

Walt Disney Animation Studios' *Frozen II* is the highest grossing animated film of all time. In just six days after the films released, it brought in an estimated \$187.6 million domestically and \$228.2 million internationally (ew.com). There is no doubt that this animated feature film was a huge success financially, but there were many folks who felt disappointed in the story after leaving the theater. There were other folks, like the Sámi people, for whom this story changed their lives for the better. The Sámi people are an indigenous group native to what we would call northern Norway, Sweden, Finland and Russia. The fictional Northuldra people in *Frozen II* are based off of this very real culture. The clothing, homes, and nature connection of the Northuldra is based on Sámi culture. The "vuelie" chant featured in both *Frozen* film opening credits as well as the *Frozen* ride in Walt Disney World is a real song of the Sámi (Vaughn 24). My motivation for writing this paper comes from my semester spent in Introduction to Shamanism, a University of Wisconsin-Madison course taught by Tom DuBois an expert in German, Nordic and Slavic studies. Dubois is listed in the credits of *Frozen II* for consulting during the production of the film. He has been studying the Sámi culture for decades. As a self proclaimed Disney Nerd, I loved the movie when I saw it in theaters, but I came to love it even more when Professor DuBois took almost an entire lecture period to explain to us what the film means and how Sámi culture is well represented. This paper seeks to explain how Elsa and the plot of *Frozen II* fits perfectly into the general mold of shamanistic religions as well as explain a little bit about why *Frozen II* is bigger and so much more important than most people originally thought.

There are three basic categories that make up the fundamentals of shamanistic religions. I like to refer to them as the "Three C's": cosmology, call, and career. Going forward, I will analyze *Frozen II* based on these three characteristics of traditional shamanism.

Cosmology is the beliefs about the structure and organization of the universe. Shamanic cosmology believes that there are multiple worlds set up in a vertical array, but they can be accessed on the visible horizontal landscape by going up to mountains or down into water. There are links between the worlds in places like caves, cracks, lakes, or trees (Embil 1). In the film, Ahtohallen is a glacier that connects the human world to the spirit world where Elsa must go to learn the truth about the past and set things right. These other worlds are known only through shamanic revelation in which a spirit guide will help the shaman navigate the different worlds, not a map. The belief in spirits is the other major part of shamanic cosmology. Spirits live in these other worlds and can act as helpers to humans or as antagonists (1). They bring fortune or misfortune to communities and individuals. The spirits call to Elsa in a voice only she can hear in order to get her to begin her journey. Elsa's spirit guide is the water spirit that manifests to her in the form of a beautiful horse. Though she does originally see Ahtohallen on a map, Elsa needs the water spirit to help her cross the dark sea and actually reach her destination.

Shamanic call happens in two main ways: a crisis situation or family background. A person can become a shaman after events like sickness, near-death experience, or epic loss like of a family member. Family background shamanic call sets the expectation that there will be a new shaman from that specific family each generation. In each case, the potential shaman will display differences/sensitivities that are not common to the average community member (1). In "Show Yourself" Elsa sings, "I have always been so different. Normal rules don't apply," after all,

she has magic ice powers. Elsa's call situation is unique because while she does experience a great loss through the death of her parents, her shaman powers were actually given as a gift from the spirits for her mother, Iduna's, selfless act of saving her father, Agnarr. Her call is more along the lines of family background because of the history of how her parents met. After the realization of a call, the potential shaman will receive an invitation into partnership from their tutelary (helping) spirit through a dream or trance state. If the person says no, the spirit could leave them alone, but more evidence shows that the spirit will punish the person until they agree to partner (1). Elsa hears the call from the spirits and she experiences a vision of the enchanted forest and some of the spirits that are calling her, water and earth. But she still doesn't want to go "into the unknown." She sings, "I can hear you, but I won't." Elsa refuses her partnership, so the spirits send a storm in which "the air rages, no fire, no water," and there is an earthquake that destroys much of Arendelle, her queendom, but hurts no people as a warning that she needs to answer her call. Generally, shamanic call happens during adolescence or some other important period of life like menopause or the end of a marriage. Elsa is thought to be 24 (frozen.fandom.com) in *Frozen II*, so she is a little old, but similar to traditional adolescent call she has to go on a spirit quest (2) in which she is tested before she can complete her journey and realize she is the fifth spirit and part of the bridge between the spirit and human world.

After the call and acceptance of partnership, the Shaman could have many roles within the community. They can be broken into five categories: healer, diviner, psychopomp, luck manipulator, and conductor of sacrifices (Dubois 83). All of the Shaman's roles are done in partnership with one or more spirits, and not completely of their own power (Embil2). *Frozen II* tells the story of Elsa's call, so we don't see much of her career (though I'm sure in a third movie we would.) We do see her acting in the healing and diving roles during her quest. About 100% of shamantic traditions have a healing role for the shaman which makes them responsible for retrieving souls that have gotten lost, banishing intruding souls, acting as a diagnostician, and a provider of therapeutic acts (DuBois 83 and Embil 2). Elsa must go into the enchanted forest and retrieve all of the Arindellians that have become lost and trapped inside. About 80% of shamanic traditions have the diving role. It can include predicting future circumstances or discovering the reason for present circumstances and how to fix them. Elsa has to discover the true history of Arendelle's relationship with the Northuldra in order to fix the present.

Unfortunately, there is a fourth C that was not originally part of shamanism but has become part of it through the centuries. It must be talked about when talking about shamanistic religions and cultures: colonization. Shamanism all across the world has been deeply affected and changed by white Christian settlers/explorers. *Frozen II* does not shy away from this fact and shows colonization explicitly. Anna and Elsa's grandfather, King Runeard's, fears the Northuldra people because they "trust in magic," and he believes they could potentially defy the king. Runeard tricks the Northuldra into building a dam on their land to benefit his kingdom and then attacks them because they begin to realize the dam is not helping them.

I was talking with a young girl from my church about *Frozen II* because she was wearing a shirt with Sven on it. I asked her if she liked the movie and she told me, "It was ok. My dad said it was a little old for me." I just nodded along as she talked about Olaf, but in my head I wondered how a PG-rated Disney princess movie could be "a little old" for a seven year old girl. Unfortunately, I think that "a little old for you" is a comfortable excuse for parents to avoid having

tough conversations. If Disney's *Inside Out* is used to talk about the difficult subject that is mental health (ct.counseling.org), why can't *Frozen II* be used to talk about race relations and colonization? Why are we afraid of talking about race with white kids? Children of color and indigenous children don't get the luxury of being spared the conversation about racial tension and injustice. They live it every day. In his interview with Katie Vaughn for UW-Madison's bi-annual publication from College of Letters & Science, Tom Dubois wrote, "When a major Western entertainment corporation like Disney enters into dialogue with the leaders of an indigenous community and respects the cultural rights and dignity of that community, an important step and decolonization occurs. I am convinced of these two things: colonization involves us all; decolonization requires us all (Vaughn 26)." *Frozen II* could act as an on ramp to some of those more difficult topics about decolonization and the part we all must play if parents let it. I hope that this paper can help serve as a starting tool to educate families about shamanistic cultures and religions that have been wiped away through centuries of colonizing and westernization.

Identity representation in the media is important because it shows children that who they are matters and that they are worthy of being in leading roles. DuBois said in that interview with Katie Vaughn, "Not only do Sámi children see themselves represented in the movie, but they hear it in their own language. It is incredibly powerful." *Frozen II* is the first feature length animation to be in Sámi ,and it has been praised by the International Sámi Film Institute as "unbelievable and such a precious gift (facebook.com)." Sámi children watched *Frozen II* and saw that not only is their culture super cool, it is fit for queens and kings.

If this paper has a future, I hope that I can dive beyond the general characteristics of shamanic traditions featured in *Frozen II* and look at the specifically Sámi traditions that are featured in the film. However, as I write this paper during the Covid-19 pandemic. all libraries and universities are closed, I am without access to research on Sámi culture. I still hope that this paper, as is, can be a starting point for anyone interested in seeing the bigger picture and importance of *Frozen II*.

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