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Multiple Worlds of Sámi Research

Abstract:

In this text I discuss how Sámi ways of knowing could be woven into the practices of Sámi research. I introduce three stories of three research projects as examples of attempts to overcome the complex and multifaceted challenges that Sámi society is currently facing. These examples place the Sámi perception of the world and its ontological and epistemological premises and practices at the core of knowledge practices. Sámi knowledge and ways of knowing the world are jointly created and shared in the every-day activities of communicating and acting, being in dialogue with the environment, caring for it, and engaging with the principle that a human being is not the master of nature.

Keywords: Sámi, Sámi knowledge, Indigenous knowledge, storytelling, art

Viidon Sieiddit

1. verse

Herding, herding the herd
Following the weather, following the soul
Balancing the numbers, protecting from the predators
And carnivores, in the goahti sharing the info
While cooking, telling stories
Taking care of things humbly
By the campfire, narrating
With yoiks saving, reminiscing
Taking care of the environment, the family
Relatives, siidas, diligently, firmly
Communicating with the air, water and earth
Asking the hunting luck from the sacrifice stones
Learning the seasons, favorable locations
Over nights, days, months, years
Springs, summers, autumns, winters
With patience the strength and vigor increases

2. verse

Oh we should return to the past
There was no time to enjoy actually
To have time to rest you had to be
Constantly searching for ways to survive
Now its much easier, weather the weather
Snowmobile, engine, ordering a ride
Its possible to save a life no matter is it
Storm or still
Well of course we survive without them
Or can we anymore
Do we fend anymore
Did you sell again, buy again, fly again
But what about the outside forces
Denouncing, condemning
Bringing death, building barrages
Attacking by day, attacking in the dusk
Restrictions, regulations
Laws, poisons, pollution
Eating space from near by lands
And at the same time from distant traditions

3.verse

Today's situation must be taken into account more extensively

That's what the criticizer forgot

How is it so difficult to see

That we only let the nature color our opinions

Blind ones trust the individuals

And the pyramids of power

When the only functional way is to return the authority to local regimes

We have the power when we dare

To fight together against the big devils

For the sake of life this is everyone's responsibility

Our things are governed by nature

Our things are governed by the reindeer

We ourselves know how to determine these lands

Not the one who is separated from nature

These lyrics are an English translation of the North Sámi song 'Viidon Sieiddit' (Widened Sacred Rocks) by the Sámi rap artist Ailu Valle, from the album *Viidon Sieiddit*, released in 2019 (English translation of the lyrics, Ailu Valle).[1] As I and other Sámi scholars (Valkonen, Alakorva et al. 2022) have noted together, the words of the first verse insightfully depict the interconnectedness of humans and the environment based on the Sámi way of life and Sámi worldview in a reindeer-herding society. Nature is not something to be captured, something distinct from the cycles of everyday life; rather, all human action is entangled with the environment: with animals, the earth, air, water, weather, sacred sites, cycles of the year.

When we look at the following verses of the song, the picture becomes more complex. In the second and third verses, the lyrics provide an analysis of contemporary Sámi society and the challenges it faces. The Sámi are in an ongoing struggle over their — our — possibility to be and live both now and in the future in a world where *our things are governed by nature* (Valkonen, Alakorva et al. 2022). Sápmi, the Sámi homeland, has for decades faced various forms of resource extraction, from water reservoirs to the extensive logging of old-growth forests, from mines to windmill parks (see, e.g. Massa 1994;

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1   The song and album *Viidon Sieiddit* by Ailu Valle were created as part of the Sámi art and research project 'Viidon Sieiddit – the new dimensions of Sámi nature relationships'/ 'Saamelaisen luontosuhteen uudet mittasuhteet' (funded by Kone Foundation, 2016–2017, PI Sanna Valkonen). The analysis of the lyrics presented in this article is also in some form part of the collaboratively produced introductory chapter (Valkonen, Alakorva, Aikio, and Magga 2022a) to the book *The Sámi World* (Valkonen, Aikio, Alakorva, and Magga 2022).

Hernes et al. 2022; Knobblock 2022; Larsen et al. 2022; Ranta & Kanninen 2019). Today, Sápmi, as with many other areas in the High North, is increasingly becoming a battleground for different competing economic and extractive claims, strategies and interests (see, e.g.; Kuokkanen 2019; Junka-Aikio 2022; Raitio et al. 2020). Together with climate change and its consequences, which are large-scale and far-reaching, the pressures faced by the Sámi people and on their way of life are considerably challenging (see IPCC 2022; Valkonen, Alakorva et al. 2022). Additionally, life in general is becoming more and more dependent on the technical and mining industry, and increasing consumption is a fact of life. As Ailu Valle asks, *Did you sell again, buy again, fly again*?

Valle's lyrics, however, also propose a solution to the question: *We have the power when we dare to fight together against the big devils. For the sake of life this is everyone's responsibility*. In what follows, Valle makes a statement that crystallises an idea quite essential to the Sámi perception to the world:

> Our things are governed by nature
> Our things are governed by the reindeer
> We ourselves know how to determine these lands
> Not the one who is separated from nature

Ailu Valle has said[2] that this song is about the challenges of living in the world today as a Sámi person, about the battle to maintain traditional culture in a rapidly changing world. According to him, the name of the song, 'Viidon Sieiddit' (Widened sacred rocks) refers to the present-day situation where the Sámi are currently involved with and impacted by global culture but also profoundly bound to their traditional, land-based way of life. Valle discusses how sacred rocks have been important in Sámi culture as places of worship. They illustrate how the Sámi have been strongly attached to local nature. But nowadays, as Valle notes, we all are also 'connected to worldwide natures through the parts of the technological devices we use, whether we want it or not'.

I have chosen these lyrics by Ailu Valle as the introduction to this review article, which discusses examples of how Sámi ways of knowing – Sámi knowledge practices, particularly Sámi storytelling in various forms – could be woven into the practices of Sámi research. My aim here is to share three stories of three research projects (*cf*. Outakoski 2020) as examples of attempts to overcome the complex and multifaceted challenges that Sámi society is currently facing while placing the Sámi perception of the world and its ontological and epistemological premises and practices at the core of knowledge practic-

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2   Instagram post by Ailu Valle, 13 November 2020.

es (see, e.g. Helander & Kailo 1999; Kuokkanen 2000, 2007; *cf.* Kovach 2009, 55–74; Wilson 2001).

When discussing storytelling as an Indigenous methodology, Margaret Kovach (2009, 94) makes the following observation: 'Stories remind us who we are and of our belonging. Stories hold within them knowledges while simultaneously signifying relationships.' In indigenous frameworks, storytelling and knowing have an inseparable relationship, and storytelling can work as a decolonising action by giving voice to the marginalised and misinterpreted (Kovach 2009, 94–98; Archibald 2001; see also Jensen 2020). I consider Sámi rap music as a particular form of Sámi storytelling, as are other forms of Sámi art and Sámi *duodji* (handicrafts), and hence, it comprises a Sámi knowledge practice in its own right (see Valkonen, Alakorva et al. 2022). The rap lyrics by Ailu Valle discussed in this text can also be read as a portrayal of Sámi knowledge and ways of knowing the world (on Sámi knowledge, see, e.g. Guttorm 2011; Helander-Renvall 2016; Kuokkanen 2009; Valkonen and Valkonen 2019; Valkonen et al. forthcoming). Knowing and knowledge are jointly created and shared in the every-day activities of communicating and acting, being in dialogue with the environment, caring for it, telling stories, asking for luck, being humble and patient, engaging with the principle that a human being is not the master of nature. As noted by Barker and Pickerill (2019, 647), '[i]t is this acting with non-human entities that distinguishes Indigeneity and Indigenous knowledge-making from non-Indigenous theory' (see also Hall 2014).

Sámi knowledge is thus co-constituted, realised together with the surrounding environment and its subjectivities and agencies. A reindeer herder knows together with the collective of herders, with a reindeer, together with a fell and with a snowmobile, just like a *duojár* (crafter) knows together with the materials and techniques, together with ancestors and future generations. Knowledge emerges and is tested in active relationships, and a central purpose of this kind of knowledge is to ensure that life and living will be possible also in the future; it is not knowing merely for the sake of knowledge itself, but rather for the sake of responsible relationships (*cf.* Kuokkanen 2007; 32–33; see also, e.g. Knobblock 2022, 5; Finbog 2020, 14; Oskal 1995; Sara 2013). As pointed out by Margaret Kovach (2009, 57) when discussing Indigenous epistemologies: 'Relationship is not identified as a specific theme because it is wholly integrated with everything else. Indigenous epistemologies live within a relational web, and all aspects of them must be understood from that vantage point.'

The three projects to be introduced in this review article have — by combining social scientific Sámi research (on Sámi research, see, e.g. Junka-Aikio 2019; Junka-Aikio et al. 2022; Valkonen & Valkonen 2016), Sámi art and tra-

ditional and everyday Sámi knowledge and skills — applied and developed relational practices and methods from Sámi perspectives and epistemological understandings to better study Sámi society (Valkonen, Alakorva et al. 2022; *cf.* Kuokkanen 2000; Porsanger et al. 2021). In this article, I focus particularly on the ways in which Sámi knowledge practices and articulations, even Sámi *duodji* (handicraft) items (see, e.g. Finbog 2020; Guttorm 2011, 2015; Magga 2022) and Sámi artistic interventions (see, e.g. Valkonen & Valkonen 2018), can both inspirit and inform the framework for a research project: How *duodji* and art can inspire research and, importantly, transmit and express the research needs, topical questions and concerns of Sámi communities, while also making it possible to examine them and present and share research findings. In other words, the article focuses on how Sámi ways of knowing help researchers tell their particular stories (*cf.* Archibald 2008; Archibald et al. 2019; Knobblock 2022; Martineau & Ritskes 2014).

My aim in this text is also then to illustrate how cooperation between Sámi art, *duodji* and research can enable and construct decolonising research practices by prioritising diverse Sámi knowledge practices in various research settings. This review article hence adheres to and contributes to the challenge of developing Indigenous methodologies and relational research practices (Smith 1999; Kovach 2009;; Virtanen et al. 2021; Wilson 2001) from a particular Indigenous epistemic position and world. To this end, I introduce concrete examples of what a decolonisation of research practices could mean in the Sámi context. I suggest that as in the Sámi world, the boundaries between human and the environment are fluid and relational and knowledge and knowing subjectivity are co-constituted through relationships and co-acting (Helander-Renvall 2016) also Sámi research as an academic field established at the universities must be able to build transdisciplinary, relational and decolonial practices of producing knowledge.

Discussing Sámi nature relations in the era of global environmental concern

The Sámi are an Indigenous People who live in the area of four nation states. The Sámi lands range from central Norway and Sweden across Northern Finland to the Kola Peninsula in Russia. The Sámi call this area Sápmi (North Sámi spelling of the Sámi homeland). The Sámi have to a rather considerable degree retained their own social, economic, cultural and political institutions, for instance the siida system, which is a historically long-lasting political, legal and administrative unit of society for sharing common sources of livelihood and usufruct territories (see, e.g. Helander-Renvall 2013; Lehtola 2002; Labba 2015). The Sámi have in many respects held on to a traditional land-based way

of life, particularly evident, as also the siida system, in reindeer herding (see Sara 2013; Oskal 1995), their own languages and cultural expressions, and a holistic, relational worldview and spiritual culture, despite various colonial, assimilative and infrastructural measures imposed on them over time. At the same time, living in the wealthy Nordic democracies, with their comprehensive welfare-state models (most Sámi live in Finland, Norway and Sweden, while only a small minority [2–3 percent of the 75000–100 000 Sámi] live in Russia), means the Sámi have a long tradition of operating in-between various realities – *ilmmiid gaskkas*, freely translated as 'in-between worlds and skies', as the North Sámi expression goes, denoting 'living on boundaries, creative moving between two or even more life conceptions' (Lehtola 2000; Valkonen, Alakorva et al. 2022). The Sámi are both European and Indigenous – definitions that, from the perspective of other Indigenous Peoples, are seen as opposites (Valkonen, Alakorva et al. 2022).

The above-described onto-epistemological position of the Sámi has structured the three research projects presented in this review article. The projects have conducted research *ilmmiid gaskkas*, in other words, on boundaries, creatively moving between different life and scientific conceptions and approaches – in-between various worlds – thus challenging the one-world paradigm still dominant in academia (*cf.* de la Cadena 2015; Guttorm et al. 2019; Rosenow 2018). This mono-ontological understanding of the world – the idea that we all share the same reality – is a doctrine enacted by Western political and legal systems and institutions, as well as science; it is based on and promotes a twofold ontological dichotomy: separating humans from nature (the nature/culture divide) and distinguishing and policing the boundary between those who operate within the one-world order and those who have other ways of worlding (the colonial divide) (see, e.g. De Sousa Santos 2014; Escobar 2015; Rojas 2016). Indigenous Peoples all over the world are engaged in struggles to maintain their multiple worlds, the pluriverse (e.g. de la Cadena 2015; Escobar 2020; Valkonen, Aikio et al. 2022). The ontological occupations of their lands and waters (Escobar 2015; Wolfe 2006), identities and cultures (Leroux 2019; Junka-Aikio 2016; Sturm 2011; Valkonen 2019), even knowledge and thought (Sundberg 2014; Tallbear 2017), can be seen as a consequence and manifestation of the one-world order, which suppresses alternative worldings. As described at the beginning of this article, this is the reality faced also by the Sámi in contemporary Europe.

The first project, '*Viidon Sieiddit* the new dimensions of Sámi nature relations' (2016–2017),[3] emerged as a result of another massive resource use plan targeting the Sámi homeland. How this project was born is a story that needs

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3   The project was funded by Kone Foundation.

to be told because it demonstrates not only the collective mindset of certain Sámi actors but also how research can truly originate from the societal concerns of Indigenous communities. In 2014, a diamond mine company registered in Ireland was granted an exploration permit to look for diamonds in Sápmi, in the Ohcejohka/Utsjoki region, located in the northernmost corner of Finland. Utsjoki is the only municipality in Finland with a Sámi majority. This news gave rise to much concern and discussion in different Sámi fora. The local Sámi stated their opposition and raised concerns about how the possible mine would affect Sámi livelihoods, especially fishing and reindeer herding, and jeopardise their options for pursuing traditional livelihoods, possibly for many generations (see e.g. https://yle.fi/a/3-7310306). It is undeniable that the existence of Sámi culture and society depends fundamentally on a clean environment and land areas that are expansive enough to practice reindeer herding and other nature-based livelihoods, which also help the Sámi maintain many particular skills and knowledge as well as a rich language. Their relation to the nearby environment is the foundational basis for Sámi society: large-scale extractive projects would crucially affect Sámi culture and conditions vital to its success (Valkonen and Valkonen 2018; Valkonen, Valkonen et al. forthcoming; Valkonen et al. forthcoming; *cf.* Simpson 2004).

A little after news about the diamond mine had spread, a Sámi visual artist, photographer and filmmaker Marja Helander, gave an interview on Yle Sámi radio (Yle Sápmi) related to her exhibition on mining landscapes. She said (https://yle.fi/uutiset/3-7699144):

> – Only when I started to study these things did I realise that we all, all Sámi as well, are married to the mining industry.
> Marja Helander is noting that she can't preach against mining because she can't live without the day-to-day industrial products that are connected to the mining industry. Through her pictures, she can only address where we are going.
> It has been hard to accept this, especially as a Sámi and a representative of an Indigenous People. Indigenous Peoples are often perceived as closer to nature than others. But the reality may be different.
> – Externally, the life of the Sámi is exactly the same as for the Finns – there are computers, cars, snowmobiles, telephones, mobile phones, all that. Helander is reminding that almost everything is based on the products of the mining industry. She continues, saying that this does not always come into mind.
> – Somehow, we might not think about this, and neither did I, that actually this Western way of consuming is pretty much based on the products of the mining industry. (Translated by Sanna Valkonen)

In the interview, Marja Helander in my mind questioned her right as a Sámi to prioritise the lands and environment of her own people at the cost of other peoples. She challenged such Indigenous agency and responsibility where 'our' own ancestral lands are at the core of Indigenous politics and ethics, as a counterpoint to Western lifestyles, which the Sámi, as citizens of Western societies, are part of as well, having a profound dependency on the mining industry. The 'Viidon Sieiddit' project was initiated by this kind of unpleasant feeling of hypocrisy related to the fact that while protecting our own nearby environment from the mining industry or other large-scale projects affecting the Sámi surroundings, also 'we', the Sámi, often carelessly consume commodities dependent on raw materials extracted from the nearby environment of other peoples. Perhaps people(s) who do not have any possibilities to resist the exploitation of their environment (see also Valkonen et al. forthcoming).

The Sámi researchers and artists who became involved with the project had had similar thoughts and feelings.[4] As a group, we started to wonder about and ponder the primality of our lands and our privilege in being able to defend our lands while at the same time reflecting on our responsibilities to distant natures, the nearby environments of faraway, or neighbour peoples. The 'Viidon Sieddit' project was initiated to conceive how a similar responsible and caring relationship to nature and knowledge practices characteristic of the traditional Sámi way of life could be extended beyond nearby environments. We wanted to envision how the Sámi consciousness of nature and the Sámi ways of knowing could allow for an increasing awareness of and inform our relationships with distant environments. Our goal was also to open perspectives onto Sámi responsibility as global citizens to care for global natures (see Valkonen and Valkonen 2018; Valkonen, Valkonen et al. forthcoming).

The starting point for the project was the idea that all human action is thoroughly permeated by, supported by and dependent on the materiality of the physical world. The ambitious goal of 'Viidon Sieiddit' was to rediscover nature beyond just planetary threat scenarios. We sought new forms of Sámi nature consciousness and sensitivity towards nearby and distant environments as well as new perspectives on the material relations of communities by combining the Sámi audiovisual environmental art, Sámi photography and filmmaking, Sámi rap music and social scientific Sámi research. The results of the project were presented as 1) an art exhibition entitled *Viidon Sieiddit*, which included several artworks on display at the Sámi Museum Siida from September 2018

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4 The research group for the project consisted of a Sámi hybrid artist, queer activist Stina Aletta Aikio, a Sámi visual artist, photographer and filmmaker, Marja Helander, a Sámi rap artist, Ailu Valle, a Sámi professor of sociology, environmental sociologist Jarno Valkonen, and myself.

Figures 1 and 2. Whose cup of tea (2018), by Jarno Valkonen, and Birds in the Earth (2018), by Marja Helander.

to March 2019; 2) a short film entitled *Eatnanvuloš Lottit* (Birds in the Earth, 2018) by Marja Helander; 3) a North Sámi rap album entitled *Viidon Sieiddit* (2019) by Ailu Valle; and 4) a book entitled *Viidon Sieiddit*, which included dialogues between the researchers and artists of the project, published both in Finnish and in North Sámi (Valkonen and Valkonen 2018).With and through both artwork and dialogues, our aim was to critically discuss and make visi-

ble the uncertainty and blurriness related to contemporary nature relations. This can be illustrated through the example of a *guksi*, a burl cup. We basically know how it is connected to nature. The motif of a wooden cup is natural material made from birch burl; the crafter will work it into a practical object, which is then valued and tested in daily use, and the crafter does this using skills learned within the culture. Contemporary practices of human subsistence are more complicated than the making of a burl cup because they have been torn away and separated from the direct environments where people are living. This is why day-to-day life's nature-culture coexistence is harder to understand and perceive: the nature relations of a porcelain cup, not to mention a mobile phone, are not at all as clear as those of a *guksi* (see Valkonen and Valkonen 2018, 11).

In *Viidon Sieiddit*, we explored how a similar kind of understanding of the interrelatedness of all human action and the environment characteristic of the traditional Sámi way of life and Sámi worldview – as figured in the first verse of Ailu Valle's song or in a wooden cup – could be extended to include modern lifestyles and distant environments. By combining the insights of the artists and their artistic work with academic discussions, we aimed to create alternative forms of knowledge, different from conventional academic practice in social sciences, and alternative ways to disseminate knowledge and provoke thoughts. We told stories in diverse forms about the Sámi relationship to nature and its multiple connections, as is the customary Sámi method of knowing, in which knowledge production is understood as narrative and dialogical by nature and with nature, as discussed by, for instance, Elina Helander and Kaarina Kailo (1999) (see also Guttorm et al. 2019).

The rap album by Ailu Valle manifests this method and goal. It is a thorough analysis of the interrelatedness, entanglement and co-becoming (see Bawaka Country et al. 2015) of the human and the environment in the past and present in the form of a particular type of storytelling (*cf.* Gorlewski & Porfilio 2012; Navarro 2014). Or, as Marja Helander elucidates when introducing 'Series North, year 2018', a photograph series forming part of the 'Viidon Sieiddit' project (Helander 2020):

> For several years, I have been taking photographs in Sápmi in the northern Fennoscandian region, exploring the link between the mining industry and today's standard of living and culture of consumption, and in particular, the impact of mining on the sensitive northern nature. The nickel mined in the Kola Peninsula is needed, for example, for the manufacture of stainless steel, computer hard drives and mobile phone batteries. Again, the apatite mined in the Khibiny Mountains is processed further to produce phosphate fertilisers for farming needs. In my work, I emphasise the dependence between people and nature.

Helander studies and illuminates the mutual dependency of humans and the environment in her work. She tells stories in visual forms of the different ways people and nature relate to each other, particularly illustrating the consequences of the consumption of nature in detail. The relationship between the mining industry and modern standards of living as well as the impacts of mining on the sensitive nature of the northern regions and Sámi ways of life especially are a central focus of her work. As Helander notes (Valkonen and Valkonen 2018, 70):

> I have used as one starting point for my pictures of the mines the realization of how much, for example, electronics use materials from the mines and produce mine waste at the same time. Cell phones, laptops, game consoles, all of these need 30 different kinds of metals to function, of which gold is one of the most severe polluters. For the 0,03 grams needed to make a circuit board of a cell phone, at least 100 kilograms of waste is being produced in a mine.

In addition to portraying landscapes that capture the impacts of consumer culture on the environment, Helander investigates the transspecies relations that are central to the Sámi worldview. She uses animal characters to illustrate the ambitious and fluid boundaries of the species: 'I want to highlight the corporeality of people and how humans are just one animal species among many, dependent on nature, ecosystems and land. We are part of the cyclicity of nature; a pile of particles and molecules' (Helander 2020).

Sámi hybrid artist Stina Aletta Aikio talks about their artwork Čierusbeahci (Weeping pine), which was part of the exhibition in the Sámi Museum Siida, in similar fashion: "Čierusbeahci enters into dialogue with nature's own ways of communicating, speech of plants, and human intervention, mining activities, industry and consumption. The work envisions how the impact of consumer culture could be concretized in nature" (Valkonen and Valkonen 2018, 14).

Aikio discusses how in the contemporary world it is urgent to know differently, reach and combine different knowledges, but at the same time they acknowledge that capturing the big picture is basically impossible. We are responsible for the planet, but we cannot fully know it (Valkonen and Valkonen, 2018, 65):

> We can't assume that a Sámi person who lived a hundred years ago thought about the Brazilian beef production. It feels impossible that these days you have to think about the whole existence of nature, and we can never understand the whole existence, no one can. There are species dying of extinction all the time, species we have never even heard of, and we have responsibility for things we actually know nothing about, which is frightening.

Figures 3 and 4. Anatomy of consumption (2018) and Giron (2018) by Marja Helander.

Figures 5 and 6. Hidden from the Dusk (2018) and Looking into the Nightfall (2018) by Marja Helander.

Figures 7 and 8. Weeping Pine (2018) by Stina Aletta Aikio.

In the 'Viidon Sieiddit' project, we told stories about Sámi relationships with the environment while at the same time engaging with, discussing and bringing forth the Sámi worldview and Sámi heritage (*cf.* Archibald 2008). Both during the process and afterwards, for instance after having received positive feedback from a wider audience about raising awareness and making

visible the multiple connections we all have with various environments, we became confident that conventional academic forms of producing and disseminating knowledge may not be enough to address and explore such ethically complex issues as human-environment relations and relationality in the Sámi context in an era of global environmental concern and crisis. What is also needed is theoretical and practical engagement with the environment and with Sámi traditions and perceptions. As Guttorm et al. (2019,153) have suggested: 'Indigenous knowledge is always connected to practice. Indigenous ontologies and knowledge practices are holistic and living, and documented, shared and distributed in oral histories, arts and crafts, other traditional practices, and language'. After the 'Viidon Sieiddit' project, we are committed to further following Indigenous ways of knowing as part of Sámi research practice.

Investigating the ontological politics of Sámi cultural heritage

Unconventional, alternative research perspectives, practices, methods and means of dissemination are of particular importance to research on Sámi cultural heritage. How otherwise should we approach and examine something that is at the same time historical and contemporary, written and unwritten, oral and tacit? How else should we study something that is enacted in everyday life but also in law and politics and produced and regulated by legal conventions and discourses, by silent conventions? How else can we makes sense of something that is embodied being and knowing, that is feelings, artefacts, memories, knowledge and the skills connected to artefacts and practices? To support my claim about the complexity of what we call cultural heritage, I will tell a story about a particular presentation given at a conference entitled '*Áigi lea buoremus oahpaheaddji*' (Time is the best teacher),[5] which was held at the Sámi Museum Siida in Inari, in the Sámi homeland, in August 2018 (see also Valkonen et al. forthcoming). There were many wonderful presentations at the conference discussing Indigenous museum and cultural heritage from different angles. The international laws, practices and conventions protecting Indigenous cultural heritage were thoroughly discussed by representatives of the UN and UNESCO. There were presentations about the Sámi music tradition, about the repatriation of the Sámi collections in other museums and about many other important, topical issues. Moreover, the new

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5   The conference concluded the project 'Culturally and Socially Sustainable Museum. Reframing the Policies of Representing Indigenous Sámi Culture in the Sámi Museum Siida' (2016–2018, funded by the Academy of Finland, PI Sanna Valkonen, project 305476), a collaborative project on the part of Sámi studies at the University of Lapland and the Sámi Museum Siida.

manuscript *Eatnamat leat min mánát / Enâmeh láá mii párnááh / These lands are our children*, prepared for the museum's new main exhibition by Professor of Sámi Culture Veli-Pekka Lehtola, was presented to public for the first time at the conference.

The conference venue was a museum: a place where cultural heritage is collected to be preserved, researched, exhibited and cared for. Through their choices, policies and practices, museums are in central positions to define and decide what is cultural heritage: museums practically determine what is selected to be preserved and displayed, from the vast repertory of traditions, to represent the history and culture of a people (see, e.g. Harrison 2015; Aikio 2022). Indigenous Peoples and museums have complex relations, and historical and present-day examples of the othering of Indigenous Peoples can still be present in the museum. As a matter of fact, museums are institutions that have often quite explicitly enacted the colonial and nature/culture dichotomy characteristic of the one-world paradigm in their conventional orientation of building coherent national histories or histories of humankind. The ways in which the Sámi and other Indigenous Peoples are represented in museums worldwide have often been based on this dichotomy. Indigenous Peoples have had few options to influence how they are defined and presented in museums targeted at majority populations (see, e.g. Lonetree 2012; Opdahl Mathisen 2014; Finbog 2020.) The Sámi Museum Siida is, however, an exception in the museum field because it is founded and led by the Sámi themselves (see Aikio 2022; Valkonen et al. forthcoming).

The keynote speaker of the conference, Sámi researcher and *duojár* (crafter) Sigga-Marja Magga, described in her presentation how she had sewn a *gákti*, a Sámi dress, for her son together with her sister, who also had sewn a *gákti* for her son. While sewing, Sigga-Marja Magga and her sister had at the same time discussed different aspects of the *gákti*: its details and their meanings, traditions, patterns and colours of different families, the *gákti's* previous and contemporary use, the unwritten norms and rules related to designing and wearing a *gákti*, and also the care and love shown to it (see also Valkonen et al. forthcoming). The speech was touching – many people in the audience told later how tears came to their eyes while listening the speech. Perhaps this was because it discussed something at the same time quite mundane, an everyday life item, but also something that many of us may have lost, namely transmitting a particular family heritage that bears irreplaceable values and meanings. The speech discussed care, sharing, family relations, transmitting Indigenous traditions and how to keep them alive and flourishing while describing detailed techniques, knowledge and skills in preparing and using a *gákti*.

During Sigga-Marja Magga's speech, I started to ponder the concept of cultural heritage and the reality it denotes in a new light. The conference offered interesting perspectives and understandings of cultural heritage: in principle, all the presenters were discussing more or less the same thing – Indigenous Peoples' cultural heritage – but through very different frameworks, discourses and understandings. In fact, I wondered, were they even discussing the same thing? The presenters approached their topics differently, and the realities of cultural heritage discussed in the conference seemed to differ quite strongly.

The *gákti* is a significant and visible part of *duodji* tradition (about *duodji*, see Guttorm 2015; Magga 2018a) and Sámi cultural heritage. *Gákti*-making requires practical skills but also co-creation and collaboration, active connections to inherited and learned knowledge, and an understanding of their inter-generational meanings. With a *gákti*, traditional knowledge and skills encounter the aesthetics, needs and material supplies of the contemporary Sámi (see also Valkonen et al. forthcoming). Sigga-Marja Magga's presentation encompassed many kinds of realities and knowledges including the experimental knowledge of a *duoj*ár (crafter): the skill needed to be able to make the costume. It included caring knowledge: the affection and will to make such a *gákti* that is perfect for a son, a *gákti* that has every detail correct in this cultural and societal context and for its particular intended use. It included inherited and learned knowledge about the inter-generational meanings of *gákti*. Finally, it included the knowledge of a researcher: a perception of how this whole process can be analysed and theorised (see also Magga 2022)

Preparing a *gákti* is an interesting, or perhaps even a perfect, example of Sámi knowledge. Knowledge and knowing are not separate parts of Sámi being but integral to living and acting as Sámi. Moreover, knowledge is caring (Guttorm et al. 2019; Valkonen et al. forthcoming). Sámi *duodji* researcher Gunvor Guttorm (2011, 62) makes a distinction between 'the Sámi concepts of knowing something and knowing about something'. According to Guttorm, *diehtit* expresses theoretical knowledge, that is, knowledge of an action, whereas *máhttit* relates to practical, bodily knowledge, a skill needed to carry out certain work. Guttorm gives an example of a *gietkka*, a Sámi cradle: someone may know (*diehtit*) how to make a *gietkka* without having ever made one. When a person actually prepares a *gietkka*, they gain hands-on personal experience, knowledge through action (*máhttit*) (Guttorm 2011, 62; see also Valkonen et al. forthcoming). This discussion applies to *gákti* as well: I can know in theory how to make a *gákti*; I can also know the particular colours and patterns of my kin. But if I do not have the personal experience of preparing one, not the skills, not the touch possible gained only through making one – the knowing in making – my *gákti* may not look right.
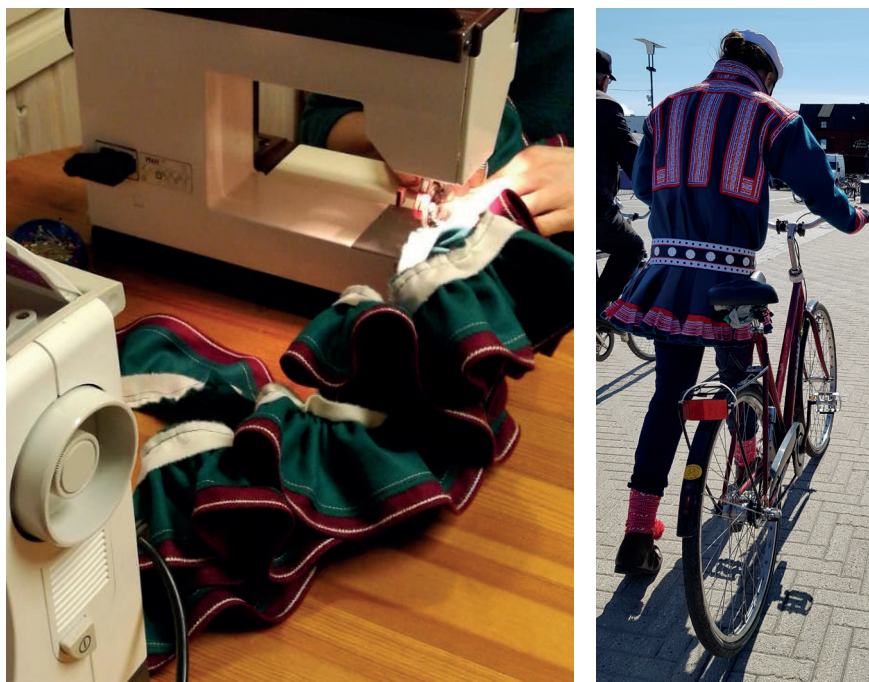
Figures 9 and 10. Pictures of sewing (2015) and *gákti* (2018) by Sigga-Marja Magga.

The conference crystallised for me how cultural heritage is about various practices and ways of being and knowing. In effect, how cultural heritage comes into being, is actualised in various practices: like with *duodji*, the Sámi handicraft tradition, or in the museum, in its conservation and curatorial practices. A Sámi handicraft tool in a glass vitrine in a museum is something quite different than a handicraft tool in the hands of a mother teaching her child how to use it, even if both practices, museum and *duodji*, are about transmitting and creating cultural heritage. On the other hand, when making a Sámi handicraft item, for instance sewing a *gákti*, it is also about conserving and curating as well as defining, interpreting and creating cultural heritage, as is the case with the museum.

I will shed light on the multiple existences and realities of cultural heritage by telling a story about *njuikun*, a heddle. A Sámi woman in old age saves in her wardrobe, inside a pillowcase, her grandmother's *njuikun*. This heddle is made of reindeer antler and dates back to the 18th century. In the family, this *njuikun* has been an important handicraft tool for preparing laces for shoes and bands needed in everyday life. The fact that the heddle is saved in a wardrobe, inside a pillowcase, indicates that it is no longer in regular use, but it is howev-

er considered a very valuable piece of bone, something that cannot be put on a bookshelf or in a *kiisa*, a craft box; instead, it is kept safe inside soft clothes.

The *njuikun* is deeply embedded within family stories, skills and handicraft tradition. Its owner, the Sámi woman, has used the *njuikun* for weaving laces for shoes and bands for *gáktis* for her family according to the models used by her family and home region, as have her mother, grandmother and great-grandmother before her. The heddle embodies cross-generational skills, relations and care as well as an awareness of family history. Recently, the owner of the heddle has started to consider whether to donate it to the Sámi museum because it is so rarely used. She however hesitates to give it away for several reasons. Perhaps the grandchildren will want to learn this special skill. Thereby, this family treasure would be used again, and this particular Sámi tradition could continue in the family. Once in the museum, the *njuikun* would become part of the museum's Sámi collection and an object of its curatorial practices and conservation methods. As part of a collection, the object would lose its practical purpose and become a cold object without human touch. When on display, the handicraft item of one family would play a role in a larger narrative of the history and culture of the Indigenous Sámi people. The *njuikun* would thus be transformed from being a personal utensil and part of one family's heritage to an object representing the Sámi people's common and public cultural heritage.

The story about *njuikun* has inspired, even informed, the scheme for the projects 'Logi' and 'Árbi' – the ontological politics of Sámi cultural heritage.[6] Making a *gákti* as a way of creating cultural heritage by combining different forms of knowledges and skills functions as an epistemic framework for the projects' research on Sámi cultural heritage. Our objective in these projects[7] has been to examine, with Sámi-based scientific and artistic manners, how Sámi cultural heritage exists in society. How is it assembled in different practices, such as in the museum, in *duodji* and in art, and again, through what kinds of practices does culture or heritage become cultural heritage? This approach is based on the idea of ontological plurality, namely that different practices create different realities, not interpretations of the same reality (Mol 1999, 2002; Blaser 2012; de la Cadena & Blaser 2018; Joks and Law 2016; Valkonen, Aikio et al. 2022). The processes of constructing realities are both open and

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6   The research group for these projects comprises a collective of Sámi researchers and artists, many of whom are at the same time traditional skill holders, *duojárs*, reindeer herders, activists and much more. The members are Áile Aikio, Saara Alakorva, Stina Aletta Aikio, Sigga-Marja Magga, Ailu Valle, Mikkâl Morottaja aka Amoc, Marja Helander, Veli-Pekka Lehtola and myself. The projects are funded by Kone Foundation and the Academy of Finland (project 324427).

7   The "Logi" project, funded by Kone Foundation, concentrates mainly on artistic work, whereas the "Árbi" project, funded by the Academy of Finland, focuses on research.

Figures 11 and 12. Heddle (2016) by Sigga-Marja Magga and a view of the Sámi Museum Siida's exhibition (2020) by Áile Aikio.

debatable, and therefore, deeply political (Mol 1999). This approach to cultural heritage emphasises its fundamental contingency – heritage is 'neither "fixed" nor "inherent", but emerges in dialogue among individuals, communities, practices, places, and things' (Harrison 2015).

The research of the 'Logi' and 'Árbi' projects builds on the idea that Sámi cultural heritage is a result of assembling different things through different practices, such as the museum, art, *duodji*, traditional livelihoods and so forth. Cultural heritage is therefore not a fixed phenomenon; rather, different practices create different realities for it, as illustrated by the story about the *njuikun*. What is more, articulating traditions in the frame of indigeneity produces new types of (political) meanings, thus possibly changing traditions as social prac-

tices (see Magga 2018b). The ontological politics of cultural heritage is, hence, also about producing futures. As Rodney Harrison (2015) has argued, the definitions, discourses, power structures and interpretations regulating cultural heritage influence the futures and realities possible for Indigenous Peoples. The values and power relations of the present determine what we choose as a representation of the past as well as what we hope to preserve for the future. (Harrison 2015; see also Valkonen et al. 2017.) In the 'Logi' and 'Árbi' projects, we look at the heterogeneous actions of the enactment and embodiment of cultural heritage, and the choices, values and possible struggles underlying them. The method we apply combines *diehtit* and *máhttit*: we discuss the contemporary challenges facing Sámi society by crafting, sewing, interpreting, rewording, analysing, writing and visualising in different forms Sámi intellectual and societal traditions, Sámi cultural heritage, in other words, by engaging in practicing, dialogue and caring. The results of the projects will be presented as several artworks, duodji items and, more conventionally, as research papers, many of which will be co-authored by the members of the research team.

Concluding remarks

CHORUS
The last who were on skis
-- adjusting, adapting
The first who started working with snowmobiles
-- siidas (village units) reflecting/ answering the fjelds
Do we really long for the past
-- adjusting, adapting
When times change, the sacred rocks widen
-- the villages adapting in the new situations

The chorus of the song 'Viidon Sieiddit' cites the famous thoughts by renowned Sámi linguist, professor and politician, Ole Heandarat, Ole Henrik Magga: the Sámi were the last who were on skis and the first who started working with snowmobiles. According to Ailu Valle,[8] this quote from Magga encapsulates the core of Sámi culture as it has often been defined: the ability to adapt and adjust to changing societal circumstances while maintaining the Sámi essence (see also Valkonen, Alakorva et al. 2022, 1). This kind of flexibility and ability to adapt and take influences from other epistemic cultures without losing one's own foundations – to make research *ilmmiid gaskkas* – is important to Sámi research as well.

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8   Instagram post by Ailu Valle, November 13, 2020.

By telling stories about the emergence of and motivation behind particular projects blending Sámi research, art and traditional skills, my aim in this review article has been to introduce and discuss alternative, Sámi-based ways to conduct research on Sámi society and its manifold relations. I have demonstrated how the categorisations and hierarchical positionings of a researcher, artist and traditional skill holder can be fluid and shifting, as are the categories of research and art and scientific and Indigenous knowledge. To engage in profound analysis and gain in-depth knowledge, it is essential to transgress academic conventions and established practices of science and to recognise and make use of various valid expertise and knowledges when doing research.

Sámi research is a multi-, cross- and transdisciplinary critical science that examines Sámi society and culture from the people's own cultural and societal standpoints. Sámi research draws from Indigenous research paradigms and methods in combination with research traditions and methodologies of particularly social sciences, humanities and legal studies – however, importantly it also builds on the Sámi epistemologies and practices of being and acting. An objective of Sámi research is to construct and strengthen Sámi self-determination and it ideally rises from the needs and concerns of Sámi society (see Junka-Aikio 2019; Länsman 2008; Valkonen and Valkonen 2016; Eriksen, Valkonen and Valkonen 2019; Valkonen, Aikio et al. 2022).

Sheryl Lightfoot (2016, 72) has defined decolonising research as privileging Indigenous voices, experiences, knowledge, reflections and analyses. Ina Knobblock (2022, 76) discusses how, 'at the core of the terms decolonisation and resurgence lies a critical examination and dismantling of colonial structures of power and a (re)imagination and (re)creation of the world grounded in Indigenous experiences and world-making practices'. Sámi research has a particular responsibility to promote and carry out decolonial practices within academia. It is crucial that Sámi researchers not just critically deconstruct and examine the prevailing power structures within academia; we must also dare to (re)create and (re)imagine the things that matter to us as Sámi. Part of this decolonial endeavour is to recognise that Sámi research cannot be considered as separate from Sámi society, but rather as an inalienable part of it. Saara Alakorva (2022, 229) argues that 'a community-based researcher has to be, to a certain extent, a servodatberošteaddji – someone who cares for the community'. To build the relations of trust with the community and gain access to it, a researcher must care about the community, its future and its well-being (Alakorva 2022). Sometimes this kind of orientation may take place furtively: there was once an interview on the radio that someone could even characterise as rather radical, at least it was critical of (established) Sámi positions. This interview resulted in a series of knowledge productions with important

Figure 13. Sacred and mysterious (2018) by Marja Helander.

and engaging outcomes. Sometimes the rules must be broken, sometimes people must dare to say out loud unpleasant things, to act as an agent of change. This is an important goal for the Sámi research as well. Linda Tuhiwai Smith concludes her work *Decolonizing Methodologies* (1999, 199) with the following words: 'As indigenous peoples we have our own research needs and priorities. Our questions are important. Research helps us to answer them.' The three projects introduced in this text have for their part attempted to prioritise Sámi perceptions, understandings and concerns and answer Sámi questions in a Sámi way.

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