2000). Participants exercised agency on ancestral, spiritual, and ecological relations by participating in this co-constitutive field, demonstrating that relational perception is an essential mode of magical epistemology. Noitahaavaseremonia, therefore, set attentive, reciprocal, and co-present behavior in the foreground as ethical and therapeutic principles and showed how synchronistic and relational vision needs to be used to enact embodied, socially mediated healing processes out of inherited trauma (Fieldnotes 15.9.2022; Farnell, 1994, pp.931–932).

5.2.3 Elemental and Symbolic Mediation

The Noitahaavaseremonia demonstrated how collaboration with elemental forces, crystals, and symbolic forms acted as mediatory tools for translating historic trauma into embodied knowledge. Participants explained that working with crystals and imagined forms, i.e., the blue triangle, extends their energetic and perceptual awareness, enabling the perception of repressed or inherited emotional states (Fieldnotes 15.9.2022). Crystals were construed as reciprocal partners, variably responding to participants' energy, and symbolic gestures provided concrete focus points for engagement with intangible historical wounds. Material and symbolic tools facilitated dynamic work with the witch wound, transposing intangible narratives of persecution into actionable, experientially mediated therapeutic interventions (Fieldnotes 15.9.2022). Ritualized interaction with elemental forces, together with visualization practices, encouraged clients to reimagine trauma as fluid, co-created, and ethically negotiable, and to find healing in relational and cosmological networks. Clients enacted therapeutic agency in embodied, relational, and ethically responsive practice by using elements, crystals, and symbolism.

The four cardinal directions also instrumentalized symbolic mediation, projecting experiential learning onto elemental gifts that facilitated emotional and cognitive trauma processing. Participants envisioned energy from earth, air, fire, and water as present, dynamic resources that engaged with their bodily and psychic states (Fieldnotes 15.9.2022). The fifth gift of Hekate, symbolized for a participant by a blue triangle, was a relational anchor for integrating ancestral wisdom into present consciousness,

emphasizing continuity across past and present healing journeys (Fieldnotes 15.9.2022). Symbolic representation enabled participants to navigate profound affective territories, transducing residual trauma into tangible, workable formats while cultivating attentiveness to subtle energetic cues. Crystals, elemental visualization, and symbols were both cues and catalysts for moral and emotional engagement, and they highlighted how material and imaginal dimensions of ritual are at the forefront of working with intergenerational wounds.

This elemental and symbolic framework enabled reflective engagement with historical trauma by providing framed yet fluid avenues to embodied healing. Through ritualized use of crystals, elemental forces, and guided visualization, the participants could externalize, transmute, and reintegrate the witch wound into an actionable experiential framework (Fieldnotes 15.9.2022). Symbols such as the blue triangle acted as nodal points for imaginative projection, enabling participants to anchor cognitive and affective processes in negotiating ancestral, social, and spiritual entanglements in later encounters. Ritual engagement with elements and crystals brought iterative learning, co-creation, and relational attunement to the fore, demonstrating that symbolic mediation is epistemic, ethical, and therapeutic all at once. By integrating material substances, elemental forces, and symbolic imagery, the Noitahaavaseremonia illustrated how magical practice transposes historical trauma into embodied, relationally confirmed healing, enabling practitioners to regain agency over both inherited wounding and ongoing spiritual evolution (Fieldnotes 15.9.2022).

5.2.4 Collective Ritual's Moral and Affective Economies

Noitahaavaseremonia illustrated how shared ritual constructs ethical and affective structures that define relational engagement and shared responsibility. Participants were encouraged to become engaged responsibly, being present to the awareness of one's own energy and to the collective energy, emphasizing ethical responsibility shared space (Fieldnotes 15.9.2022). Ritual movement, for example, root visualization, elemental aligning, and breathwork, facilitated mutual respect, consent, and attunement as moral norms of practice rather than externally stipulated rules (Greenwood, 2000). By situating healing in shared sensory and affective experience, the ritual dismantled neoliberal ideals of independent self-care and fostered interdependence, reciprocity, and relational calibration in preference. Members collectively determined ethical standards of practice by

recursive observation, feedback, and reflection, creating the moral authority from mutual validation rather than hierarchical prescription. The affective atmospheres evoked by the ritual invited attentional participation with richly textured emotional and energetic information to enable participants to align personal healing with communal responsibility and shared cosmological ethics (Fieldnotes 15.9.2022).

Activity in collective ritual crossed social and sacred divides to create a space for relational healing grounded in somatic and symbolic practice. As participants engaged with crystals, elemental energies, and guided visualisation, they negotiated visibility, secrecy, and disclosure, reconciling empowerment with restraint for protection (Fieldnotes 15.9.2022). Social engagement generated affective norms in which affective display, vulnerability, and sensor capture were sanctioned through collective enactment instead of biomedical evaluation. These practices instilled a moral economy, whereby reciprocity, ethical presence, and mutual responsibility structured behavior and perception, producing relational cohesion. Ritual feedback loops, such as observing, reflecting, and iterative participation, allowed participants to realign energetic and emotional responses in communal space, producing legitimacy grounded socially, ethically, and spiritually. Furthermore, relational healing was colored by collective ethics and affects.

How ethics and affection were framed in the ceremony also allowed historical trauma to be translated into care-in-action. Group performances of symbolic and elemental mediation provided participants a way to integrate inherited oppression - synced affective relation with relational responsibility (Fieldnotes 15.9.2022). By foregrounding collective attentions and co-constructed moral norms, the ritual resisted the pull of biomedical reductionism and individual wellness paradigms, all while demonstrating that real healing efficacy cannot be divorced from moral and affective economies. Recursively dialogical communal practice allowed participants to cultivate engagement, build trust, and authorize personal experience in relational and ethical terms, iterating that ritual efficacy emerges through engagement, not instruction (Greenwood & Goodwyn, 2016). This view illustrates how collective magical practice generates relationally mediated care, opening room for emotional, spiritual, and moral attunement and sustaining interdependent healing communities.

5.2.5 Transformative Epistemologies and Generative Re-enchantment

The Noitahaavaseremonia facilitated epistemologies of transformation by confirming intuitive knowing as valid knowledge, allowing participants to reinterpret inherited trauma. Participants engaged with ritual, visualization, and breathing to enter embodied and affective memory written into the witch wound (Fieldnotes 15.9.2022). Magical items, such as crystals, and symbolic forms, such as elemental gifts, worked to mediate converting history into actionable wisdom (Greenwood, 2000, p.117; Farnell, 1994, pp.931–932). This body epistemology favored relational sensing, where human and more-than-human actors co-produced meaning, situating knowledge as processual and contextual rather than abstract or invariant (Greenwood & Goodwyn, 2016, pp.1–3). Ritual participation allowed participants to experiment with interpretative schemata, cross-check individual responses with collective observation, and establish iterative feedback to restate trust intuitively. Through positioning the embodied, sensing, moving body at the center, the ritual transformed epistemic power from institutional credentialing to self-governed insight grounded in relational and ancestral knowledge (Starhawk, 1982; Nenonen, 2014). These practices overturn habitual disenchanted knowledges, demonstrating that lived experience and bodily engagement produce ethical, affective, and active learning.

Ritual immersion also enabled re-enchantment, as symbolic and emotive experiences were woven into meaningful structures of comprehension. Participants experienced synchronicities and transformational sentiments, such as energy shifts or imagined gifts, authenticating magical consciousness (Fieldnotes 15.9.2022). Through interaction with elemental forces and directed imagery, ancestral trauma was transformed into empowerment, generating generative knowledge beyond the individual to communal spaces (Greenwood, 2000, p.117). The ritual encouraged iterated learning, allowing participants to reconceptualize disempowering experiences and integrate them into existing practice, allowing ongoing moral, emotional, and spiritual growth (Farnell, 1994, pp.931–932). Co-constructed ritual experience allowed participants to work within epistemologies where intuition, affect, and relational awareness are valid cognitive resources. By embracing these other forms of knowing, participants reconstructed historical and contemporary marginalization as spaces of creative possibility, demonstrating that transformative ritual work generates both individual and collective re-enchantment (Greenwood & Goodwyn, 2016, pp.1–3).

The epistemic transformations gained through the ritual also highlight ethical and relational dimensions of knowledge creation. Participants' experiences demonstrate how syncretic inclusion of intuition, embodiment, and symbolic interaction creates frameworks that resist rationalist, disenchanted modern frameworks (Fieldnotes 15.9.2022). Rituals produce a reflective capacity that turns ancestral and historical trauma into sensory and affective knowledge, enhancing agency, discernment, and relational responsibility (Starhawk, 1982; Greenwood, 2000, p.117). The magical consciousness generated through these rituals and practices validates subjective knowledge as epistemically reputable and socially responsible, and manifests as moral, actionable knowledge that is experientially validated (Greenwood & Goodwyn, 2016, pp.1–3; Farnell, 1994, pp.931–932). Re-enchantment, therefore, is a social and dialogue-centred process that requires actors to co-construct meaning together, purposively redefining oppressive meaning systems, and regaining agency within epistemologies that have historically limited knowledge. This method represents how engaged, embodied, ritualized, or magical activity with either objects or symbolic space can develop transformational knowledge, moral empowerment, and long-term relational and spiritual connection.

5.3 Belonging and Exclusion within the Moral Geographies of Witchcraft

5.3.1 Familial and Ancestral Transmission of Magical Knowledge

The moral worlds of Finnish witchcraft were shaped through familial and ancestral connections, which defined kinship as both a site of permitting and a border of belonging. Precognition, magic, or healing ability were often attributed to parents or grandparents as ancestral points of origin, marking inheritance as biological, but also social (Strathern, 2020, pp. 6-7, 154; Fieldnotes 22.9.2022). Emphasizing ancestors produced more ways of arguing that knowing was transmitted between family generations, and access was relative, not open. Kinship also consistently grounds magical identity in ancestors, which is located in care histories and togetherness rather than in deliberate teaching. The intergenerational framing created hierarchies of being-an-origin in which people with ancestors were inducted as "naturally born" and those who consider the lengths of time to pursue become "natural" in their applications to or for responsibility (Carsten, 2000; Strathern, 2020, pp. 6-22). This power was also underpinned by the felt weight of family story as an exercise, re-articulating remembrance into sensorimotor intelligence, thus connecting and reproducing continuity in the form of repetition, not codified record. In this way, the witch

became heir and mediator for ancestral legacies, occupying a space of liminality between ancestral and agency. Family transmission, therefore, functioned as an epistemic and moral support, disciplining those who were counted as legitimate within group lines of belonging.

Familiar knowledge also carried emotional significance, translating remembrance into affective understanding and linking legitimacy with corporal resonance. Remembering a grandmother's touch or a parent's warning was not inactive nostalgia but an ethical anchor point that legitimized practice as relationally grounded (Sahlins, 2011; Fieldnotes 22.9.2022). Emotional ties reinforced relationships through kinship as a form of implicit pedagogy that shaped how knowledge was learnt and passed down through trust, loyalty, and obligation (Strathern, 2020, pp. 6-22; Carsten, 2000). However, these same ties articulate exclusive boundaries, whereby practitioners with no such ancestral relations are often viewed as lacking an appropriate sense of grounding. At the same time, continuity was not static: practitioners re-interpreted family instructions, resolving ancestral practice into contemporary spiritual needs (Strathern, 2020, pp. 6-7, 154; Sahlins, 2011). Through reinterpretation, belonging could be projected beyond biology, for collective reinterpretation allowed scope for non-kin practitioners to participate. Familial transmission thus operated as a dynamic process, not fixed but rather authoritative, constructing inclusion and exclusion by interweaving lineage, affect, and innovation within witchcraft groups.

5.3.2 Mediated Spiritual Belonging and Digital Networks

Digital media reconfigured how Finnish practitioners of witchcraft negotiated membership, creating more inclusivity and new forms of exclusion. Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, Suomi24, and Discord enabled relational connections beyond geographies and timelines, allowing mentorship, story-sharing, and collaborative problem-solving beyond neighborhood environments (Strathern, 2020; Fieldnotes 22.9.2022). Mediated interactions granted epistemic legitimacy in that practices were made legitimate through co-feedback, likes, or comments, instantiating moral recognition into technological assists. Online venues also gave voice to previously marginalized embodied groups' participants, like practitioners bound by disability, economic marginality, or rural distance. Meanwhile, the same venues constructed algorithmic hierarchies, aestethic expectations, and discriminating presentation, advancing those drilled in social media self-presentation and

excluding others. Spiritual ties were relationally dependent on competence within the coding systems of platforms and one's own ritual knowledge. Online communities did not function as uninvolved bridges; instead, networks mediated power and legitimacy that ensured some practices were visible, while other's practices and identities were pushed to the periphery of the moral geographies present within witchcraft communities.

Digital belonging also happened through affective and ethical means in the background of online exchange. Whether participating in virtual rituals, dynamic dialogue, or the sharing of stories, each site and online action stalled for some amount of co-presence, whereby actors in exchange deepened affective commitments of reciprocity, attentiveness, and care (Carsten, 2000; Fieldnotes 22.9.2022). These relational processes pushed the artificial boundaries between care and conveying knowledge, highlighting how digital spatialities mediated expertise and intimacy; nonetheless, hierarchies existed. People with low connectivity, digital adeptness, or communicative power, conveyed visibility and authority within witchcraft in some instances of pre-existing structures. Virtual locations were experimental playgrounds where ritual skills were tested, reworked, and exchanged, augmenting inherited practices and invigorating new epistemological forms. However, exclusions ensued where algorithmic curation or community norms privileged conformity over diversity, constraining who could shape collective practice meaningfully (Fieldnotes 22.9.2022). Belonging in these mediated environments was therefore neither an automatic nor universally distributed affair but negotiated in intersecting access, affect, and recognition registers. Digital networks enabled transformative possibilities of connection while replicating structural disparities, situating spiritual legitimacy within technologically mediated moral economies of inclusion and exclusion.

5.3.3 Material and Spatial Limitations on Participation

Material and spatial conditions had a significant impact on the accessibility of witchcraft communities, determining who would be able to join them and under which conditions. While witchcraft is often imagined as an inclusive spiritual path, practitioners repeatedly encounter infrastructural, economic and epistemic barriers. For example, one wheelchair-using interviewee described repeated exclusion from rituals held in inaccessible venues. Despite offering to organize more accessible alternatives, such as hosting meetings in wheelchair-friendly community spaces or offering low-cost summer camps via disability organizations, her suggestions were ignored or dismissed without explanation. As she

poignantly stated: “If I’ve made clear that I and my friends want to attend, and you haven’t even thought of a ramp, then I know I’m not welcome.” Even attempts to adapt ritual forms - such as modifying physically intensive spirit-raising practices - were met with discomfort or exaggerated performative accommodation, reinforcing her sense of being both hyper-visible and peripheral. While encountering ableism in other domains of her life, she described this one being particularly difficult to deal with. As she put it: “I was so disappointed - so bitterly disappointed - that my own group, the one I thought would be tolerant and open-minded and accepting, wasn’t. Total bullshit.” Her testimony reveals how ableist assumptions about 'natural' spiritual spaces (e.g., remote forests, heritage manors or inaccessible cellars) function as informal gatekeeping.

Financial constraints also limited access, with Noitaopisto charges and travel, tool, or accommodation expenses creating a hierarchy of participation where some accessed resources because of family sponsorship and others dropped or deferred courses (Fieldnotes 22.9.2022). Cyberspace sometimes breached spatial or corporeal boundaries but couldn’t replace matter, especially in ritual environments that valued sensory connection and material contact. These convergent conditions also showed that access was never neutral in relation to material conditions, keeping exclusionary geographies that were otherwise about belonging in practice. The materiality of engagement was the gatekeeper to legitimacy for those who could pay, access, and be present bodily. In contrast, others who were still allowed into the story of the community were denied materiality.

Material and infrastructural limitations also conditioned knowledge in the ritual setting. In part, these were limitations of who could participate and whose knowledge counted. Being outdoors, raising energy, or rigorous practice required some bodily ability to perform, and some accommodation would be provided, but this was not always guaranteed, meaning experiences were more contested from this practice of attending to the vulnerable while not whole (Fieldnotes 22.9.2022). Economic insecurity also compounded this, where transport costs, ritual wear, or other specialised apparatus became unspoken acts of assessment that preferred privilege for economically secure or geographical proximity-

Attempts at inclusion for different levels of engagement were embedded in modified tasks, which were often interpreted as symbolic, reinstating members' status and barely substantive membership. In attempting to clarify the dimension of access, these exceptions pointed to a materiality in which access was not only logistical but also ethical, and

intersected a larger discussion about recognition, caring for others, and shared responsibility (Lugones, 2007, pp. 189-194, 200-202; Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017, pp. 1-3). Participant narratives showed a tension in constructing community around egalitarian intentions and exclusions, and how infrastructural and economic realities constrained the effects of witchcraft practice (Fieldnotes 22.9.2022). Belonging, therefore, continued to be entangled with material conditions, where epistemic power, legitimacy, and recognition were enabled through spatial, economic, and embodied infrastructures.

5.3.4 Gendered and Embodied Norms of Spiritual Legitimacy

Embodied and gendered standards structured belonging within Finnish witchcraft societies, building authority and exclusion. Embodied practices such as menstruation and reproductive cycles were generally scripted as spaces of ritual power, naturalizing cis-heteronormative bodily systems (Fieldnotes 22.9.2022). These assumptions favored cis-women who fit reproductive cycles at the cost of transgender, non-binary, and non-menstruating members. As Elaine Swan (in Salmenniemi et al., 2020) argues, therapeutic and spiritual cultures often reproduce neoliberal ideals of the self that are deeply gendered, classed and racialized (p. 216). Contested terminologies like *noitasiskot* (witch sisters) cemented such differentiations, making belonging hinged on gendered identity and not shared knowledge or practice (Fieldnotes 22.9.2022). Ritual directives that value alignment with lunar or solar cycles further solidified these bodily demarcations, rendering gender conformity at times an unspoken indicator of spiritual validity.

Embodied norms also interacted with epistemic authority, creating hierarchies of credibility for ritual practice. The transfer of knowledge was often framed in heteronormative logics, which meant certain bodies were regarded as necessarily knowledgeable about energetic work. Those who did not conform to a normative model (of flesh or person) were compelled to conform to gain access performatively, revealing the relational forces at work (Strathern, 1996; Fieldnotes, 22.9.2022; Romo, 2025). These forces determined membership based on bodily conformity, upholding structural difference and concealing other possibilities of legitimacy, even as present. In articulating recognition in terms of gendered embodiment, witchcraft spaces re-created broader cultural hierarchies, illustrating how moral geographies of belonging are generated as much by bodily norms as by ritual knowledge (Massey, 1994).

5.3.5 Cultural Heritage, Appropriation, and Legitimacy of Knowledge

Cultural heritage became a central platform for negotiating belonging and exclusion in Finnish witchcraft communities. At Pakanalliset syysmessut, international practice validity arguments, e.g., white sage, were reframed as cultural appropriation dilemmas centered on reliance on local Finnish plants (Fieldnotes 15.8.2022). By distinguishing open from closed traditions, practitioners sought to articulate spiritual legitimacy regarding ownership of heritage, highlighting Strathern's (1996) idea of the "cutting of the network" by which the acknowledgment of some ties also cuts others off. Selective revaluation of Finnish and Karelian traditions was thus both a defensive strategy and a system of gates, establishing hierarchies of membership founded upon claims of heritage (Strathern, 2020, pp. 6–7, 154; Massey, 1994, p. 147). Positioning cultural continuity as a marker of authenticity aligns with Lugones' (2007) colonial modern critique, in which hegemonies naturalize epistemic privilege by valorizing their own cosmologies (pp. 189-194, 200-202).

These dynamics also disclosed how disproportionate control over interpretive frameworks is maintained, often by enlarging hegemonic voices over disprivileging dissident ones. Reactive insistence on not being guilty of cultural appropriation highlighted Swan's discovery that therapeutic and spiritual cultures emulate racialized and classed hierarchies (in Salmenniemi et al., 2020, p. 216). By positioning themselves as "privileged white Westerners," some practitioners acknowledged structural privilege and, in the process, reaffirmed claims to heritage, thereby foreclosing space for Sámi and Karelian activists to negotiate limits of proper practice (Fieldnotes 2022). Such negotiations underscore that spiritual authenticity is not just a question of access to ritual forms but of whose discursive terms define and govern authenticity and appropriation. Accordingly, the geographies of witchcraft are morally composed through disputed claims to heritage, producing solidarities and exclusions that highlight the political value of belonging. As Puig de la Bellacasa (2017) reminds us, care is always situated, partial and embedded in contested worlds (p. 1-3).

5.3.6 Epistemic Access and Transformative Practice Conditions

Epistemic access was essential in membership, deciding who could productively participate in Finnish witchcraft communities. Asymmetrical distribution of resources, including time, funds, and facilities, dictated which practitioners could reach for higher-level instruction or shared rituals (Fieldnotes 22.9.2022). Access to classrooms such as

Noitaopisto was restricted by tuition costs, requiring economic independence or external support to continue participating. Those who could not pay were continuously at risk of marginalization, since training and ritual practice continuity were deemed necessary for legitimacy. Spatial and infrastructural ordering emphasized such disparities, with inaccessible facilities limiting the prospects of disabled practitioners even where the community remained cognizant of such limitations. Online alternatives provided some palliation, but online practice rarely had the same epistemic significance as embodied practice. These unbalanced contexts created stratified modes of belonging that favored those who possessed structural privilege and placed others on the margin of recognition.

Transformative practice criteria were also defined by affective and relational support distribution among the communities. Group trust, mentorship, and shared vulnerability provided essential scaffolding for consequential learning, but such relational resources differed in availability (Fieldnotes 22.9.2022). Those with pre-existing networks or kin relations tended to have privileged lines of interpretation and initiation, reinforcing intergenerational knowledge hierarchies. Conversely, new entrants or socially excluded members experienced limited recognition, demanding performative compliance or heightened emotional labor for affiliation (Lugones, 2007). Relational exclusions were also contiguous with structural barriers in that individuals with limited economic or spatial resources were disproportionately excluded from prolonged mentorship. The dynamics also indicated that change was not an issue of ritual efficacy but depended on conditions that assured recognition and trust. Where support was absent, the participants evidenced alienation, uncertainty, or initiation that failed to succeed fully, and the vulnerability of belonging (Fieldnotes 22.9.2022). Epistemic access thus operated as a facilitator and limiter to decide who could learn and who could become meaningful within Finnish witchcraft communities.

6 Conclusion

This thesis has focused on understanding how Finnish witches perform and build the *noita* identity through ritual, community, and culture. Tracing their practices, stories, and self-descriptions has described how identity is enacted in an embodied, relational, and contested epistemological process. How to become a witch was elaborated in the chapter on becoming a witch: specifically, how initiatory events, bodily learning, and visions of institutions ground each witch's self-concept and place within the group. It has been shown that awakening is not a one-off event but a process through which a witch awakens through each particular layer of acknowledgment, invocation, and practice. Nonetheless, this research has also shown how reading group participants' healing rituals and body-work was crucial in rebuilding the witch identity through private and communal reconstruction. In doing so, the *noita* identity resembles a fractal process, constantly coming into existence and dying in layers through religious, cultural, and social negotiation. It is specifically through these layering possibilities of a fractal process that suggests how witchcraft works as an everlasting process of self-breeding and self-fashioning through broader Finnish modernity.

The significant lesson of the findings is recognition of the understanding that *noita* identity cannot be disentangled from larger negotiations of legitimacy and belonging. Practitioners do not merely participate in something regarding individual spirituality, mediated by services. Practitioners actively navigate between cultural visibility, political recognition, and epistemic contestation. For example, social media and community events were sites of belonging and contested authority. The fact that practitioners can be visible online speaks to practitioners as witches, exposing them to critique and misrecognition. Likewise, institutional actions like Noitaopisto's may demonstrate desires for vocational legitimacy and process public suspicion. These discourses reveal, in part, that identity is negotiated concerning personal authenticity and social sanction, cultural affirmation and structural exclusion. These findings foreground the witch identity at the intersections of embodied practice, social power, and moral geography, where inclusion and exclusion contested. It suggests that witchcraft is meaningful as a person-specific approach and communal infrastructural recognition.

The study revealed witchcraft as an alternative healing infrastructure in response to a deficit in biomedical care and state health structures. The Noitahaavaseremonia was

explored as a space where trauma understandings were woven together to enact collective healing. The participants moved through lineages of ancestral wounds, emotional and intergenerational wounds, into ritual movements, symbolic facilitations, and bodily presence. These processes extend understanding of how healing exists outside of individual meaning-making, and to root personal wounds within moral economies and histories of collectively shared suffering. As such, witchcraft provides an alternative form of care, using spirituality as a location for therapeutic legitimacy within broader wellness spaces.

Nevertheless, it is essential to consider that this study recognized tensions, which revealed ways that these practices, intentionally or not, may interrupt the normative neoliberal notion of self-responsibilization and commodified well-being. As Salmenniemi et al. (2020) argue, therapeutic life is not simply imposed from above but actively assembled in ways that blur the boundaries between secular, spiritual and material domains. Hence, the meanings and practices of resistance and reproduction unveil the mixed feelings of witchcraft, as a situated phenomenon of the contemporary Finnish world. That is, critique, repair, and engage with the entrepreneurial spirit circling within broader wellness worlds. This ongoing tension and paradox are essential in understanding the limitations and possibilities of the healing infrastructure of witchcraft.

A second important finding concerns the epistemological dimension of witchcraft. Participants recounted consistently divergent forms of 'knowing' that were informed by the employed magical consciousness, ritual attunement, or embodied forms of learning. These epistemologies challenge hegemonic rationalist forms of arrangement that typically create arrangements that attempt to exclude alternative epistemologies. Through readings of witness statements, the study drew upon Susan Greenwood's conception of magical consciousness; witches transpose knowledge in embodied, sensuous, or relational forms. Crystals, energetic practices, or sensory realignments become not mere symbols but epistemic objects of knowledge. Thus, the contestation over ownership, appropriation, or interpretative authority is a contestation over epistemic authority. In this way, witchcraft knowledge is produced and, thus, socially negotiated, patrolled, and legitimized. Witchcraft is a contested epistemic assemblage, though, some alternative epistemologies are just as contested, leading to struggles over claims of authenticity, authority, or ownership. The epistemological contestation expressed through embodiment resonates

with larger conversations inside anthropology regarding the multiplicity of ways of knowing and the boundedness of what is produced to be legitimate.

Another common theme throughout the study was belonging and exclusion. Material constraints, such as income, proximity, and logistical constraints, formed boundaries regarding who could belong in witchcraft communities. Embodied expectations and gendered norms also regulated which practices were permitted, turning sanctioning into a site of conjure. Denoting cultural heritage adds a complicating level of belonging, invoking conversation regarding appropriation, authority, or several kinds of authority to interpret. Unequal distribution resulted in striated belonging, where belonging is never consummated but is always suspended in participation. In this manner, witchcraft constitutes a moral geographical site or a compass of belonging and exclusion intersecting for aspirational inclusive groups of place. Research suggests that witches experience belonging relationally, often negotiating liminal forms of communication through participation and differentiation. Belonging here is not merely performative but mitigates absence by producing boundaries tied to legitimacy, recognition, and asymmetrical power. The result further advocates for a conviction that witchcraft, at some level, should be looked as a political and moral space of being, rather than identity alone.

This research contributes to broader discussions surrounding religion, spirituality, and modernity within Finland. The practices of witchcraft have a capacity to resist, embody, and perform within secular rationality and biomedicine. The practices create counter-meaning communities while intersecting with neoliberal wellness economies and spiritual entrepreneurship. This ambivalence provides a sense that witchcraft occupies the tensions of late capitalist societies, whereby authentic and altered selves intersect and exist alongside commodified religiousities. The study argues that witches navigate this ambivalence imaginatively, employing hybrid practices that signal a spiritual legitimacy while inquiring into "modern" socioeconomic contexts. In this fashion, Witchcraft is both a critique of a culture and a practical negotiation, including resisting and accommodating. Tensions are contributions to an anthropological discussion "and upside-down" regarding new spiritualities attaining their claims within "modern" economies, epistemologies, and the expansion of the state. It suggests that witchcraft in Finland does not exist marginally but is as authentic as the deeply intertwined negotiative cultural processes.

The study has anthropological significance as it sheds light on the archetype of magic, personhood, and epistemology. By conceptualizing witchcraft in terms of fractal

personhood, mimesis, and magical consciousness, the research evidence counters biased rationalist and reductionist discourses of identity and knowledge. The evidence demonstrates that witchcraft ritual persuades recursive, relational, and embodied forms of personhood, indicating how identity is not stable, but rather reconstituted through ritual, narrative, and social relations. The research also demonstrates the epistemic value of magical consciousness in perceiving the everyday as a vivid and intense relationality of knowledge and experience. The research contemplates anthropology's responsibility to engage with more alternative ways of knowing and the act of resisting reductionism. More significantly, the research theorizes witchcraft as neither an "other" of superstition nor a fetish of imagination, but rather as a valid practice of world-making with valid and disquieting implications for anthropologists, discourses of knowledge, belief, and practice in late modern contexts.

This thesis has demonstrated how Finnish witchcraft raises questions about broader themes of identity, healing, belonging, and epistemology. I have argued that rather than being a niche interest, witchcraft forms a site of cultural negotiation worthy of study in Finland today. By engaging in ritual practice, witches use body knowledge and collective infrastructures to create space for articulating and embodying unconventional identity and healing. At the same time, they negotiate tensions of legitimacy, visibility, and exclusion - laying bare the moral ambiguity of witchcraft geography. I theorised witchcraft as a critique of and companion to hegemonic orders in the form of an alternative care infrastructure, and negotiating a contested form of knowledge as epistemological opposition. Ultimately, I have articulated how witchcraft facilitates practitioners' renarration of their lives, in spiritual, social, and economic ways. In this respect, witchcraft encompasses not only the lives of Finnish witches but also the said dynamics of personhood, belonging, and spirituality within late capitalist modernity.

6.1 Future Directions

6.1.1 Witchcraft, Entrepreneurship, and Digital Economies

The students' progress at Noitaopisto towards entrepreneurial possibilities has opened pathways for future studies on witchcraft and capitalism. The teachers have been engaging in service for some time, but a shift towards increased entrepreneurial participation by students indicates an alteration of the boundaries of legitimate spirituality. Future studies could explore how spiritual entrepreneurship is framed by witchcraft groups, and the

potential for framing to live within tensions of authenticity, livable income, and commodification. This tension also exemplifies a larger relationship between spirituality and neoliberal economies, with witchcraft evading and arising from a logic of capitalism. A significant vector in these issues has come from actors using digital platforms, such as websites, online stores, and social media, that shape clients' visibility and network interactions. Contemporary spirituality would say something about mediating infrastructures to think through witches' navigation regarding the visibility of algorithms, rules of the platforms, and audience expectations. Moreover, comparative studies of witchcraft might also ask how witches in Finland sense similarities and differences from witches in other European or Global contexts where esoteric enterprise occurs from economic precarity.

6.1.2 Witchcraft, Care, and Multiple Regimes of Healing

This research has demonstrated how Finnish witchcraft produces multiple regimes of care, overlapping with the boundaries of biomedicine, institutional religion, and self-help economies. Research in the future must explore how these various forms of healing intersect in practice, and how witches navigate competing claims of authority. A comparative anthropological perspective could explore if other minority spiritual groups, like neo-shamanism or Afro-diasporic spiritual care, exhibit a similar dynamic. In addition to extending ontological pluralism (Graeber, 2015) and Greenwood's (2000, 2005, 2009) magical consciousness, future research could examine how witches synthesize somatic, ecological, and ancestral healing with wider care regimes. Of particular interest is how professional witches negotiate legitimacy with medical practitioners, and whether it is possible to negotiate collaboration across epistemologies. There is also a need to explore how spiritual care interacts with social determinants of health, such as unstable employment, environmental precarity, or inter-generational trauma. Comparative studies could also determine whether witchcraft care provides resources for marginalized communities conducting caring practices, or how these practices reinforce the neoliberal individualistic ideas of responsibility and vulnerability. These queries would help shed light on the paradoxical position of witchcraft in late-capitalist health ecologies, resisting and/or working in concert with the biomedical governing of health and wellness markets. This research would contribute to the debates on plural epistemologies, therapeutic authority legitimacy, and ethics of care.

6.1.3 Institutions, Epistemic Dialogue, and Relational Care

An alternative avenue is institutional engagement with non-traditional epistemologies. In healthcare, education, and social work, witchcraft is mostly ignored as a knowledge system. Instead, practices are treated as either superstition or utilized as cultural currency. Future study could examine how, or if, institutions may persuasively engage epistemologies of witchcraft without compressing them into biomedical or bureaucratic registers. It is a matter of cultivating epistemic humility and structural openness, as Puig de la Bellacasa (2017) imagines care as an ethico-political practice. Studies could examine whether dialogical encounters generate hybrid forms of care that combine bodily, ecological, and spiritual knowledge with medical knowledge. Observing partnerships in the field using ethnography can reveal the potentialities and tensions of these meeting spaces. For example, what happens to witches when they are included in therapeutic contexts, schools, and nature projects? Are professional rationalities absorbing the practices, or does a genuine pluralism emerge? Cross-national investigation can, in effect, interrogate whether countries or contexts with different religious or secular agendas provide more hospitable spaces for epistemic encounter. In addition, this investigation can also inquire into how actors are trained to access, value, and utilize non-hegemonic cosmologies. Overall, this reflects a shift in anthropology from description to opening up to truly different, responsible, and ethical ways of relating that can engage with other epistemologies of care.

6.1.4 Witchcraft, Technology, and Future Infrastructures of Belonging

The greater integration of AI technologies and online infrastructures has fundamental implications for the future of witchcraft. In Noitaopisto, businesses increasingly rely on AI-enabled websites, online advertising, and digital rituals. Future studies should examine witches' positions in technological mediation, and if and how these technologies change power, safety, authenticity, and belonging. It could be interrogated how digital infrastructures act as the primary means of building spiritual practice and, importantly, how algorithmic visibility, platform exclusion, and data economies affect these practices. Do witches feel a sense of empowerment and control through AI-enabled access, or perpetuate unnecessary vulnerability through reliance on extractive techno-processes? Research might ask when a digital platform enables the building of overall more inclusive communities in ways that practitioners across a far geographical distance can practice together and feel connected, and when a platform allows for exclusion through preferential

location of those with digital capital and enabling resources to practice? Longitudinal work could follow witches as they change their practice with changing technologies, especially in light of increasing unemployment and economic instability in Finland (SVT, 2025). Comparative accounts could follow witches in differing geographical and national standings to understand how they mediate AI into ritual, instruction, and healing. Analysis and study of these processes would provide a richer and more profound knowledge of witchcraft, and be included in larger conversations on how technology creates sizable shifts in spiritual identity.

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8 Annexes

Annex 1: A screenshot of the invitation to Noitahaavaseremonia

Noitahaavaseremonia

Torstaina 15.9. klo 18.00-19.30

LiveWebinar alustalla

Osallistumismaksu 44€
(sisältyy lukuvuosimaksuun 2022-2023)

Tunnetko palan kurkussasi tai piston niskassasi, kun olet puhumassa itsellesi tärkeästä asiasta?

Noitahaava on aiemmista elämistä syntyisin oleva kollektiivinen trauma, joka aktivoituu kun olet astumassa omaan voimaasi ja tuomassa esille sisäistä magiaasi.

Se voi saada sinut hiljenemään, kun haluaisit jakaa ystävillesi kristalliharrastustasi.

Se voi tuoda karheuden kurkkuusi, kun kerrot perheelleesi aloittaneesi opinnot Suomen Noitaopistossa.

Se voi saada sinut kerta toisensa jälkeen perääntymään, kun aiot aloittaa energiahoitojen ja korttitulkintojen tarjoamisen.

Noitahaava on syntynyt silloin, kun olet tuonut näkyväksi sisäiset maagikon ja parantajan lahjasi ja sinut on hiljennetty. Hiljentäminen on voinut tapahtua lyttäämällä, vähättelemällä tai jopa väkivalloin.

Tänä päivänä maapallolle on inkarnoitunut ennätysmäärä vanhoja noitia, joilla on energeettisessä solumuistissa jäljet keskiajan noitavainoista.

Nämä jäljet näyttäytyvät selittämättöminä niskakipuina, kurkkukipuina, epämukavana kihelmöintinä päälaella tai suorastaan pakokauhuna, kun on aika tulla näkyväksi.

Noitahaavaseremoniassa voit tuoda haavasi turvallisesti näkyväksi.

Tulet kohdatuksi omana itsenäsi, koko valossasi ja varjossasi.

Näen sinut, kuulen sinut, tunnen sinut.

Hekate saapuu paikalle hoitamaan haavaasi.

Sinun ei tarvitse tietää, milloin haavasi on tarkalleen syntynyt. Riittää, että tunnistat sen olemassaolon.

Tule seremoniatilaan LiveWebinariin rauhallisesta paikasta, jossa voit keskittyä 100% koko 90min ajan.

Kutsumme paikalle elementaalit, ilmansuuntien vartijat, Hekaten ja muut mahdolliset oppaat.

Iina toimii seremonian ylipapittarena ja kanavana piirin ja Hekaten välillä.

Kohtaamme noitahaavan sekä yksilötasolla että kollektiivina ja tuomme valoa rankkoihin kokemuksiin, joita osallistujilla on tästä ja aiemmista elämistä.

Näin valmistaudut seremoniaan käytännössä:

- käytämme LiveWebinar alustaa, joten saat sähköpostiisi linkin ja voit liittyä mukaan selaimen kautta puhelimella tai läppärillä. Sinun ei tarvitse ladata mitään ohjelmaa
- varaa rauhallinen tila koko 90min ajaksi
- Ehdimme todennäköisesti ottaa muutaman vapaaehtoisen puheenvuoron osallistujilta
- saat listan valinnaisista oheistarvikkeista sähköpostiin lähempänä seremoniaa