

LÁHI and ATTÁLDAT: *the* PHILOSOPHY of *the* GIFT and SAMI EDUCATION

RAUNA KUOKKANEN

Institute on Globalization and the Human Condition,
McMaster University, 1280 Main Street West, Hamilton,
Ontario, L8S 4M4, Canada

■ Abstract

This article explores the Sami philosophy of the gift as a basis for a transformative pedagogical framework. Grounded on the Sami land-based worldview, this philosophy calls for the recognition and reciprocation of gifts, whether gifts of the land, interpersonal gifts or giftedness of an individual. In particular, the article considers two Sami concepts, that of *lábi* and *attáldat* and explains how they can serve as a framework for a Sami pedagogy that takes into account the central role of the Sami worldview in contemporary education while simultaneously critically analysing the colonial structures that continue to impact Sami society and education.

■ Introduction

The process of “Indigenisation” of the academy and research is a multilayered enterprise comprising of practices of “researching back”, claiming, remembering, rewriting as well as celebrating survival (see Smith, 1999). It is a joint endeavour of Indigenous scholars and others transforming academic spaces, challenging White privilege, power relations and collective amnesia (e.g., Barnhardt, 1991; Battiste, 1996, 2000, 2001; Battiste et al., 2002a; Battiste & Henderson, 2000; Binda & Calliou, 2001; Borrows, 2002; Castellano et al., 2000; Champagne & Stauss, 2002; Cook-Lynn, 2001; Dei et al., 2000; V. Deloria, 1999a; Findlay, 2000; Fixico, 2003; Grande, 2004; Graveline, 1998; Green, 2002a, 2002b; Guerrero, 1996; Hampton, 2000; Irwin, 1988; Kasten, 1998; Kelley, 1992; Kirkness & Barnhardt, 1991; Laenui, 2000; LaRocque, 2001; McConaghy, 2000; Medicine, 2001; Mgbeoji, 2005; Mihesuah, 1998, 2003; Mihesuah & Wilson, 2004; Moreiras, 2004; Oakes et al., 2001; Oakes et al., 2003; Smith, 1992; Suzack, 2004; Van Gerwen-Toyne, 2001; Waters, 2004). It is also about calling for the responsibilities of the academy toward the “other” (Kuokkanen, 2004). In terms of education, indigenising is defined “as a leading out, a fanning out, a spreading out” (Findlay in Battiste et al., 2002, p. 179). In other words, rather than being about exclusivity and containment, it seeks inclusion and validation of the concerns and knowledge of various, especially previously marginalised, communities.

Indigenising the academy and education is also about redefining Eurocentric concepts such as research, science and, most recently, humanities. According to Isobel Findlay (2003, Conclusion section, para. 3), “Indigenous humanities” is “a strategic labelling [which] is deliberately and unapologetically hybrid, collaborative, and interdisciplinary”. It aspires “to dismantle the master’s house by reinterpreting and exposing the foundational violences of the traditional humanities and their complicity in acts of delegitimation and dispossession”. Indigenising the academy is similar to Derrida’s idea of “new humanities” that calls for “opening up” the academy to the “forces from without”. The notion of “new humanities” dates back at least to the late 1980s, when there emerged a common fear of losing humanities to economic rationalism characterised by reforms in higher education. Ruthven notes how, despite these fears, humanities is “alive and well” with newly established research centers and an expanding field of interdisciplinary research

that includes cultural, multicultural, cultural policy, feminist and gender, postcolonial and subaltern and legal studies. For some reason, Indigenous studies does not feature in Ruthven's list of fields included in the "new humanities" (Ruthven, 1992). For Derrida, there is a need to enlarge and re-elaborate the concept of the humanities. One of the first tasks of the new humanities "would be, *ad infinitum*, to know and to think their own history, at least in the directions that can be seen to open up" (Derrida, 2001, p. 240). Further, Derrida has suggested that in its profession of truth, the university "should remain an ultimate place of critical resistance – and more than critical – to all the powers of dogmatic and unjust appropriation" (Derrida, 2001, p. 235).

As a historical concept, humanism is rooted in Eurocentric and patriarchal (but universalising) notions of the humanity and the human being and therefore is highly exclusionary. Not only has it relegated any other than human realms insignificant, it has also excluded the vast majority of the globe's people from its definitions of human being. Humanism, therefore, is deeply implicated in the colonial project, especially in those involved in acts of epistemic violence and appropriation. Abdul R. JanMohammed and David Lloyd (1990, p.2) contend:

Western humanism still considers us barbarians beyond the pale of civilisation; we are forever consigned to play the role of the ontological, political, economic, and cultural Other according to the schema of a Manichean allegory that seems the central trope not only of colonialist discourse but also of Western humanism.

Thus, discussing or considering Indigenous (or any other) humanities, we need to remain vigilant not to reproduce its exclusions (for critiques of humanism by Indigenous scholars, see Allen 1986, p. 67; Smith, 1999, p. 26). Even if we focus on the more neutral understanding of humanities as the study of the liberal arts, it remains selective and repressive if it is not centered on various relations of domination and privilege (JanMohammed & Lloyd, 1990, p. 13).

From an Indigenous peoples' perspective, however, the perhaps most problematic aspect of humanism and thus humanities is that it actively seeks to eliminate the non-human reality and its significance by various binary oppositions established on the assumed superiority of reason (embodied by a White elite male). Not only does this go entirely against Indigenous ontologies and epistemes but these hierarchical dualisms have played a central role in the colonising project of Indigenous peoples (and other subjugated peoples and groups, including women). The question for today's Indigenous scholars is, then, whether we think the notion of humanities has the potential to be opened up and redefined in a way that will not only

ensure the validation of Indigenous ontologies *en toto* but also counter the Eurocentric legacies of exclusion, hierarchical dualisms as well as elitism. For some, humanities may remain an elitist concept with too much baggage – something we can easily do without. For others, it offers new means of decolonising and indigenising the academy, research and education.

In this article, I explore the Sami philosophy of the gift as a basis for a transformative pedagogical framework. This framework emphasises the need to recognise both the gifts of the land (non-human environment) and of the student. Even if the two Sami concepts discussed in this paper, particularly that of *lábi*, are rooted in the Sami worldview which, especially in the older ethnographic literature has been referred to as "religion", this consideration is not to suggest a spiritual or "religious" framework to be introduced to contemporary Sami education. As many Indigenous scholars have pointed out, spirituality deriving from living in a close relationship with the land and manifested in various cultural, social and spiritual practices, differs in many ways from the institutionalised, so-called "world" religions such as Christianity or Islam. When discussing Indigenous peoples' "religions" we are, in fact, talking about their ontologies, cosmologies and philosophies (e.g., Ash Poitras, 1991; B. Deloria *et al.*, 1999; V. Deloria, 1989, 1999a, 1999b; Griffiths & Cervantes, 1999; Irwin, 2000; Kawagley, 1995). This is articulated by Marie Battiste and Sákéj Henderson as follows:

From the beginning, the forces of the ecologies in which we live have taught Indigenous peoples a proper kinship order and have taught us how to have nourishing relationships with our ecosystems. The ecologies in which we live are more to us than settings or places; they are more than homelands or promised homelands. These ecologies do not surround Indigenous peoples; we are an integral part of them and we inherently belong to them. The ecologies are alive with the enduring processes of creation itself. As Indigenous peoples, we invest the ecologies with deep respect, and from them we unfold our structure of Indigenous life and thought (Battiste & Henderson, 2000, p. 9).

The Sami are the Indigenous people of Sápmi (Samiland), an area that spans from central Norway and Sweden through northern Finland to the Kola Peninsula of Russia. Previously called the Lapps or Laplanders by outsiders, the Sami have claimed their right for their own collective term deriving from their own languages (*sápmelaš* in Northern Sami). Moreover, the terms "Lapp" or "Laplander" are considered negative and derogative. A rough estimate of the Sami population is between 75,000 to 100,000, the majority of whom are in Norway. In Finland, the Sami population is

approximately 7,000. During the early Middle Ages, the surrounding kingdoms of Sweden-Finland, Denmark-Norway and Novgorod became interested in the land and natural resources of the northern territories. As in many other places in the world, Christianisation was one of the central means of the early colonisation of the Sami. This was followed by incentives and policies encouraging settlement of the north by farmers and others (for a more detailed discussion on history of the Sami people, see Broadbent, 1989; Kvist, 1991). Faced with similar colonial practices of assimilation, usurpation of territories and eradication of languages and cultures as other Indigenous peoples worldwide, the Sami have been engaged, particularly since the late 1960s, in a process of reclaiming their self-determination and rights to land, language and cultural heritage (e.g., Brantenberg, 1985, 1991; Corson, 1995; Eidheim, 1985, 1992, 1997; Eikjok, 2000; Gaski, 1997; Helander, 1999; Helander & Kailo, 1998a; Henriksen, 1999; IWGIA, 1987; Jernsletten, 1997; Joks, 2002; Jull, 1995; A.-I. Keskitalo, 1994; Korsmo, 1992, 1993; Kuokkanen, 2005; Kvernmo, 1997; Lehtola, 2002; Minde, 1996, 2001; Müller-Wille & Weber Müller-Wille, 1993; Olsson & Lewis, 1995; Pennanen & Näkkäljärvi, 2004; Salvesen, 1995; Sami Council, 2002; Seurujärvi-Kari & Kulonen, 1996; Sillanpää, 1994).

Thus far, there has been fairly limited discussion on specifically Sami pedagogies. Until very recently, Sami education discourse has primarily centered on the question of the language of the instruction. Discussing Sami education, therefore, often focuses on instruction in the Sami language, not necessarily education based on and informed by Sami values and cultural practices (see Aikio-Puoskari, 1998; Balto, 1997a; Helander, 1990, 1991; J. H. Keskitalo, 1994; Todal, 1999). As Sami scholar Vuokko Hirvonen (2004, p. 146) notes, a large number of Sami schools remain at the “addition stage” where subtle forms of assimilation continue in the school and pedagogical practices. Moreover, she suggests that “Sámi schools lack general plans on how to promote Sámi culture and make it visible throughout the school” (2004, p. 149).

The reason for not being able to achieve the objectives set in the Sami curriculum can be found in Sami society that has, in various levels and ways, internalised the ideology of assimilation. Hirvonen (2004, p. 149) points out:

The primary obstacle is the teachers’ training, which has kept passing down the assimilation ideology to new generations (only 15 % of the present Sámi teachers have studied at the Saami University College). As a result of this assimilation ideology, it is hard to deviate from the official interpretations of the development of nation-states, and to examine instead how Sámi have influenced the Nordic societies and culture for at least the past thousand years.

The Sami University College was established in 1989 to train Sami teachers but it has since broadened its focus to facilitate Sami capacity-building also in the fields of journalism, Indigenous knowledge, multiculturalism, economic development, traditional Sami crafts, Indigenous art history, and others. At the moment, the College is in the process of developing into a full university. Hirvonen’s research results echo the perspectives of many Sami scholars and educators of an urgent need for what Paulo Freire calls conscientisation – awareness-raising and development of critical understanding of the legacy and effects of Sami colonisation. This was discussed, for example, at a workshop on Indigenous Perspectives in Research and Education at the Sami College in October 2005 (Kuokkanen, 2005). I propose that a pedagogical framework inspired by the two concepts deriving from the Sami gift-centred worldview can assist us in the critical process of restoring our Sami episteme – the structures and systems of knowledge and values that have largely been decimated by the long history of colonisation. These two concepts, *lábi* and *attáldat*, serve as a crucial reminder in contemporary educational settings of the necessary relationships with the land and the community – relationships that continue to function as cornerstones of Saminess.

What is also needed in Samiland is a stronger awareness of the hidden curriculum and the effects of the colonial educational system – an understanding how historically, education has been a means for the governments to mold the colonised into roles serving the interests of the coloniser and to create and sustain “an inherently inequitable and unjust organisation of production and political power” (Carnoy, 1974, p. 3). Without a critique of colonial processes and understanding of the subtle ways in which colonialism and hegemony continue to operate, there is a danger of uncritically subscribing to the idea of schooling according to which “Western education brings people out of their ignorance and underdevelopment into a condition of enlightenment and civilisation” (Carnoy, 1974, p. 4). Critical perspectives to mainstream, (neo)colonial education strengthen the ongoing Sami attempts to make schools and curriculum to better reflect Sami needs and realities.

■ The historical context of Sami education

In general, the colonisation of the Sami was much subtler and thus arguably more perilous than, for example, the arrival of the settlers, colonisers and missionaries in North America. By the time of the early Sami cultural reawakening in the mid-nineteenth century, much of the traditional Sami cultural and spiritual practices had already been replaced by Christianity several generations ago. The Sami language, however, had not been decimated and systematically erased as among many other Indigenous peoples in the world.

It has become the strongest marker of Saminess and the main focus of the Sami ethnopolitical movement which began in the late 1960s. In some Sami areas, there are kindergartens and schools where the language of instruction is Sami. In those places, Sami is often used as a daily language of communication. At certain universities, there are Sami studies programs where it is possible to study and graduate in the Sami language. There are also newspapers, magazines, radio broadcasts and, more recently, TV programs available in Sami. Although insufficient in many ways, the Sami language acts in Finland and Norway passed in the early 1990s have also contributed to the public recognition of the Sami language.

There are several reasons for the relative survival of the Sami language. One is that the Sami boarding school experience was not as destructive as in North America where it was far more institutionalised and also was in place over several generations, effectively destroying not only the linguistic and cultural continuity of the Native peoples but also imposing a cycle of violence and abuse that continues today. This is not to suggest that violence and abuse were absent from Sami boarding schools. Thus far, however, there is very little research on Sami boarding school experience (for a comparative study on Sami and Nlakapamux boarding school narratives, see Kuokkanen, 2003). Moreover, even if the Sami language was regarded as one of the targets of colonisation and assimilation, there is also a long history of the church and, to some extent, state authorities attempting to interact with the Sami in their own language. This history reaches back to the seventeenth century when representatives of the clergy translated Christian texts into Sami for their missionary purposes.

Behind the apparently well-intentioned idea of producing religious services and texts for the Sami in their own language was a missionary strategy of undermining Sami culture and land-based spirituality from within. Some scholars have argued that there have always been two different approaches to Sami language and culture by the church and surrounding kingdoms: one of assimilation and eradication and another of preservation and protection (e.g., Salvesen, 1995). It is possible, however, to consider these apparently contradictory approaches as two sides of the same coin – insidious colonial practices promoting interests of the states over the Sami territory. Occasionally, there have also been representatives of the clergy who have candidly spoken against the assimilation of the Sami, especially during the official assimilation policies in the nineteenth century (e.g., Niemi, 1997). The active use of Sami language by the church was also an attempt to implement the principle of Protestantism by preaching gospel in the language of the people. While the churchmen indicated support of the Sami language, they were very clear on their intentions of overthrowing the Sami worldview of reciprocity characterised by the existence of various deities and

spirits of the natural world to whom human beings were required to pay respect and express gratitude.

In the nineteenth century, however, assimilation pressures intensified as the Nordic countries sought to gain a stronger hold over their northern territories. The surrounding states justified their assimilation policies in the name of education: the only way for the Sami to become equal with the other citizens of the state was to know the official language of the country. Laws that prohibited the use of Sami language both in schools and at home were passed, particularly in Norway and Sweden. At the end of the nineteenth century, the first Sami writers and activists chose the Sami language as the symbol of Saminess and Sami identity that was required for the protection of Sami identity and self-representation. The right to one's mother tongue became a central issue for most of the first Sami organisations established in the first decade of the twentieth century. To date, the Sami language remains as the clearest, strongest measure of Saminess for the majority of the Sami. The official Sami definitions in the three Nordic countries vary slightly but are all based on linguistic criteria. It is beyond the scope of this article to discuss the details of the various definitions or recent developments and the implications of those definitions.

Both Norway and Finland have passed Sami language acts in 1992, making the Sami language official together with the dominant languages in the northernmost municipalities of both countries. This has meant, among other things, that road signs and places names are required to be in Sami as well in the officially defined "Sami home area". These language acts guarantee the Sami a right to use their own language at courts and with the authorities. Applying first and foremost to local and regional authorities working in the "Sami home area", the acts do not, however, obligate the authorities to know Sami but the rights are guaranteed through translation and interpretation.

In some ways, the language situation of the Sami is almost diametrically opposed to, for example, the First Nations situation in British Columbia where Indigenous languages were always relatively small in terms of numbers of speakers. A relatively short but very destructive colonial era characterised by generations of assimilative schooling and decimation of Native population by imported illnesses have seriously undermined the vitality of First Nations languages. Today, a number of West Coast First Nations languages are in a state of emergency with only a handful of speakers left, usually elderly people who will soon pass away. In this critical stage, many First Nations educators and scholars have started language revival programs some of which have already produced promising results and a change in the trend of the apparent language loss. Yet on the other hand, unlike among the Sami, many other First Nations cultural and spiritual practices remain strongly

manifested not only in traditional ceremonies such as the potlatch but often also as a part of individuals' work and daily activities.

Differences in policies and experiences of colonial educational institutions have also resulted in a situation where the Sami have perhaps always been less distrustful of formal education imposed by the governments. The focus of Sami education has been in creating and offering education for Sami children in their own language. Only recently more attention is being paid to the contents and curriculum of Sami education as well as the hidden values and norms delivered through text books of dominant societies some of which have been directly translated into Sami (see Hirvonen, 2004).

■ Sami gift philosophy

There are two concepts in the Sami language that relate to what I call the Sami gift philosophy or worldview: *lábi* and *attáldat*. In contemporary language usage, the term *lábi* is usually found in the phrase *Ipmil lábi*, meaning the God's gift or abundance. Due to the Christianisation of the Sami over many generations, *Ipmil* in everyday parlance almost invariably refers to the Christian God. It is, however, an old word that predates the arrival of Christianity and numerous studies on Sami "religion" show that the word has previously referred to Sami pre-Christian deities. Also its variant, *Jupmel*, is, at least in some Sami regions, one of the main deities in the traditional Sami pantheon. I argue that the concept of Sami "religion" refers, in fact, to the Sami land-based worldview. The topic of Sami "religion" has drawn the attention of scholars for centuries and it has been the subject of innumerable ethnographic, anthropological and religious studies (e.g., Ahlbäck & Bergman, 1991; Bäckman & Hultcrantz, 1978; Holmberg, 1987; Hultcrantz, 1962; Manker, 1938, 1950; Pentikäinen, 1995; Scheffer, 1751; Sommarström, 1991; Vorren, 1980). Today, the expression *lábi* is considered somewhat archaic, referring particularly to the God's gifts in the form of food. I suggest, however, that the concept reflects the Sami worldview that recognises the abundance of the land as gifts that, in turn, are actively acknowledged and reciprocated by various ceremonies and rituals. *Lábi*, then, is an expression of the relationships that the Sami have traditionally had with the natural environment.

The other concept related to the Sami gift philosophy, *attáldat*, is a derivative of the Sami verb to give, *addit*. Today, *attáldat* is usually defined as a skill or giftedness. For example, *lávlun-attáldat* would translate as good singing skills. I propose that this is a central concept when considering Sami education and pedagogical models. Moreover, I argue that the concept of *attáldat* needs to be interpreted in a much broader light which takes into consideration its roots in the aspect of giving. In many Indigenous worldviews

and philosophies, gifts, including personal giftedness, exist primarily to be shared with others.

Okanagan educator and artist Jeannette Armstrong notes: "what you are gifted with, and what you have been given in terms of skills, doesn't only belong to you. It belongs to the community, and it is there for the benefit of the community" (Armstrong in Isernhagen, 1999, p. 162). The notion of responsibility of sharing one's gifts is also discussed by many other Indigenous artists for whom it is often the driving force behind their art (e.g., Fedorick in Lutz, 1991, p. 221). Not surprisingly, then, in Indigenous communities artists are often considered healers, visionaries and pathfinders of their communities (e.g., Ash Poitras, 1991, 1996; Helander & Kailo, 1998b, p. 165). I suggest, therefore, that if we want to develop Sami education and pedagogical frameworks grounded on Sami values and socio-cultural practices, there is a need to restore and reconsider the concept of *attáldat* in a light that foregrounds the gifts of the students (and sharing them) in relation to their communities as well as to their natural environments – that is, to the land-based Sami worldview.

Lábi

Like many other Indigenous worldviews, the traditional Sami perception of the world postulates that the land is a physical and spiritual entity. As human survival has depended on the balance and renewal of the land, the central principles in this understanding are sustainable use of and respect for the land and *lábi*, the earth's abundance that is given to human beings if the relationships are well maintained. These relationships with the land are maintained by collective and individual rituals in which the gift and giving back are integral. The intimacy and interrelatedness is reflected in the way of communicating with various aspects of the land which often are addressed directly as relatives. The close connection to the natural world is also evident in the permeable and indeterminate boundaries between the human and natural worlds. Skilled individuals can assume the form of an animal when needed and there are also stories about women marrying an animal (Porsanger, 2004, pp. 151-152).

The porosity of the boundary between the human and the non-human is sometimes seen as a reflection of shamanistic worldviews. In traditional Sami society, particularly *noaidis* or shamans – who were the spiritual leaders but also healers and visionaries of the community – were in contact with the spirit world where they travelled often in an animal form. As *noaidis* were among the most important members of the community as doctors, leaders and visionaries, they were the first ones to be exterminated amongst the Sami by church and state representatives (e.g., Laestadius, 1994; Paltto, 1998, p. 28). In a worldview in which survival and thus knowledge depend on

the intimate connection with the world, this kind of transformation is not considered supernatural but is rather a normal part of life. The Sami *noaidi* communicated with the spirit and natural worlds also with the help of the *goavddis*, a drum depicting the Sami cosmos on its surface. The Sami cosmos consists of a complex, multilayered order of different realms and spheres inhabited by humans, animals, ancestors, spirits, deities and guardians, all of whom traditionally have had specific roles and functions in the Sami socio-cosmic order.

An interesting, almost completely ignored aspect in the analyses of Sami cosmology is the role of the female deities in giving the gift of life (to both human beings and domestic animals, mainly reindeer) and the connection to the land. One could suggest that the Sami deity Máttaráhkká with her three daughters Sáráhkká, Uksáhkká and Juksáhkká signify the very foundation in the Sami cosmic order for they are the deities of new life who convey the soul of a child, create its body and also assist with menstruation, childbirth and protection of children (Ränk, 1955). In other words, the most significant gift of all, a new life, is the responsibility of these female deities. Further, Máttaráhkká could be translated as “Earthmother” (the root *máttár* refers to earth and also to ancestors). Words for “earth” and “mother” in the Sami language also derive from the same root (*eanan* and *eadni* respectively). Thus, when reconsidering the concept of *lábi*, we must recognise the central role of these female deities, Máttaráhkká and her three daughters, in giving not only new life but also assistance and guidance in important matters such as hunting and child-rearing.

As the physical and spiritual well-being of Sami society has traditionally been inseparably linked to a stable and continuous relationship between the human and natural worlds, knowledge of taking care of that relationship has been an integral part of Sami social structures and practices, including spiritual practices (cf. Mulk, 1994, pp. 127-128). In other words, what is central in this worldview is that well-being depends on *knowing*, not actively *changing* the environment (cf. Brody, 2000, p. 117). An important part of this knowing is the awareness of one’s responsibilities and norms of behaviour. As “every geographical place was considered an entity in which the physical dimension was in balance with the spiritual one, [b]oth aspects needed to be taken into consideration when making a living” (Porsanger, 2004, p. 153).

Traditionally, one of the most important ways to acknowledge and thank for *Ipnil lábi* has been the practice of giving to various *sieidis*. *Sieidi*, a sacred place of the gift, usually consists of a stone or a piece of wood to which the gift is given to thank certain spirits for the abundance in the past but also to ensure fishing, hunting and reindeer luck in the future. Although the several centuries’ long influence of Christianity has severely eroded the Sami gift-giving

to and sharing with the land by banning it as a pagan form of devil worshipping, there is a relatively large body of evidence that the practice of *sieidi* gifting is still practiced (see Juuso, 1998; Kjellström, 1987).

The common location for *sieidis* are in the vicinity of sacred places, camp grounds or fishing and hunting sites. Stone or rock *sieidis* are usually natural formations of unusual shapes, functioning as natural landmarks particularly in the mountains. Wooden *sieidis* are either trees with the lowest branches removed, carved stumps or fallen trunks. For the Sami, *sieidis* were considered alive although many ethnographers interpreted them merely representing inert stones and structures. The Sami practice of giving back to *sieidis* involve spirits and guardians of the elements (e.g., wind, thunder) and various spheres of the natural world (animal birth, hunting, fishing). Sami reindeer herder Johan Turi describes the nature of the *sieidi* in the early twentieth century as follows:

Some *sieidis* were satisfied if they received antlers, and others were content with all the bones, which meant every single bone, even the most wee ones. Fish *sieidi* did not demand less than a half of the catch but then it directed to the nets as much fish as people could collect. Some *sieidis* wanted a whole reindeer which needed to be embellished with all kinds of decorations, cloth, threads, silver and gold (Turi, 1987, p. 108) (my translation).

Sieidi gifts are, particularly in ethnographic literature, almost invariably referred to as “sacrifice”, usually defined as a gift exchange with gods and nature. I contend that contrary to conventional interpretations, giving to *sieidi* cannot be completely understood through the concept of sacrifice. Even if *sieidi* gifts do have aspects of sacrifice, they are not and should not be regarded solely as such. They may have other dimensions that can be as significant – if not more so – as the aspect of sacrifice. Bones are given back, the catch shared and reindeer given to the gods and goddesses of hunting, fishing and reindeer luck represented by *sieidi* sites as an expression of gratitude for their goodwill and for ensuring abundance also in the future. In this sense, giving to *sieidis* appears involuntary as it is done for the protection and security of both the individual and the community.

On the other hand, *sieidis* are considered an inseparable part of one’s social order and thus it is an individual and collective responsibility to look after them. While it may appear that such a gift is an exchange and a mandatory forfeit (especially when interpreted through the framework of a foreign worldview), I suggest that it rather is a voluntary expression of a particular worldview. *Lábi*, then,

is not an aspect or reflection of religion or even a spiritual framework that should be employed as a foundation of Sami education and pedagogy. The question is rather, how the concept of *lábi* can assist in laying a stronger emphasis on the necessary relationships and the recognition of the gifts (particularly of the land, on which the survival of the Sami is much dependent) in contemporary Sami educational practices.

Attáldat

The notion of ideal education as a pedagogical practice that focuses on encouraging, supporting and sustaining the different skills and strengths of individual students is far from new. In a narrow interpretation, this is also what the concept *attáldat* implies in an educational setting. Many Sami teachers stress the need to establish education that serves the needs and skills of individual Sami, especially as they relate to livelihoods such as reindeer herding.

At a week-long intensive seminar for Sami teachers on Sami and Indigenous Pedagogy held in June 2001, facilitated by Asta Balto and myself, one of the topics was to discuss how an ideal Sami education would look like from the perspective of Sami teachers who have been working in the field for several years. The seminar participants' perspectives on ideal Sami education are shared by many other Sami teachers as documented by Hirvonen (2004). The concept of *attáldat* featured in this discussion as the teachers pointed out that an ideal Sami education would not be tied to certain ages but schooling would start from the students themselves who would choose according their needs and phases when to study practical or theoretical issues. This, of course, would only be possible provided that Sami children had been raised according to traditional Sami upbringing that emphasises the child's independence from an early age on (see Balto, 1997b).

In this pedagogical approach, the teachers articulated, education would not need to be strictly tied to set curricula or time – that is, a school year would not need to start and end always at the same time but would rather reflect the seasons and needs and interests of the students. Obviously, the role of local livelihoods in education would be integral in a way that students would be able to participate in them according to annual cycles. In the current school system, this is possible at least in some Sami regions, but as Sami parents indicate, it is far from adequate (Hirvonen, 2004, p. 47).

Moreover, Sami students would be granted a broader responsibility of their own learning and work and that their knowledge and skills would be respected and recognised more than in the current system. As teachers put it, students should be able to enjoy their education and “have fun” in a constructive sense – an idea usually strongly opposed by teachers but as the

Sami teachers pointed out, why is learning supposed to be serious and boring? Also the pedagogy of love and caring should be advanced in a way that instead of being enemies or the authorities on the top of a hierarchy, teachers would be students' collaborative partners. In other words, the philosophy of opposition would be replaced by a philosophy of co-existence. This would make it possible to compose a personalised plan of studies for each student in cooperation with their extended families.

While not implying that the more conventional understanding of *attáldat* is no longer important, I suggest that we need to consider the concept in a broader light that links it to the Sami gift philosophy of relationships as well as to the notion of responsibility of sharing one's gifts with the community for the well-being of all. After all, *attáldat* is rooted in the verb *addit*, to give. A translation of *attáldat* could be, for instance, “something that a person has to give or share”. Understood this way, *attáldat* carries a very strong implicit collective dimension and a sense of responsibility toward others. To have certain skills or to be gifted with something is to give and share it with others, not to treasure it for the individual benefit only. It thus also carries an implicit criticism of hyper-individualism and selfishness that characterises much of contemporary mainstream society. *Attáldat* emphasises the significance of giving and sharing in order to sustain the needs of others.

The aspect of sharing was also stressed by the Sami teachers attending the seminar. For them, there is a need to integrate the entire society into the school system in a way that not only students would participate in schooling. On the same yard with the school, there could be an old people's home in order to maintain or improve the relationships and links between elders and children. There is also a need for stronger integration of the local elders and their knowledge and skills as a central part of education and school's practices. Hirvonen notes that “on the basis of the interviews with the teachers and statistics, it is obvious that making use of the local community and people has not yet become an established practice in the everyday activities of the school” (Hirvonen, 2004, p. 129). An ideal Sami education would also share the same curriculum in all Sami schools irrespective of national borders. Such a curriculum would integrate local oral traditions, knowledge and history and from where it would expand to deal first with issues in the entire Sami society and then the rest of the world, not forgetting the Indigenous world. One of the teachers also envisioned a joint Sami high school and student exchange programs with other Indigenous students “instead of always sending our kids to England”. A natural extension of a Sami high school would, of course, be a Sami university, as one teacher put it, “in order to prevent our youth disappearing to the Western world”. As the Sami teachers suggested, the

school environment could also incorporate local livelihoods in its immediate surroundings. The school yard could have a place for reindeer and a garden that would give students an opportunity to holistically work with one's natural environment. In this way, both social and natural environments would be an inherent part of education.

With regard to livelihoods combined with the concept of *attáldat* understood primarily as the skills of an individual, it is worth taking into account Hirvonen's concerns about a potential gender bias:

Strikingly, the Sámi skills that one can find outside the classroom are, according to many interviews and examples, mostly skills that are linked with chores of boys or men. As a result of this, girls' and women's chores and traditions may be omitted from school education, if the schools do not examine their activities profoundly from the perspective of gender, too (Hirvonen, 2004, p. 129).

Considering how Sami women's tradition has been traditionally excluded also from ethnographic accounts resulting in a situation where recorded Sami tradition is, in fact, Sami men's tradition (Hirvonen, 1996), it is absolutely necessary to pay much closer and more critical attention to gender issues than thus far in considerations of Sami education and pedagogy. This is where the primary role of the female deities Máttaráhkká and her daughters in the Sami philosophy of the gift become critical. If we keep in mind that both the *lábi* and *attáldat* of these female deities form the very core of the Sami survival and well-being, we can no longer ignore or relegate girls' and women's skills and traditions insignificant or secondary.

Although the common perception – or myth (see Eikjok, 2000) – is of strong Sami women, the often negative influence of Christianity on general attitudes and perceptions of women in Sami society continue to be reality today. In *No beginning, no end: The Sami speak up* (Helander & Kailo, 1998a), an anthology of front line Sami artists and cultural workers discussing and analysing current issues affecting the Sami people and culture, several contributors address the influence of Christianity on women. Sami women writers Kirsti Paltto (1998) and Rauni Magga Lukkari (1998), and musician Inga Juuso (1998) suggest that Christian ideology has introduced a hierarchical understanding between genders, prioritising men and resulting in low self-esteem for many Sami women. Since the mid-1800s, particularly Laestadianism, an evangelical, revivalist movement inside the Lutheran Church influential in the northern parts of Scandinavia, has had a strong effect in Sami society. The movement was named after its founder, Lars Levi Laestadius (1800-1861) who was of South Sami ancestry and who travelled across Samiland preaching and delivering

his healing sermons, which partly drew upon Sami culture and oral traditions. A central characteristic of the Laestadian faith is the confession of sins followed by absolution “in the name and blood of Jesus”. Laestadianism requires an abstinence from alcohol and disapproval of contraception. It has introduced certain concepts of female piety and humility in addition to common Christian dualistic notions of women as either good or evil. Dualistic, simplistic descriptions of Sami women are evident, for example, in some of the works of male Sami writers (e.g., Guttorm, 1998). Female writers, on the other hand, have analysed the common images and representations of Sami women in a society strongly influenced by Christianity (Paltto, 1989).

Thus, in order to be able to be effective and successful, any consideration dealing with Indigenous humanities or any other processes of indigenising and decolonising the master narratives (of which education and the academy are naturally essential part), must also address the intersectionality of various forms of subjugation such as colonialism, racism, patriarchy and sexism. In order to restore the equanimity and socio-cosmic balance postulated in and required by Indigenous worldviews of the gift and reciprocity, it is necessary that envisioning Indigenous education and pedagogical models are able and willing to take a critical look at the erasure by the Christian Church of the goddess and the power of the female and her ability to produce life that was considered sacred in pre-Christian worldviews. *Lábi*, for example, can be considered to refer, among other things, to the gift of life given by the Sami female creators, *Sáráhkká* in particular (cf. Laestadius, 1994, p. 50).

In relation to Sami education, the concept of *attáldat* has to be reconsidered in a way that includes the skills, traditions and tasks of Sami girls and women. Drawing on the Sami gift philosophy of *lábi* and *attáldat*, we can do this by restoring the status of Máttaráhkká and her daughters as teachers and mentors of their own right. By reclaiming the life-giving and life-sustaining functions of the Sami female deities, we are able to reconnect with the indispensable spiritual and medical knowledge of women and also be reminded of the shared etymological roots of the Sami words for “mother” and “earth”. We need this reminder not for a nostalgic romanticisation of the golden past but for a viable and strong contemporary Sami society as well as the survival of future generations.

I argue that reconsidering the two concepts of *lábi* and *attáldat* as forming the core of the Sami ontology or worldview, and establishing our pedagogical structures upon these core values, we are forging a firm path for Sami self-determination that is able to transform the conditions of assimilatory ideologies that in many cases still prevail in Sami and Nordic societies. This self-determination is not only intellectual, although it focuses on epistemological and pedagogical aspects.

The concepts of *lábi* and *attáldat* teach us the knowledge of the surrounding natural environment, of taking care of the relationship with the land, of our ancestors and relations in the spiritual realm, and of our responsibilities toward others. *Lábi* teaches us about the need to recognise the gifts of the land and reciprocate rather than take the abundance for granted and exploit it for profit, while *attáldat* teaches us to share our skills for the benefit of our communities and eventually, Sami society at large.

I suggest that *lábi* and *attáldat* are two guiding principles deriving from and rooted in Sami philosophy and worldview upon which we can build relevant and appropriate Sami education and pedagogical practices. An educational foundation that emphasises the significance of relationships (including with our ecosystems) and responsibilities toward recognising individual students' gifts teaches not only the necessary social skills but also provides Sami children with an understanding of central Sami values, that of interdependence and reciprocation. These values are closely linked to the notion of sustainability and their significance goes far beyond Sami culture and society.

The field of environmental education has flourished in the past two decades. One of the major factors contributing to this growth is the publication of the Brundtland Report, *Our common future*, in 1987, which triggered events such as the UN Earth Summits in 1992 and 2002, the International Climate Change Convention and worldwide Agenda 21 programs. The Brundtland Report calls for global awareness of the enormous environmental problems facing the planet and for the need for concerted global environmental action in the name of our common future. It proposes that human activities should "meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (Brundtland, 1987, p. 43). Significantly, the report also recognises the sustainable ways of life of Indigenous and tribal communities and the role of Indigenous and tribal institutions and ideas in envisioning more sustainable futures for everybody on the planet. In short, incorporating the Sami gift philosophy into contemporary education would not be contradictory to the issues and concerns of contemporary society, but rather, quite the opposite. Education and pedagogical frameworks informed by Indigenous gift philosophies such as the Sami philosophy of *lábi* and *attáldat* function as implicit critiques of the dominant global economy that is predicated on exploitation, accumulation of capital and waste. The emphasis on the collective, they also expose the problematic nature of hyperindividualism that characterises much of contemporary mainstream society (see Christiansen-Ruffman, 2004; Feiner, 2003). The political economy of the gift thus serves as a sustainable, ethical and just alternative to globalised capitalism that is benefiting few and wrecking havoc in the lives of millions of

people around the world (on globalisation and its effects on Indigenous peoples, see for example, Battiste & Henderson, 2000; Blaser et al., 2004; Gedicks, 1993; Guissé, 2003; Hall, 2003; Harry & Dukepoo, 2000; Howard, 2003; Indigenous Peoples and Globalization Program, 2003; Posey & Dutfield, 1996; Shiva, 1993, 1997; Smith & Ward, 2000; WGIP, 2003). As such, education established on the concept of the gift is far from being old-fashioned or nostalgic for the past, but rather extremely sophisticated and savvy with a critical understanding of the present that looks into sustainable futures while not forgetting the past. It provides students with values that stress the significance of giving instead of taking and in that way, it ensures that there indeed will be a future by taking into account the limited resources of our common globe.

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■ About the Author

Rauna Kuokkanen, from Samiland, is a post-doctoral scholar at the Institute on Globalization and the Human Condition, McMaster University (Hamilton, Ontario, Canada). She holds a MA on Sami Language and Literature (University of Oulu, Finland) and Comparative Literature (University of British Columbia) and PhD on Education (UBC). Her dissertation was awarded a Recognition for Excellence by the American Educational Research Association (Postsecondary Education) Dissertation Award Committee in 2004. She is the editor of *Juoga mii geasuba* (2001), an anthology on Sami literature, and author of *The responsibility of the academy and the gift of Indigenous epistemes* (forthcoming). She has published articles on Indigenous research paradigms and critical theory, Indigenous literature, the gift paradigm, and globalisation and Indigenous women. She was the founding chair of the Sami Youth Organization in Finland, established in 1991, and has served as the Vice-President of the Sami Council. Currently she is a member of the Board of Directors of Terralingua, International Organization for Protection of Biocultural Diversity, and a member of the Call of the Earth Circle, Indigenous Peoples' Initiative on Intellectual Property Policy.


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■ All correspondence and submissions should be addressed to:

The Editors

The Australian Journal of Indigenous Education

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies Unit

The University of Queensland

Brisbane QLD 4072

AUSTRALIA

Email: ajie@uq.edu.au

URL: <http://www.atsis.uq.edu.au/ajie/>

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