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Becoming Earth : Rethinking and (Re-)Connecting with the Earth, Sámi Lands and Relations

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CHAPTER 8

Becoming Earth

Rethinking and (Re-)Connecting with the Earth, Sámi Lands, and Relations

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Looming, or Introduction

The fell Bárši looms out of the early morning fog in the picture. The fell has also given name to the small village where my father comes from. Bárši is located in Sámi land, 25 kilometers north of Karigasniemi toward Utsjoki, in Deanuleahki, Teno River valley, on the border between Finland and Norway, on the Finnish side. Deatnu, Teno River itself, is hardly visible in the picture, especially if you don't recognize the river boats. (See Figure 8.1.)

I use the picture as an introduction to this autoethnographic text on Earth, Sámi lands, and relations, as well as on learning

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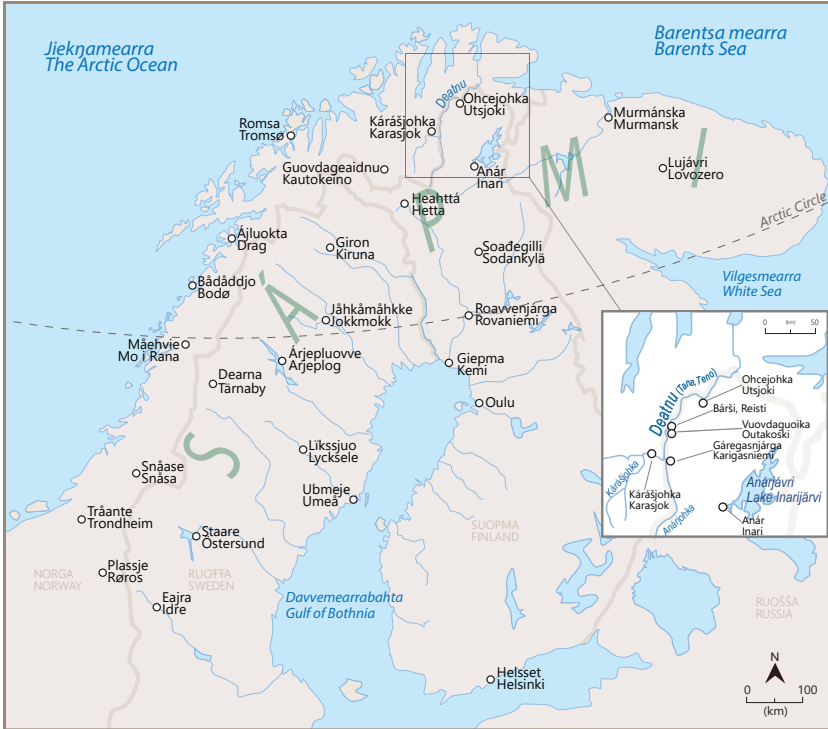
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Figure 8.1: Bárši, a fell in Vuovdaguoika/Outakoski in the Finnish side of Sámi land. Photo: Hanna Ellen Guttorm.

North Sámi concepts concerning land and “nature.” We do not always see clearly, it is like not-knowing, not-seeing, not-understanding what is happening in the world, with the Earth, in the climate, and now in this currently specific time with the novel coronavirus—with the life of viruses. We don’t always understand what is happening even with our nearest relations and societies. There are different kinds of smog, and we can lose the connection and the clear vision. We have to learn to live with uncertainty and not-knowing. In those Sámi societies where people are living connected to the environment and the weather conditions, uncertainty and humbleness are acquainted: “Will the lake give fish? Is this intended? Perhaps, or perhaps not. Will the conditions for moving a herd be favorable? Very often not. Is it safe to travel? Possibly not.”¹

This picture illustrates my path of coming to know these places, as well as concepts, which once, and for a very long time, were very well known to my father. As I have shared elsewhere,² I was born in Southern Finland, and did not learn Sámi, even though we visited my father’s home areas every summer. Still, I never spoke the language and never learnt to fish or drive or even row a boat in the heavy and fast-flowing river. I think we never even went to pick cloudberries or lingonberries—maybe we never were in the Teno River valley during that late time of the summer, or maybe we kids could not handle the swarms of mosquitos. So, the landscapes in Sápmi are still partly only looming for me, beckoning me to arrive. I’m longing to learn these places with my heart



Map 8.1: Deanuleahki, Teno river valley, in Sápmi, along the Finnish–Norwegian border. Map: Heli Rekiranta.

and soul. Happily, I am now moving on that path as I have learnt to speak Northern Sámi and have been able to spend longer times in Sápmi (see Map 8.1).³

Indigenous people are known as having close and sustainable connections with the Land/Earth in the areas they inhabit. But I did not learn of these connections in my childhood and youth. School and society more generally taught me to value progress, “democracy,” and scientific reasoning—the shiny sides of modernity as Vanessa de Oliveira Andreotti and others have described them.⁴ And my worldview, hard as it is to admit, was also based on coloniality, anthropocentrism, capitalocentrism, and Eurocentrism. Coloniality has remained a central concern for non-Western epistemologies, including Indigenous ways of knowing and living, but during the long history of modernity and enlightenment

also our bodies, feelings, and so-called femininities, in us all, have been colonized. In addition, we have colonized the land, truly taken more from the Earth than we need in order to build up what we now understand as welfare. Here, we Sámi people are participating too on multiple levels, as we are living in between different worlds, spaces, and identities, as Sámi, as Finns, as members of a European welfare state.

So, in this emergent autoethnographic (re)search and (re)writing, I'm seeking both to rethink and to (re)vitalize my/our connection with⁵ the Earth. To reconnect, in the meaning of recognizing the connection that we have always already had. Western civilization, globalization, colonization, and "a historically specific fantasy of mastery over the self, the earth, and all its creatures"⁶ have enabled the construction of this world, where the climate is changing and humans and non-humans are suffering because of pollution and growth-based thinking. We do have plenty or actually we are overwhelmed with the knowledge of climate change and global warming and of the need to cut down our carbon dioxide emissions. Common or individual changes are nevertheless not highly convincing. We know, but we don't know with our hearts, our bodies, and our bones. We have lost the true feeling or meaning of being connected. We have lost a sense of responsibility.

Instead of talking about conceptualizations of "nature," I'm using more the concepts "land" and "earth," both with small and capital initials. In multiple Indigenous languages, there is no word for nature, nor for culture. The concept of "nature" has a Cartesian genealogy, but has become self-evident in the current world, creating a distinction between human and non-human others as though human beings and their ways of life were not "nature." "The implication is that animals are natural whereas people are not. An undifferentiated mass of people lies outside nature and disturbs nature's 'essential and natural mechanism[s]' by fishing too much or by shooting mergansers."⁷

Though, based on my own experiences as well as what I've seen, I agree with Jarno Valkonen and Sanna Valkonen, who write that

the representation of the relationship of Sámi people with nature as something that would have remained unchanged for thousands of years is a mythical conceptualization and a part of performatively constructed identities.⁸ Few Sámi people still live in truly close connection with nature. More than 60 percent of the Sámi people in Finland live outside the Sámi homeland area and some 5 percent practice reindeer herding, which no doubt can be seen as preserving traditional ecological knowledge. At the same time, as, for example, Klemetti Näkkäljärvi states, reindeer herding has also changed.⁹ It has been motorized, privatized, and capitalized. Sanna Valkonen writes: “in the current society, nature has been mostly destroyed by the aids and appliances provided by modern society and technology.”¹⁰

There is though knowledge both in the language and in the relational practices. As Bagele Chilisa once said in a research seminar at Sámi allaskuvla, Sámi University of Applied Sciences in Guovdageaidnu/Kautokeino, every Indigenous person has a book within them, or at least a story to write. She also emphasized the Indigenous language and its ability to carry knowledge on that certain philosophy and worldview.¹¹ In this chapter, I follow this advice and dive into some Sámi concepts around land(s) and the entity known in English as “nature.” Through rethinking land(s), I also both recognize the longing for the land(s) and the search for ways to reconnect with them. This reconnection happens with different guides and travel companions with whom I have had the opportunity to talk and walk. After thinking with Sámi concepts, I will share different mystories, not histories or his-stories, stories by the colonizers, but my-stories, our stories, stories from the people I’ve talked with in my revitalizing journeys in Sámi land.

My-Stories and Autoethnography as an Onto-Epistemological Encounter

Mystories and autoethnography as a methodological choice are connected to my onto-epistemological¹² conviction and will to create space for research that comes from and is based on the entangled

experiences of the researcher him-/herself. Every researcher encounters in her/his life paths and movements a multiplicity of different materialities, discourses, practices, policies, assumptions, discussions, events, and both material and immaterial spaces. These modalities can make these researchers think, without a specific need to go somewhere else—of other spaces, locations, or groups of people—in order to find an interesting/tricky/not-yet-known phenomenon. That kind of research is surely needed to create understanding between different spaces, locations, and peoples. But one should also recognize that in one life, even in one mind, a pluriverse exists. De la Cadena and Blaser see pluriverse, the world of many worlds as “heterogeneous worldings coming together as a political ecology of practices, negotiating their difficult being together in heterogeneity.”¹³ I think that in already one life these different worlds meet. This onto-epistemological understanding of mine is based both on Indigenous theorizations and methodologies,¹⁴ which challenge a human-centric and supposedly rational view of the world by acknowledging the agency of other-than-human beings. This approach is also inspired by multiple post theories (post-structuralism, post-humanism, postcolonialism, feminism, new materialism, and even quantum physics), which challenge Western dichotomist thinking, such as nature-culture, human-animal, reason-emotion/affectivity, theory-lived experience. New materialist and post-humanist thinkers have been theorizing Earth-based subjectivity¹⁵ and inter- or actually intra-relatedness and the ethics of being,¹⁶ which also have been self-evident in multiple Indigenous relational ontologies¹⁷ for ages, already before humanism, even if they have not been conceptualized in that way. That is why Indigenous theorizations could actually also be called pre-humanist.

Admittedly, post theories have been the theoretical background of my thinking and research for a much longer time,¹⁸ whereas with Indigenous thinking I’ve acquainted myself more only during the last five years. Both post theories and Indigenous conceptualizations challenge the human and rationality centeredness of most Western thinking. The main difference may be that while



Figure 8.2: Teno River in Bárši. Collage and larger image: Hanna Guttorm. Smaller image: Taina Kontio.

post theories are also challenging the idea and basis of a stable identity, most Indigenous theories build on identity and in that way on some kind of strategic essentialism. There are tendencies and pressures toward Indigenous cultural purity, and in these essentializing discussions both culture and identity can be seen as rather unchanging attributes.¹⁹

All this has anyway opened up for me spaces for recognizing multiple affects in connection to making research and for challenging the norms of scientific writing, including writing that is openly unfinished, and unraveling the assumptions of “research” with, for example, Elizabeth Adams St. Pierre and Anne Reinertsen.²⁰ With my co-researchers, we have become convinced that stories can carry knowledge and create empathy and understanding in our research writing.²¹

With the picture in Figure 8.2, I want to illustrate how I see myself as naked in the river, naked in the flow of the Teno River, naked in between the encounters with the land and with human and non-human others. Naked in my humbleness, naked in my lack of experience. With all this I then think, write, and talk. And even though I normally want to enjoy the flow of the energy and drift smoothly with the current and not against it, the flow in Teno

is so strong that in order to hold my place, I have to lay against the flow in low water. Against the flow, it is also possible to see and document the things and beings which pass; things and phenomena which flow by me and past me. This is like in my research: I don't merely float and drift with the stream, but stay still and document what happens around me. I have neither a rowing boat nor a motor boat by which I could move from place to place. Nor do I have a fishing or spinning rod with which to catch a fish. Nor a hook with which to get what I would need. Instead, I travel around telling about my task and listening to stories the people I meet have to tell.

Indigenous research most often starts by positioning the researcher.²² In Sámi language, the names follow relationality to grand (grand) parents, from one or both parental sides. This is done as far as needed in order to specify the line of the family, as, for example, Guttorm is a large Sámi family, spread widely in the Finnish and Norwegian sides of Sápmi. In this way, I can be called Luhkkar Jovsset Sámmol Sámmol Hanna, which shows that my father was the great grandson of Luhkkar, one of the early catechists in the Teno River valley. The name can also be related to the location of a certain family. Thus, in the Teno River valley, I more often use the name Báršši Sámmol Hanna, which identifies me through my father as “away from”²³ the village, Báršši—where he was born, and where some relatives still live.

Most preferably, I would like to see and identify myself as an Earthling, a being or a living being on the Earth. This would mean taking the Earthlingness of us, or in this case of myself, seriously. In Earthlingness, ethnicity plays no role.

Sámi Concepts on Nature, Land, and Some Related Words

To learn one's father's mother tongue, North Sámi, as an adult has been a gift. To learn an Indigenous language, in my case Northern Sámi, has meant opening one's eyes and understanding. I have learnt another system of thinking and I am wary of assuming

cultural equivalents through translation as in that way Indigenous ways of thinking can easily get lost, as so often happens in quick and clean practices of translating.²⁵ I have wanted to slow down with the words and concepts, and I have fallen in love with this process. In the next section, I share some findings.

“Nature” and “Land”

For me, the concept *luondu*, used nowadays also in the meaning of “nature,” was easy to learn, as it is so near to the Finnish word *luonto*. However, according to Norwegian Sámi understanding, it is in fact a mistranslation.²⁶ Østmo and Law even state that “there is no word for ‘nature’ in Sámi.”²⁷ *Luondu* is an old Sámi word, which has earlier been used in the meaning of the nature or character of some people, animals, or plants. In everyday Sámi language use, it has nevertheless established its place as a word for “nature”; in Finland, it has been taken into the named meaning,²⁸ and it is used in multiple webpages and projects as well.²⁹ The concept of “nature” has become part of everyday Sámi, and an interesting question would be: How much does it change Sámi material practices? Does the word create a division between nature and culture that was not there earlier?

Whereas “nature,” *luondu*, is a complicated word in Sámi, “land” and “Earth” are not. *Eana* means the planet Earth, land, soil, and ground, as well as state. *Eana* is thus a holistic concept. It is also closely related to the word *eadni* for “mother,” as is the case in several other Indigenous languages. *Eana*, in plural *eatnamat*, is also related to *eatnu*, a current or a flow³⁰—the flow of life in our Earth, as in the mother, the creator of life. In Sámi thinking, the Earth is our mother and the Sun our father.

The Multiplicity of Sámi Concepts for Different Areas

As the Sámi have not used the word *luondu* in the sense of making a distinction between nature and culture, or a difference between realities and values,³¹ and also “environment,” *biras*, came later,

the surrounding environments and areas have been called by different, more specific names. Here, I present some Sámi words for different “tracts” or “areas,” in the plural form. *Duovdagat* are local areas. When Klemetti Näkkäljärvi investigates the memory of a certain area (*duovddamuitu*) and the skill connected to that (*duovddamáhtu*), in his case reindeer herding area, he uses the word *duovdda*, the singular form of *duovdagat*.³² *Duovdda* is thus connected to the local people and the accumulated knowledge on how to manage and read the signs in the forest or fell as well as signs of animals. I can’t resist pondering the connection between the verb *dovdat*, to know, and these locally known areas, even though there is that one “u” dropped from the current verb. This “knowing” is more than about knowledge—Jelena Porsanger uses this example: “*Mun diedán, gii son lea, muhto in dovda su*. I know who he or she is, but I don’t know him [i.e. personally].”³³ I think *duovdagat* is connected to this kind of relatedness, whereas another word *guovllut* is a wider and more often used concept for areas, lands, or landscapes. It is also used when the beauty of a certain area is praised: “*Čáppa guovlu*,” beautiful surroundings. The verb *guovlat* also means to peep or peek.

Some Sámi concepts of the areas are related to the length of stay and connected to verbs or movement. The word *orohagat* comes from the verb *orrut*, to inhabit, live, or stay, and is connected to spaces where one, or a reindeer herd, stays more or less permanently. Also, the summer or winter herding areas are called *orohagat* and could thus be translated as habitats. *Johtolagat*, then, are areas where the herd or people go or migrate through, and that word comes from the verb *johtit*, to travel or to leave. One more word for a certain kind of “area” is *geainnodagat*, which is connected to the word *geaidnu*, “a road” or “a route.” *Geainnodagat* are then areas to move along or move through.

There are also two different words for “a place”: *báiki* can mean any place, a beautiful place, a place to meet or fish or hunt or stay, and so on. *Báiki* becomes *sádji* when one finds a good *báiki* to stay longer, to make it temporarily one’s own *sádji* for a longer or shorter time, especially during reindeer herding. Mikkel Nils Sara

explains what makes a place *sádji*: it is a place where one can lay down, have a reindeer fence, set up *goahhti*, a hut, and have a fire, and the border of the *sádji* can be crossed.³⁴

Meahcci and Ruoktu

There are hundreds of different words in the Sámi languages for different fells, rivers, and other waters, as well as, for example, for snow and salmon. In this chapter, I see it as relevant to mention *meahcci*, which has often been translated as an uninhabited area or wilderness. This, however, is a mistranslation, and to my surprise it still exists in Giellatekno dictionaries. In Finnish, the word is easily connotated with “metsä,” “forest,” and this is how I also understood the meaning at the beginning of my Sámi language learning. Solveig Joks, Liv Østmo, and John Law have recently published a thorough and outstanding exploration of the colonial mistranslating of the word *meahcci*, or in plural *meahcit*,³⁵ which they verbalize, meaning to act in a set of lived and worked taskscapes, activity spaces, or places-times-tasks. They investigate the highly variable *meahcci* practices and *meahcci* as “a creative collection of practical places and relations.”³⁶ Different productive activities are practices at different times and in different places and areas, and they are connected to potentially productive relations and encounters with lively and powerful beings.³⁷ *Meahcit* can thus be all kinds of different fells, forests, and bogs, in some areas also lakes and rivers where people go in order to hunt, gather, move, or fish. Regarding the task to do, *meahcit* then become *muorjemeahcci* (places to go and gather berries), in some areas even *guollemeahcci* (places to go fishing). Thus, *meahcci* is like a border crossing concept between land and water. Most often, there is a reason to go to *meahcci*. Some Sámi people say that Sámi do not go to *meahcci* without a specific practical reason, but I think this is changing in the Sámi communities. The recreational aspect of *meahcci* is becoming increasingly important as people are working in different indoor occupations.

As a pair for *meahcci*, I want to tackle the word *ruoktu*, which is mainly translated as “home.” It certainly does mean “home,” but for Sámi it still carries the memory of movement in it. Many Sámi people, especially those living among the reindeer herds, have moved to permanent houses only in the 1960s. Before that, they lived in huts (*goahti*) and moved with the herd to winter and summer *orohagat*, where they created *sádji* for the *goahti* and a fireplace, as well as a reindeer fence. The *sádji* hence became a temporary home, *ruoktu*. The word *ruoktut*, then, means both coming back to some *sádji* and coming or going home. *Ruovttoluotta*, which comes from the words *ruoktu*³⁸ and *luodda*³⁹ (path or track), also means coming back (home), or, actually, following the tracks or path of/to/toward home, when translating directly. This makes me think that *ruoktut* and *ruovttuluotta* are old words for arriving back from the *meahcci*, arriving back from the practical tasks, arriving back to *orrunsádji*, *sádji* to stay, rest, and cook between the tasks in *meahcci*. This moving site, *ruoktu*, is also being located in the *meahcci* itself. The feeling of movement and creating home wherever one migrates is still present in Nils-Aslak Valkeapää’s poem *Ruoktu lea mu váimmus ja dat vuolga mu mielde* (My home is in my heart and it migrates with me).

Other (Still) Living Concepts

One further word, *ealli*, which means both “animal” and “living or alive,” is worth discussing. *Eallit* (the plural form) are those who live, also a person can be *ealli*, living, and the environment also lives, *ealli biras*. Thus, animals, environments, and human beings are relationally dependent, and there is reciprocity and respect between them all. The relation with land is based on humility, *vuollegašvuohhta*, which is visible in multiple practices. There are some ideas which many Sámi people still share, namely, asking for permission to stay or to create *sádji* for a hut and through that honoring the subterranean. The gifts of nature, *luonddoáttaldagat*, should only be harvested to the extent that

they are needed.⁴⁰ So, for example, if you still have berries from last year in the early autumn when it is time to gather new berries, you have taken too much. My former student, Aura Pieski,⁴¹ found Anishinaabe researcher, Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, and with her I also got inspired to harvest not only to the extent that I need but to the extent that I get and to be grateful for that.

Humility is also visible in words connected with hunting and fishing: the word *bivdit*, for example, means both to plead, ask, or request, and to hunt, fish, or snare.⁴² When you ultimately get something, you are blessed, *sivdniduvvon*, and you are expected to be grateful for the gift.⁴³ Ethical and respectful relationality and reciprocity is put into practice in using everything from the animal you receive, and leaving the places in *meahcci* as they were.⁴⁴ It also means recognizing and respecting the fact that every animal, *ealli*, has a soul or spirit, as well as emotions, values, goals, and conscious ways of acting, communicating, and caring. Lands are perceived as living entities and are active in relation to humans and animals.⁴⁵ In reindeer herding, this respect nowadays meets with difficulties, as acts and regulations have made it impossible to follow the multiple ancient habits of respecting nature and non-human beings, such as not counting the reindeers or ptarmigans as a sign of respect for them.⁴⁶

The way in which Western (Norwegian, Finnish, English) concepts infiltrate Sámi communities and their materialities needs to be looked at thoroughly, even though it may not be stopped. In addition to Solveig Joks, Liv Østmo, and John Law, among others Mikkel Nils Sara and Jelena Porsanger have also commendably done that.⁴⁷ Sara shows how the concept (and practices) of reindeer herding have changed from *siiddastallan*, having a *siida*, to *boazodoallu*, reindeer herding, because of Norwegian reindeer herding acts and their influence on practices. *Siiddastallan* was earlier a holistic concept and practice for having or living in a *siida*, which aimed at the well-being of the whole *siida*. The idea of collective responsibility, social and ecological sustainabil-

ity, and sustainable relations between people, animals, and the environment changed after and through the governmental regulations and privatization.⁴⁸

Mystories of Longing for Lands and Relations

In this section, I'll share some mystories based on the stories, thoughts, and experiences of a couple of Sámi elders with whom I have been able to walk and talk or sit and talk, as well as my own stories. These stories are full of longing for times gone by, but also for times and possibilities which are now different.

I

Piera, *mu eahkki*, the older-brother-of-my-father,
my 88-year-old uncle,
has been by my side, sharing stories and hospitality.

Piera took me to the cloudberry bog, *luopmanjeaggi*,
It may have been the very last time he went picking cloudberrries,
It was already hard for him with his aching knees,
But he wanted to go and wanted to take me with him.

He told stories about his younger brother
filling the buckets quickly.
We took time to rest and time to move and pick.

Not every cloudberry is ripe enough to pick,
There is often one ready to pick and many which aren't yet,
In this way there's enough for everybody
Today, yesterday, tomorrow,
maybe still next week for someone to pick them,
I'm only taking what I get.

While stepping from tussock to tussock joking
"Is your bucket already full?"
"Oh, yes, it's running over already."
"Yes, I see, I also left a big portion for the bear over there."

...

Some of my cousins, living next to those areas,
have not gone to cloudberry bogs in more than 20 years.

II

Petteri, an old Sámi reindeer herder,
told and memorized softly and longingly
About the old reindeer herding times in the 50s,
Promised me that I can tell his stories as “heard from around,”
but not with his name.
I named him after my brother Petteri,
as he is my brother-in-community.

I heard how Petteri and others were skiing after the reindeer,
How there were no fences, but only skis.
Reindeer must be herded all the time,
so that they don't stray into other reindeer herding areas.

How the fells were full of lichen,
“Unfortunately we didn't have instruments to document it.”
The whiteness of the fells, how white they really were,
The height of the lichen, how high they really grew,
“Unfortunately we didn't have any instruments to document it.”

And how reindeer were eating lichen,
And how demanding and discriminating
the reindeers were with the lichen,

Also in the winter they dug through the snow,
everyone for themselves.
Even though there would have been lichen
dug by someone else on the snow,
it did not meet the requirements of eatable lichen
for any reindeer.
And nowadays, the reindeer eat every black small—and dry—
piece on the surface of the snow.

And if you needed to feed a reindeer,
you were not allowed to touch the lichen

with your hand—no no, it didn't work at all,
 the reindeer would only turn their noses up,
 You had to wear gloves, or not to touch at all.

And the meat!—In the old days,
 reindeer had fat and the meat was delicious and mellow,
 Now the only organic meat is the calf in its first autumn.

But, still, "I don't want to criticize the current practices,
 there are challenges enough."

III

One old fisherman, he'd been following the river all his life,
 Going every morning down to the river
 To see the river, to see the salmon,
 to see the possibilities for fishing, asking, tricking today,
 To observe the young salmon, baby salmon,
 swimming and playing on the shoal.

"For many years I have not even seen any fingerlings,
 Pushing the boat out as a child, I remember
 the water around the boat being black with fingerlings.

The predators and saboteurs are many,
 seals, mergansers, sea trout,
 They can all have their insides
 full of fingerlings and young salmon,
 In Finland it's forbidden to kill a seal,
 Even though it's actually lost from its natural habitat,
 lost and as if caged in the river,
 Emptying the waters of salmon,
 and if not eating them all, frightening them,
 Then we have to call the people at the Norwegian side
 so they can kill it.

Humans are not destroying the salmon, but the autumn flood is—
 Salmon are spawning on the shoal and if the water is high then,
 The flood freezes up and the spawn is in the ice too and dies.

And, the tourists destroy,
 they fish just there where salmon are spawning,
 at the heads of the rapids,
 The salmon don't spawn at all then,
 The fact is that the salmon look for a place to spawn
 already during swimming upstream,
 Then they return downstream even 20 kilometers,
 And when they see the fishing lines and paddle boots,
 they don't stay there at all,

Also, the fish study destroys,
 In the old days when there was no research done there were fish.”

IV

*Dat eai leat munnje
 duovdagat,
 muhto áhččan ruoktoguovllut
 Ráhkistan dáid
 Váillehan dáid dovdat
 Diehtit ii leat doarvái*

They're not *duovdagat* to me,
 But the home *guovllut* of my
 father,
 I love them,
 I long for them to *dovdat*, know
 (through personal and inherited
 experience)
 To know, *diehtit*, is not enough.

*Mo sáhttet dáid guođđit
 Dáid duottariid, dáid oidnosiid,
 dáid váriid ja bálgaid
 Dáid oidnosiid etnui
 Ja manin in nuorra
 rávesolmmožin ollen deike
 In máltán guođđit ustibiiddán
 ja ealliman
 In lean šáddan dovdat
 gullevašvuoda
 dáid eatnamiidda,
 in goit dán gillii
 Ja guolastit, bivdit,
 dan in oahppan ollege*

How could you leave them?
 These fells, these landscapes,
 These hills and paths,
 These sceneries by the river?
 And why didn't I take time
 to come here as a young adult?
 I couldn't help staying
 with my friends and life,
 I hadn't come to experience
 belonging
 to these lands,
 not to this language either,
 And fishing, hunting,
 those I didn't learn at all.

V

Giitu, Irja
Don leat mu ofelaš, mu elder
Maid duinna lean beassan
duoddarii,
Joknameahccái,
Sieidibáikái
Suttésádjagii
Ja oahppasmuvvat
min olbmuiquin

Thank you, Irja,
 You are my guide, my elder,
 With you I have got back to the
 fells and hills,
 To lingonberry *meahcit*,
 To *siedi* places,
 To Sulaoja spring,
 And to learn to know our people.

Becoming Earth: Reconnecting (/) Belonging to the Earth

What to think about and with all of this? Where to go, where to take you, my reader? Yes, there are complicated and huge phenomena, which make me think. Or grasp at thinking. There are multiple changes going on in Sámi societies, in fact in the whole world. During this previously unimaginable phase of global lockdown on account of the coronavirus, it is easy to think of capitalism, globalization, and Western civilization as a set of entangled viruses that have also spread throughout the world.

Sámi poet Nils-Aslak Valkeapää was worried in his last poetry anthology (*Eanni, Eannazan*) about the self-sufficient and superior human, which concerns especially Western civilization and capitalism, but whose fruits Indigenous people are also enjoying, even though these fruits are depleting the environment. “If they [Indigenous people] don’t stop, remember their history, their myths, and beliefs and turn towards a more ecological direction, they too are on the way to destruction.”⁴⁹ One example of this carefree enjoying is one “silver performance” and the reaction it got at the Sámi art festival Márkomeannu a couple of years ago: artist sisters Sara Marielle Gaup Beaska and Risten Anine Gaup wanted to pay attention to the current Sámi way of life and

overconsumption and had dressed themselves from top to toe in silver, in *riskkut*,⁵⁰ and other silver jewelry. They hoped to evoke horrified reactions, but to their great disappointment, very many came to them with very positive and praising comments.⁵¹

In addition to colonization, assimilation, legalization, capitalization, motorization, and privatization, global warming is also transforming the conditions of life in the Arctic quicker and more significantly than in other areas. The worry related to climate change and its implications for Indigenous societies is often directed toward the possibilities of maintaining the socio-cultural life and the traditional livelihoods of the specific community. Losing cultural identity is often represented as a serious consequence.⁵² It is nevertheless interesting to ask: How does the meaning of traditional ecological knowledge change if or when it turns from a nomadic necessity, ecological responsibility, and reciprocal respect to strengthening cultural identity?

Tere Vadén writes that where climate change and the change needed in our ways of life are concerned, we are not missing facts or indicators, but the knowledge and structure of knowledge that would holistically affect our ways of living.⁵³ Western ways of life do not include that kind of knowledge that would maintain ecological sustainability. We have lost or forgotten the foundations of our own life: we don't recognize the world as it is. In addition, we are destroying our own material and spiritual foundations. Vadén calls the material and spiritual conditions of relational life—like what is life, why are we living at all—the knowledge of origins. These conditions are resilient as “many changes are possible, but not all the changes, simultaneously as one single change can make some other changes necessary.”⁵⁴ That is, the conditions both change and remain, repeating rhythmically, renewing the life as holistic and over-generational knowledge. This kind of knowledge of origins often remains in Indigenous societies. I think this may be still alive in some Sámi communities, but not in all the Sápmi. Somewhere and sometime, I have heard those stories of humility and reciprocal respect, but on the Finnish side of Sápmi not everything that I have seen or heard happening in and outside of my

cherished Sámi society makes me feel comfortable. The spiritual practices in Sápmi also vary a great deal.⁵⁵

Nevertheless, I have been very inspired by Shawn Wilson's thought that he shared in the International Congress of Qualitative Inquiry 2016 in Champaign–Urbana. He said he sees neoliberalism as an over-generational trauma of losing the connection to and with the land. We have built up a system of welfare and progress in which we have got lost. We have forgotten our connectedness, our relationality, our belonging to and with the Earth. We have forgotten our dependence on the Earth. Who is this “we,” the reader might ask. I think John Mohawk, a late Seneca Indian thinker, partly answers this when he speaks about re-indigenization:

I think that when we talk about re-indigenization we need a much larger, bigger umbrella to understand it. It's not necessarily about the Indigenous people of a specific place; *it's about re-indigenizing the peoples of the planet to the planet*. It's about us looking at the whole thing in the broadest of possible ways.⁵⁶

The 500 years of colonization, the exploitation of life on earth, and the extinction of peoples, animals, and plants is not a feature of modern life in some parts of the world, though in many places (neo)colonization is still continuing. Re-indigenization would then mean bringing back the biodiversity of both human and non-human cultures. As Cajete, Mohawk, and Rivera point out, “re-indigenization means that we're looking at a vision of the world in a postconquest, postmodernist, post-progressive era. Once we see that, we can come to ways to make that real.”⁵⁷

Isabelle Stengers takes this even further:

With the privatized commons, what was destroyed was practical know-how, along with collective ways of acting, thinking, feeling and living. The democratic individual, the one who says, “It's my right ...” is the one who takes great pride in an “autonomy” which, in fact, hands back to the State the responsibility for

“thinking through” the consequences. A strange liberty is not to have to think further than one’s own immediate interests.⁵⁸

So, she continues, resistance can only exist alongside

“reclaiming”—recuperating, healing, becoming capable once again of linking with what we have been separated from. This recuperation process always begins with the jolting realization that we are well and truly sick, and have been for a long time, so long that we no longer recognize what we are lacking, and think of our sickness, and whatever sustains it, as “normal.”⁵⁹

There is valuable environmental knowledge embedded in Indigenous languages and practices, but I think it is still partly hidden. We are about to lose it if we don’t recognize that we Sámi people also need to take responsibility and—difficult but necessary to state—not only ask for rights and resources. We are all in this together. Isabelle Stengers continues:

Slowing down means becoming capable of learning again, becoming acquainted with things again, reweaving the bounds of interdependency. It means thinking and imagining, and in the process creating relationships with others that are not those of capture. It means, therefore, creating among us and with others the kind of relation that works for sick people, people who need each other in order to learn—with others, from others, thanks to others—what a life worth living demands, and the knowledges that are worth being cultivated.⁶⁰

So, how to turn back to ecological responsibility and reciprocal respect? In my autoethnographic research, I have seen that it takes time to get to know the land, to get to know it personally, in one’s bones and heart. Like Aslak Paltto said recently, it’s a totally different world to live in the *meahcci*, and it is a privilege to have learned that as a child.⁶¹ To recreate oneself in the forest or to be astonished by the sceneries is something else, perhaps to be worried about the knowledge of the climate change as well. But to

know the land, to know the Earth, to become Earth, to become an Earthling, to know that, that takes time.

Becoming an Earthling

An Earth,
 The Earth,
 this is our planet,
 this planet with water and ground, land in different structures,
 colors, shapes,
 this land constructed and changed by us humans,
 this land covered with different materials,
 this land covered,
 covered with and under these buildings, these roads, these corridors, those all,
 Still staying,
 still always there standing, no,
 moving, circling in the Milky Way,
 this Earth, this third planet from the Sun.

It's not Europe, America, Africa, Asia,
 it's not South and North, South and Arctic,
 and it is,
 we name it so,
 we name this covering of the Earth with our socio-culturally constructed names,
 which are so true, which become so true,
 which divide lands, divide us and those from each other with the naming,
 They became so true that we almost think,
 so true that we almost forget
 that it (THIS) is a One,
 one Earth,
 our Earth,
 our moving star,
 our breathing star,
 with which we breath,
 with which we move and become.

“We say that the Sun arises”⁶²
 But no,

we rotate, and we move around the Sun
 all the time,
 This is not divided
 in itself.

Slowing down the way we think,
 Slowing down the answers that we have,
 Slowing down the need to know,
 Searching for words,
 Searching for sustainable words.

We still have this beautiful land,
 we still have these clean rivers and lakes,
 these green forests,
 especially here in Sámi and Suomi land,
 We are all responsible in saving those.

What if we were Earth-centered with our human
 and more-than-human others,
 what if we cared for the Earth
 and breathed through and with the Earth,
 and loved the Earth and our more-than-human-others,
 as well as our more-than-human(ist)-human-others
 more than we do.⁶³

Notes

- ¹ Østmo and Law, “Mis/translation,” 354.
- ² Guttorm, “Flying Beyond,” 47–52.
- ³ The Sámi people are the only recognized Indigenous people of Europe, inhabiting the specific areas of Northern Finland, Sweden, Norway, and Russia, called *Sápmi* in Northern Sámi. Sámi people do not face extreme poverty or high levels of violence, like many Indigenous peoples in the world, but have experienced different kinds of colonization and discrimination. The number of Sámi varies in different countries and according to different references. Sámi are said to be most numerous in Norway (around 50,000) and the least in Finland (some 10,000). In Sweden, there are some 20,000. Nine Sámi languages are still spoken today. When I talk about the area called Sápmi, I use the Sámi name. When I wish to refer to the lands and landscapes there, I use the concept Sámi lands.

- ⁴ Andreotti et al., “Mapping Interpretations,” 23–24.
- ⁵ I use the preposition “with” in order to emphasize the reciprocity and interconnectedness of the relation.
- ⁶ Frost, *Biocultural Creatures*, 1.
- ⁷ Joks and Law, “Sámi Salmon, State Salmon,” 163.
- ⁸ Valkonen and Valkonen, “Contesting the Nature Relations,” 27–36.
- ⁹ Näkkäläjärvi, *Jauristunturin poropaimentolaisuus*.
- ¹⁰ Valkonen, *Poliittinen saamelaisuus*, 19.
- ¹¹ Chilisa, “Indigenous Research Methodologies.” See also Chilisa, *Indigenous Research Methodologies*.
- ¹² “Onto-epistemological” is a much-used concept especially in new materialism as highlighting that the theories and understandings of being (ontology) are connected to the understanding and theories of knowing (epistemology). Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfways*, actually adds also ethics into the concept, and uses the term “onto-ethico-epistemological,” which is worthwhile in Indigenous studies as well.
- ¹³ De la Cadena and Blaser, *World of Many Worlds*, 4.
- ¹⁴ See, e.g., Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass*; Kuokkanen, *Boaris dego eana*; Wilson, *Research Is Ceremony*.
- ¹⁵ Braidotti, *Posthuman*; Braidotti, *Nomadic Theory*.
- ¹⁶ Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfways*.
- ¹⁷ See Helander-Renvall, “Animism,” 44–56; Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass*; Kuokkanen, *Restructuring Relations*.
- ¹⁸ See Guttorm, “Assemblages and Swing-Arounds,” 353–64.
- ¹⁹ Harris, Carlson, and Poata-Smith, “Indigenous Identities,” 1–9; Sarivaara, “Emergent Sámi Identities,” 357–404.
- ²⁰ Reinertsen, “Minor Research,” 623–27; St. Pierre, “Posts Continue,” 646–57.
- ²¹ Guttorm et al., “Decolonized Research-Storying,” 115–45; Guttorm, Kantonen, and Kramvig, “Pluriversal Stories,” 149–72.
- ²² See, e.g., Wilson, *Research Is Ceremony*.
- ²³ When a Sámi meets another Sámi whom s/he does not know previously, they ask each other “*Gos don leat eret?*” which can be directly translated as “Where are you *away* from?” Where are you being missed, where have you left from?
- ²⁴ Porsanger, *Bassejoga čáhci*, 53–54.
- ²⁵ Guttorm, “Healaidan,” 57–75.
- ²⁶ Østmo and Law, “Mis/translation,” 354.
- ²⁷ *Ibid.*

- ²⁸ Näkkäljärvi, *Jauristunturin poropaimentolaisuus*.
- ²⁹ See, e.g., “Čáhci, luondu ja olbmot”; “Valkonen and Valkonen, *Viidon Siedit*.”
- ³⁰ *Deatnu*, then, means in Sámi a big and heavy flow. In the Finnish or English name *Teno*, that meaning is no longer present.
- ³¹ See, e.g., Østmo and Law, “Mis/translation,” 354.
- ³² Näkkäljärvi, “Duovddamuitu sámi boazodoalus,” 43–45.
- ³³ Porsanger, *Bassejoga čáhci*, 36.
- ³⁴ “Luonddunamahusat boazodoalus,” a lecture by Mikkel Nils Sara on nature terms in reindeer herding.
- ³⁵ The plural for *meahcci* is not often used in Sámi, whereas *meahcci* is everywhere. The authors (see next footnote), however, tend to use the plural form *meahcit* in English-language contexts to refer to different locations where people carry out different actions.
- ³⁶ Joks, Østmo and Law, “Verbing *Meahcci*,” 307.
- ³⁷ *Ibid.*, 307–08.
- ³⁸ The accusative and genitive form of *ruoktu* is *ruovttu*, and in Sámi compound words the last vowel of the first word in many cases changes, i.e. “u” changes to “o.”
- ³⁹ *Luotta*, again, is a genitive-accusative form of *luodda*.
- ⁴⁰ Here is one example where the word *luondu*, nature, is used widely.
- ⁴¹ Pieski, “Gulahallat eatnamiin ja čáziin.”
- ⁴² See also, e.g., Joks, Østmo and Law, “Verbing *Meahcci*,” 308.
- ⁴³ See also Joks, “*Laksen trenger ro*”; Sjöberg, “Att leva i ständig väl-signelse.”
- ⁴⁴ Gaup, “Gullelašvuhta goahteeallima bokte.”
- ⁴⁵ Helander-Renvall, *Sámi Society Matters*.
- ⁴⁶ Buljo, “Vuoinnalašvuhta sámi biebmovieruin.”
- ⁴⁷ Sara, *Siida ja Siiddastallan*; Porsanger, *Bassejoga čáhci*.
- ⁴⁸ Sara, *Siida ja siiddastallan*.
- ⁴⁹ Sallamaa, “Maa—kaiken áiti,” 182.
- ⁵⁰ *Risku* is a certain kind of silver jewelry Sámi women use, e.g., for fastening their scarfs.
- ⁵¹ Näkkäljärvi, “Badjelmearastallamin.”
- ⁵² IPCC, *Climate Change and Land*.
- ⁵³ Vadén, “Alkuperäiskansaistuminen ja syntytieto,” 18–19.
- ⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 24.
- ⁵⁵ Porsanger, *Bassejoga čáhci*.
- ⁵⁶ Cajete, Mohawk, and Rivera, “Re-Indigenization Defined,” 259, cur-
sive in the original.

- ⁵⁷ Ibid., 255.
- ⁵⁸ Stengers, *Another Science is Possible*, 69–70.
- ⁵⁹ Ibid., 70.
- ⁶⁰ Ibid.
- ⁶¹ “Skogen kallar: Aslak Paltto & Magne Ove Varsi.”
- ⁶² With: Deleuze, *Negotiations 1970–1992*.
- ⁶³ Published partly also in Guttorm, “Coming Slowly to Writing with the Earth, as an Earthling.”

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