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For the most part, the gift is understood and approached either as a mode of economy (e.g., as part of informal local economies) or a form of exchange. While exchange can also be a form of economy, some literature discusses gift exchanges outside the economic realm, something that takes place between individuals particularly in contemporary society. Instead of viewing the gift as a form of exchange or having only an economic function, the gift in indigenous societies is a reflection of a particular world view characterized by a perception of the natural environment as a living entity which gives its gifts and abundance to people if it is treated with respect and gratitude (i.e., if certain responsibilities are observed)¹. Central to this perception is that the world as a whole is constituted of an infinite web of relationships extended to and incorporated into the entire social condition of the individual. Social ties apply to everybody and everything, including the land. People are related to their physical and natural surroundings through genealogies, oral tradition and their personal and collective experiences pertaining to certain locations. Interrelatedness is reflected in indigenous systems of knowledge, which often are explained in terms of relations and arranged in a circular format consisting mostly or solely of sets of relationships seeking to explain phenomena. In many of these systems of knowledge, concepts do not stand alone, but are constituted of “the elements of other ideas to which they were related” (Deloria 1999: 48).

It is a well-established argument that the gift functions primarily as a system of social relations, that it forms alliances, solidarity and communities and “binds collectives together” (Berking 1999: 35)². What is often ignored, however, is that the gift in indigenous worldviews extends beyond interpersonal relationships to “all my relations”. In other words, according to this philosophy, giving is an active relationship between human and natural worlds based on a close interaction of sustaining and renewing the balance in the socio-cosmic order. The foundational principle of indigenous worldviews – the intimate and intricate relationships with the land and community – are established and affirmed by gifts. These relationships also form the ethical basis of indigenous worldviews, sustaining cultural and ecological survival (LaRocque 2001: 67; see also Deloria 1999, ch. 26).

In this article, I will discuss the gift philosophy in indigenous thought as a central manifestation of the special relationship that indigenous peoples have with their lands and territories. In this philosophy, the gifts are given back and shared with the larger cosmos as a means of recognizing and thanking the land and cosmos for its gifts. Through the act of giv-

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ing, the kinship or relationships are actively recognized, not taken for granted or ignored. This creates a collective sense of respect, reciprocity and responsibility. In short, it could be suggested that in indigenous societies, the gift is one of the most important organizing principles around which values and perceptions of the world are attached.

While discussing some of the general, shared principles and aspects of indigenous peoples' worldview of the gift, I will draw my examples from the Sami people, the indigenous people of Northern Europe, who, in the course of colonial history, have been divided by the nation-states of Norway, Sweden, Finland and Russia⁴. My consideration is by no means a comprehensive study of the functions, philosophy or logic of the gift within indigenous systems of thinking – it is clear that anything like that would deserve and require a separate study. It also is beyond the scope of my inquiry to raise and address the vast array of issues in various anthropological and other analyses of the gift. What is, however, necessary is to explain what is meant when we discuss the relationship that indigenous peoples have with their lands.

Indigenous Peoples' Relationship with the Land

For indigenous peoples, the relationship with their homelands and territories is a fundamental issue, forming the basis of survival as a people. In this context, survival does not imply only physical sustenance and an ability or right to practice certain livelihoods, but that the very existence of a distinct people with a culture, language, worldview and value and knowledge systems is dependent on the land with which there has been a historical connection and continuity for generations. In other words, the collective identity of indigenous peoples are intricately and inseparably linked to their physical surroundings. The profound relationship indigenous peoples have to their lands has various social, cultural, spiritual, economic and political dimensions and responsibilities (Daes 1999). An indigenous people is connected to a certain location through its history and genealogies traditionally told and reflected in oral tradition – stories, songs, myths, legends, proverbs and other verbal expressions⁵. A common view among indigenous peoples is that stories tell who "we" are as a people. This includes stories of origin and of ancestors, worldview and values, knowledge for everyday and long-term survival. Various forms of oral tradition are rooted in and draw upon certain places and locations and they are used to explain and interpret experiences (Basso 1996, Cruikshank 1990). The connection relationship with a specific territory is also reflected in names of places and people: in many indigenous cultures including the Sami, families and also individuals are commonly identified by or named after places and locations.

The relationship that indigenous peoples have with their lands also has a spiritual dimension rooted in a specific worldview. This understanding of the cosmological order emphasizes relationships and interconnectedness instead of causality and separation of human from the rest of the world. Australian Aboriginal historian and activist Jaggie Huggins articulates this view as follows:

Like most Aboriginal people it is my spiritual and religious belief that we come from this land, hence the term "the land my mother". This land is our birthing place, our "cradle"; it offers us

connection with the creatures, the trees, the mountains, the rivers, and all living things. This is the place of my dreaming. There are no stories of migration in our Dreamtime stories. Our creation stories are linked intrinsically to the earth. This is why place and land are so important to us, regardless of where and when we were born (1998: 106).

Others have explained this understanding by comparing it to the dominant western perceptions of the human relationship with the phenomenal world which foreground the mastery and control over nature (Brody 2000, Vickers 1998: 142-3)⁶. In other words, it is necessary to understand that when we talk about indigenous peoples' relationship with their lands, we are not talking about a relationship on an individual level. The question is rather about a worldview – a specific way of knowing and being in the world which is transmitted through values and cultural practices. Naturally, it is important to distinguish between the indigenous philosophy and individual thinking and behaviour which may not always reflect or comply with the former. There is, therefore, a need for a different conceptual framework to understand this relationship as suggested by the UN Special Rapporteur Erica-Irene Daes (1999).

Classic Gift Theories on Giving to Nature

In Marcel Mauss's classic essay on the gift, *Essai sur le don, forme archaïque de l'échange* (1967 [1924]), one of the themes in the economy and morality of the gift is gift giving to gods or nature. Mauss does not, however, advance a theory on this theme, partly because of the lack of facts in this area but also because of its "strongly marked mythological element, which we do not yet fully understand" (1967: 12). Similarly, most other considerations of the gift that address this aspect of giving at all only give meager attention to gift giving to the natural world, often imbued by assumptions of primitiveness, strangeness and antiquity⁷. One of the reasons many scholars do not give non-western systems of thought the serious and rigorous attention they do to western counterparts is the insistence, as Vine Deloria Jr. notes, that non-Western peoples represent an earlier stage of their own cultural evolution – often that tribal cultures represent failed efforts to understand natural world [...]. Non-Western knowledge is believed to originate from primitive efforts to explain mysterious universe. In this view, the alleged failure of primitive/tribal man [sic] to control nature mechanically is evidence of his ignorance and his inability to conceive of abstract general principles and concepts (1996: 37).

Classic gift theories are also usually characterized by serious misinterpretations simply because the analysis is informed by paradigms and thought of modernity which are incapable of adequately grasping the deeper meanings of gift giving to the natural world. In other words, there is a need for a theory of the gift that would focus on this largely neglected and misconstrued area. In this article, my intention is to discuss and reexamine some of the central aspects of the gift to the non-human realm, hoping to offer critical insights to previous gift theories.

Instead of viewing gift giving to gods and nature as a reflection of indigenous worldviews founded on active recognition of kinship relations that extend beyond human realm, Mauss

explains it as a "theory of sacrifice" in which people have – they must make – exchange contracts with the spirits of the dead and the gods who are the real owners of the world's wealth. He gives the Toradja of the Celebes, Indonesia, as a classic example of people who believe that "one has to buy from the gods and that the gods know how to repay the price" (1967: 14). Moreover, for Mauss, "the idea of purchase from gods and spirits is universally understood" (*ibidem*). This is, however, a gross misinterpretation of the Toradja and other indigenous worldviews which are based on an understanding that the socio-cosmic order is maintained through the stability of various relations within that order, necessarily including the natural world and the ancestors. Following the teachings of her elders, a Toradja (or Toraja, as the correct spelling reads) woman explains that according to the understanding of her people, Deata ("God" or "Creator") provides the Toraja everything and that every creature has a spirit. The Toraja give gifts or "offerings" to thank Deata for everything that they have. After the harvest, for instance, the Toraja hold a ceremony to express gratitude for the season. These practices and this understanding are definitely not considered a purchase from the gods but a form of thanking and respecting the natural world (Sombolinggi, personal communication, 2004).

From this perspective, it is very peculiar indeed that Mauss, critical of the economic interpretations of the gift, has to resort to interpreting a practice reflecting a perception of the world that postulates a moral universe founded on respect and responsibility toward other forms of life by means of the terminology of economics (exchange contracts, purchase). In a similar fashion, Godbout analyzes the underlying philosophy of the "archaic" gift only cursorily and with a condescending tone, referring to gift practices as something "strange", "curious" and "primitive" (1998: 134).

While Godbout recognizes that "the gift represents the overall complex of relationships that brings together [...] all the personalized powers that inhabit the primitive cosmos: human, animal, vegetable, mineral, or divine" (ivi: 135), he reduces it, however, into what he calls "the strange law of alternation" which rules that in archaic societies, giving is only possible by taking turns⁸. In his view, this might be "a primitive democratic requirement" motivated by the fear of revenge and destruction (ivi: 134). This kind of interpretation is reductionistic because it "consists of elements (values, structures, gender roles) which it has naturalized without heeding the animistic [sic] world's own attitudes towards life" (Kailo, forthcoming). It is also masculinist as Kaarina Kailo suggests, for this kind of giving "did not necessarily get organized along those dichotomous, conflictual lines that [many theorists] take for granted" (*ibidem*). In worldviews characterized by gift giving to the land and its various representatives or elements, the emphasis is not on apprehension or retaliation but on expressing gratitude for its gifts and kinship.

Starting with Mauss, most gift theories view the gift as a mode of exchange characterized by obligations, countergifts, pay-backs, debts, forced reciprocity and other mandatory acts. Mauss's central thesis was that the gift is constituted by three obligations of giving, receiving and paying back. Existing within distinctive social rules, the gift is both constrained and interested even if it may first appear voluntary and disinterested. For Mauss the gift exchange represents a disguise and replacement for a deeper hostility, an alternative to war. In the same fashion, Claude Lévi-Strauss, though criticizing Mauss's analysis of ambiguity, has sug-

gested that exchange is the primary structuring principle of society. In his view, all societies are founded on various forms – kinship, economy, culture – of exchange.

Building on Mauss's agonistic notion of the gift exchange as a substitute for hostility, Pierre Bourdieu has analyzed the gift as symbolic violence, which for him is "the most economical mode of domination" (1997: 218). In his view, the gift exchange ultimately leads to the accumulation of social capital of obligations and debts that are paid back, among other things, in the form of homage, respect and loyalty. Material capital thus produces symbolic capital, which is actively "misrecognized" as something else such as obligations, relationships and gratitude. In this system, the gift implies power acquired by giving (ivi: 217).

For Bourdieu, gift-giving is an observation of "moral obligations", an active denial and misrecognition of the embedded symbolic violence. He suggests that "the pre-capitalist economy is the site par excellence of symbolic violence" for in this system, the only way to establish and reinforce relations of domination is through strategies of which the true nature cannot be revealed – it would destroy them – but instead must be masked, transformed and euphemized. It is interesting that Bourdieu should want to interpret a social order constituted mostly of non-adversarial relationships observed through mutual responsibilities as a site par excellence of a form of violence. While there is no need to romanticize indigenous (or "pre-capitalist") communities as nostalgic examples of societies without violence, it hardly does any justice either to the complexity of the logic of the gift or the social order which largely depended on cooperation and nonaggression to reduce one of the central structuring principles, the gift, to a form of violence, however subtle and symbolic.

Violence has never been absent in any societies, including indigenous ones who have, like other nations, fought wars both among themselves as well as with and against various colonizers. Traditionally, however, violence has never characterized indigenous societies in the same way as it does the modern, western society which Pueblo Laguna scholar and writer Paula Gunn Allen calls a culture of death; culture where the presence of death is evident everywhere around us (Allen 1990: 30; see also Allen 1986: 127-35)⁹. Could it be possible that Bourdieu's interpretation is informed by his own cultural notions of adversarial, competitive and dominating relationships more than anything else, preventing him from seeing other functions and logic?

Bourdieu's and many others' analysis of the logic of the gift ignores giving and sharing that exist outside the restrained system of indebtedness in spite of countless examples that indicate otherwise. One such example is the Sami "grave gifts" in which the dead person is given a gift related to her or his livelihood while alive as well as food and tobacco¹⁰. Tobacco was also "put down in the earth to the departed" every time a person passed by a grave (Bäckman 1978: 35, 40)¹¹. The function of these Sami grave gifts is not economic but preeminently social and spiritual, ensuring the continuance of a congenial relationship between the deceased and her or his living relatives (ivi: 36). This type of giving is often called an "offering" to the spirit world and thereby considered separate from (or perhaps a subcategory of) the gift proper.

As with other traditional livelihoods, Sami livelihoods of hunting, fishing and reindeer-herding are contingent upon a stable and continuous relationship between the human and natural worlds. Thus, knowledge of taking care of that relationship has tradi-

tionally been an integral part of social structures and practices, including spiritual practices (cf. Mulk 1994: 127-8).

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 Sami cosmic order. An interesting, almost completely ignored aspect in the analyses of Sami cosmology and "religion" is the role of the female deities in giving the gift of life (both human and domestic animal, mainly reindeer) and the connection to the land. One could suggest that the Sami deity Máttaráhkká with her three daughters signified the very foundation in the Sami cosmic order for they were the deities of new life who conveyed the soul of a child, created its body and also assisted with menstruation, childbirth and protection of children (Ränk 1955: 31).

Thus the most significant gift or all, a new life, was the duty of these female deities that often in ethnographic literature have been relegated to a mere status of wives of male deities (reflecting the patriarchal bias of these interpretations). Moreover, Máttaráhkká could be translated as "Earthmother" (the root word máttár refers to earth and later also to ancestors). Initially, she could have also been an individual ancestress (ivi: 19). Moreover, words for "earth" and "mother" in the everyday Sami language also derive from the same root (eanan and eadni respectively). The role of women and female deities in Sami cosmology and the world order of giving and relations is a neglected area of study but should be noted here when considering Sami notions of giving¹².

The Sami view of the cosmos is reflected, for example, in the Sami drum. Traditionally, the main users of drums in Sami society have been noaidis who were spiritual leaders of siidas, the Sami self-governing units of extended families. They were also healers and visionaries and thus were the first ones to be exterminated amongst the Sami by church and state representatives (Paltro 1998: 28). Today, there are still noaidis but their knowledge and practice exist mostly in hiding. Noaidi used a drum depicting the Sami cosmos with its various elements and deities both to foresee future events and enter a trance which took him or her into journeys in other realms. In this way, a noaidi was able to communicate with animals and dead ancestors.

The goodwill of the deities, spirits and guardians who share the gifts of the land with humans plays a significant role in the well-being and survival of humans. In this system of thought and practice, relations with the spirit world and larger cosmos are secured by sharing the gifts of the land, returning the remains of an animal back to the land, and observing certain ceremonies and restrictions which guaranteed the continuance of the social and cosmic order, preventing serious, and often life-threatening ruptures.

Traditionally, one of the most important ways to maintain established relations and the socio-cosmic order has been the practice of giving to various sieidis. Sieidi, a sacred place of the gift, usually consists of a stone or wood to which the gift was directed. The common location for sieidis are in the vicinity of sacred places, camp grounds or fishing and hunting sites. Stone or rock sieidis is 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 thought they represented merely inert stones

and structures. This is well captured in the description by Sami reindeer herder John Turi in the early twentieth century:

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 (1987: 108)¹⁵.

Sieidis require regular attention and if neglected, the consequences could be drastic: a loss of hunting, fishing or reindeer luck, illness or at worst, death. Although 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 (Kjellström 1987; see also Juuso 1998: 137)¹⁴. These gifts are, particularly in ethnographic literature, almost invariably referred to as "sacrifice", usually defined as a gift (or gift exchange) to gods and nature. As a forfeiture of something for the sake of receiving something else, sacrifice is not voluntary but given under certain pressures or conditions. Jacques Derrida notes:

Sacrifice will always be distinguished from the pure gift (if there is any). The sacrifice proposes an offering but only in the form of a destruction against which it exchanges, hopes for, or counts on a benefit, namely, a surplus-value or at least an amortization, a protection, and a security (1992a: 137).

I argue that giving to sieidis, however, cannot be completely understood through the concept of sacrifice. If sieidi gifts do have aspects of sacrifice, they are not, however, and should not be seen solely as such. They may have other dimensions that can be as significant – if not more so – than 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, however, 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 from the framework of a foreign worldview), it is rather a voluntary expression of a particular worldview. Reflecting the Sami worldview of respect of and intimate relationship with the land, the practice of sieidi gifts is a manifestation of circular or loose reciprocity which should not be confused with restrained reciprocity present in systems of exchange.

It is, of course, possible to argue that any kind of giving is always a form of exchange – that even in the framework of indigenous worldviews gifts are exchanged for collective well-being. Discussing the bear ceremony in which the bones of the bear are ritually returned to nature and the spirit of the animal, Kailo notes that even if it might be "rooted in the exchange of

gifts between hunters, the bear and the other actors of the bear drama [...], the attitudes, mood, values and philosophical context are very different" (forthcoming)¹⁵. She notes that while the ethnographic accounts on bear rituals do not explicitly discuss the underlying paradigms the interpretations are based upon, one can observe the implicit ideology of the nineteenth century nationalism and its unexamined assumptions of "primitive" cultures and male interpretations which stress the primacy of self-interest, guilt and aggression. In other words, these ethnographic interpretations are usually rooted in certain colonial, Eurocentric and patriarchal worldviews, ideologies and values (Kailo, personal communication 2004)¹⁶.

To suggest that the gift necessarily extends beyond interpretations of exchange economy is not to deny the role of the gift also in the economic sphere of indigenous societies. There is a need, however, to question the economic bias that appears to inform the majority of interpretations of the archaic gift (Godbout 1998: 128). In this regard, Mauss's interpretation represents an exception for it recognizes how in archaic societies¹⁷, the gift is a "total social phenomenon" with legal, economic, religious, aesthetic, morphological, political and domestic dimensions (1967: 76-7). Though recognizing the gift as representing various aspects and functions in society, Mauss's interpretation in many occasions tends, however, to emphasize the gift as an exchange economy which is a predecessor of the current market system and thereby implying evolutionary phases from primitivism to more civilized and highly developed forms of exchange. Writes Mauss: "We may then consider that the spirit of gift-exchange is characteristic of societies which have passed the phase of 'total prestation' [...] but have not yet reached the stage of pure individual contract, the money market, sale proper, fixed price, and weighed and coined money" (ivi: 45)¹⁸. In spite of Mauss's ability to see the complexity of the gift in "archaic" societies, the western society and its models serve as the norm to which other societies and practices are inevitably compared.

Different Types of Reciprocity

The underlying logic of the exchange paradigm is that gifts cannot be given unless the receipt of counter-gifts is guaranteed. Reciprocity, usually defined as giving back in kind or quantity, is considered the condition of the gift by many theorists. In Bourdieu's view, the gift can remain unreciprocated only when one gives to an "ungrateful person" (1997: 190). This kind of constrained reciprocity – "a binary give-and-take" (Hyde 1983: 74) – emphasizes the movement inward and toward self, seeking to maintain the independence of the self. It requires that gifts be "paid off" by giving exact value back in order to remain self-contained and independent from others. In constrained reciprocity, based on the worldview of individualism and the notion of the Cartesian subject, dependency on others is considered a burden¹⁹. The desired norm of individualist subject views dependency on other people with trepidation – the common attitude of "no strings attached" or "even steven" supports the existence of separate, self-contained individuals with minimal responsibilities toward the other (cf. Tyler 2002: 78). In its extreme, receiving gifts in this model is considered a burden for it implies owing something of at least equal value to the giver:

Behind every gift lurks the ulterior motive of the giver who expects a return, and it is the recipient's perception of the giver's ulterior motive that impels him to "give as good as he gets" in order to be free of obligations or, conversely, to be locked into an ongoing relationship of reciprocal relationship of reciprocal exchanges over time (*thidem*).

According to this thinking, dependency and responsibility are regarded as something negative – an obligation and a duty external to oneself imposed by others, whether individuals or society at large. According to such an understanding, responsibilities are no longer seen as necessary for the well-being of an individual or community (even if they are) – in other words, the connection between the self and the world has been weakened²⁰. For Hélène Cixous (1981), this view is a reflection of the masculine economy characterized by uneasiness when confronted by generosity. As an alternative, she suggests feminist economies which do not imply a form of exchange but affirmation of generosity and establishment of relationships. This is also a central argument for Genevieve Vaughan who maintains that reciprocity is problematic for it is "a way of maintaining the self-interest of both of the parties involved in the interaction" (1997: 58). Others have also opposed the idea of strict reciprocity of the gift, viewing constrained reciprocity as opposed to direct giving and receiving. In Derrida's (1992a) view, it is the very reciprocity that makes the gift impossible. For him, the prerequisite of the gift is that it is neither recognized nor reciprocated. Once the gift is recognized as a gift, it ceases being a gift and becomes an object of exchange²¹.

Hyde on the other hand suggests that there are two forms of giving, reciprocal and circular, which differ from one another in several ways. Reciprocal giving is a simplest form of gift exchange while in circular giving one has to give blindly, i.e., "to someone from whom I do not receive (and yet I do receive elsewhere)" (Hyde 1983, 16)²². For him, the condition of the gift is not constrained reciprocity but circulation and keeping the gift moving: "[a] gift that cannot move loses its gift properties" (1983: 8). The circulation of gifts is recognized also by Mauss who points out that "it is something other than utility which makes goods circulate in these multifarious and fairly enlightened societies" (1967: 70).

Reciprocity is commonly quoted as one of the central dimensions of indigenous thought. Stemming from world views and practices rooted in the close relationship with the natural world, it encompasses the aspects of sharing and giving back. This kind of reciprocity, however, goes beyond the reductionist "binary give-and-take" and more often takes the form of circular reciprocity and sharing, sometimes also called "ceremonial reciprocity" (cf. Kailo forthcoming, Richter 2001: 14-5)²³. In this kind of reciprocity, gifts are not given first and foremost to ensure a countergift later on, but to actively acknowledge the sense of kinship and coexistence with the world without which survival (of human beings but also other living beings) would not be possible. The main function of circular or ceremonial reciprocity is to affirm the myriad relationships in the world from which stems the sense of collective and individual necessity "to act responsibly toward other forms of life" (Deloria 1999: 51).

This kind of reciprocity thus implies response-ability – ability to respond – ability to remain attuned to the world beyond self and willingness to recognize its existence by means of gifts. This sense of responsibility embedded in the gift is a result of living within an ecosystem and being dependent on it and as indigenous peoples continue to be culturally,

socially, economically and spiritually more directly dependent on their lands and surrounding natural environments. It is quite obvious that this thinking remains a central part of indigenous philosophies while for many other peoples, this previously existing connection and relationship with the physical surroundings has started to erode generations ago as a result of modernization, urbanization and other developments since the Renaissance and Enlightenment which continue today in the form of neocolonialism, capitalism, consumerism and globalization²⁴.

In circular reciprocity, responsibility is commonly regarded as an integral part of being human and inseparable part of one's identity. Okanagan writer Jeannette Armstrong articulates this kind of understanding of responsibility in terms of her relationship to the surrounding environment:

I know the mountains, and by birth, the river is my responsibility. They are part of me. I cannot be separated from my place or my land. When I introduce myself to my own people in my own language, I describe these things because it tells them what my responsibilities are and what my goal is (1996: 461).

Armstrong's notion of self is not limited to her as a individual but inseparably entails the connection to a certain place toward which she has certain responsibilities. By recognizing those responsibilities, she knows her location and her role; in short, she knows who she is (ivi: 462). A common way of carrying out these kinds of responsibilities, besides not treating them as taken-for-granted resources or commodities, is through acknowledging their existence with gifts, and acknowledging their gifts by sharing those gifts with them.

This understanding stems from a perception of the world in which the well-being of the mountains and river is related to her personal well-being and to the well-being of her community. In other words, it is an understanding which does not separate the self from the world to an extent that it would be possible to view human beings as independent from the rest of the creation. This understanding is embedded in the notion that personal and collective responsibility toward the natural environment is the foundation of society (Happynook 2000)²⁵. Nuu-chah-nulth chair of the World Council of Whalers Tom Mexsis Happynook elaborates this understanding as follows:

When we talk about indigenous cultural practices we are in fact talking about responsibilities that have evolved into unwritten tribal laws over millennia. These responsibilities and laws are directly tied to nature and are a product of the slow integration of cultures within their environment and the ecosystems. Thus, the environment is not a place of divisions but rather a place of relations, a place where cultural diversity and bio-diversity are not separate but in fact need each other (2000).

As with many classic interpretations of giving to nature in indigenous worldviews, analyses of indigenous understandings of responsibility are often characterized by assumptions grounded on different worldviews and values which remain blind to other ways of knowing and relating to the world. For instance, Bourdieu contends that the circulation of gifts is nothing more than "mechanical interlockings of obligatory practices" (1997: 198). While it

is not incorrect to suggest that giving to nature is one of the many forms of socialization whereby the individual learns to conform to certain cultural norms and rules, it is however extremely reductionistic and dismissive to interpret indigenous (or any other) gift practices as merely rules which are blindly obeyed and conformed to only out of duty. Such views lack an understanding of different ethics and ways of being in the world and thus deny it from other peoples and cultures. Instead of being mechanically observed practices, giving to nature is the basis of the ethical behaviour and a concrete manifestation of worldviews which emphasize the primacy of relationships and balance in the world upon which the wellbeing of all is contingent.

Notes

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¹ By the term "indigenous peoples", I refer to those peoples and individuals who are considered indigenous as defined in ILO Convention No. 169 (1989) and the Cobo Report (1983). While there is no single, fixed definition of indigenous peoples, the ones in these two documents are widely accepted as informal working definitions. They emphasize the historical continuity in the territory later invaded or occupied by other people as well as the non-dominant status in society. It is important to distinguish between indigenous peoples and (ethnic) minorities, groups or populations. Indigenous peoples are often referred to as peoples who remain colonized or peoples without nation-states.

² Besides Mauss, other early work on this theme includes Durkheim (1964), Lévi-Strauss (1987) and Sahlin (1972).
³ The expression "all my relations" (or "all my relatives") is commonly used by indigenous people in North America as an opening invocation and closing blessing of ceremonies and meetings (e.g., Deloria 1996: 41). Moreover, as Deloria contends, the phrase "describes the epistemology of the Indian worldview, providing the methodological basis for the gathering of information about the world" (1999: 52).

⁴ 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" is considered negative and derogative and today is used particularly by Finns living in Northern Finland (aka Lapland) to refer to themselves to further confuse the already complex and conflicting issue of Sami land rights.

⁵ Oral traditions have often been referred as "folklore". This however has been rejected by many non-Western people. Métis writer and critic Emma LaRocque for instance writes how "[o]ral traditions have been dismissed as savage or primitive folklore. Such dismissal has been based on the self-serving colonial cultural myth that Europeans (and descendants thereof) were/are more developed ("civilized") than Aboriginal peoples ("savage")" (1990: xvi). The common divisions of the Western paradigm between high and low culture, literature and folklore, history and story, oral and written, have been increasingly put under a critical, deconstructive light by more recent theories of poststructuralism, postmodern and feminist discourses, and of course, by growing critique of indigenous (and other non-Western) peoples themselves.

⁶ For instance in Genesis (1: 28), human beings are commanded to "Be fruitful and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it". Later this understanding was secularized by the Cartesian epistemology characterized by dualism, mechanistic worldview and detachment (assumptions which emanated from classical Greek philosophy, particularly Plato's articulations). As Susan Bordo notes, the separation of the self and the world (human/nature) was not an innocent exercise but was characterized with explicit attachment of value and hierarchy to those categories. Mind was elevated to possess godly qualities such as freedom, will and consciousness, whereas body and nature represented "rextensa", unconscious, brute materiality, "totally devoid of mind and thought" (Bordo 1987: 99). This thinking continues today in neoliberal corporate ideologies and practices which regard nature as a potential for economic profit, posing serious risks on the survival of indigenous peoples, communities, cultures and livelihoods. See, for instance, the International Cancun Declaration of Indigenous Peoples (2003) which states that the economic globalization and neoliberal agenda and policies have resulted in a situation where indigenous peoples rights to self-determination, to land, their knowledge, culture and identities are grossly violated.

⁷ For instance, Sahlin considers the gift as "the social contract for the primitives" (1972: 169).

⁸ Also Berking argues that in "archaic" societies, nobody is free to escape the duty of giving which "cannot simply be equated with the reproduction cycle of social community", including the dead and gods (1999: 34).

⁹ On violence in contemporary indigenous communities, see, for example, LaRocque (1993). She indicates, like many others, that the main cause for the present-day social problems and violence in Native communities is the ongoing process of colonization. LaRocque argues: "There are indications of violence against women in Aboriginal societies prior to European contact. [...] It should not be assumed that patriarchy necessarily prevented men from exhibiting oppressive behaviour toward women. [...] There is little question, however, that European invasion exacerbated whatever the extent, nature or potential violence there was in original cultures" (75).

¹⁰ Hyde calls this type of gifts as "threshold gifts" or "gifts of passage" (1983: 40, 41).

¹¹ Sami scholar of religion Louise Bäckman notes that "In pre-Christian times the dead were buried in individual graves in the wilderness" (1978: 30).

¹² It would be worthwhile to pursue this line of thought further but such an undertaking is, however, beyond the scope of this inquiry.

¹³ My English translation.

¹⁴ The Sami "religion" has drawn the attention of outsiders for centuries and it has been the subject of innumerable ethnographic, anthropological and religious studies around the world. See, for instance, Ahlback (1987), Bäckman and Hultkrantz (1978), Holmberg (1987), Karsten (1952), Manker (1938, 1950), Pentikäinen (1995), Schaffer (1975), Sommarström (1991) and Vorren (1962).

¹⁵ According to Kailo (forthcoming), the bear ritual is "an effort to give back and pay tribute to the totem animal [who is] also venerated as half relative". Traditionally, the Sami have also conducted bear ceremonies.

¹⁶ Kailo also questions the often taken-for-granted view that the western assumptions of human nature, for instance, are somehow more correct and legitimate than those of indigenous peoples and that such considerations are always necessarily interpretations as humanity or human nature cannot be scientifically measured.

¹⁷ The term "archaic societies" is used by Mauss to refer to indigenous and other non-western societies that maintain a vital and active link to their social and cultural practices. To discuss the logic of the gift in indigenous societies and thought does not imply that similar values do not exist in other societies and cultures. Values of giving and sharing as well as the sense of responsibility for the other are present in many other cultures and religions, including Christianity (see, for example, analyses in Derrida 1992b and 1997).

¹⁸ Bataille (1988) is, however, critical of this view, demonstrating the shortcomings of mechanistic model in analyzing human existence which seeks to reduce all of its aspects to classical economic balance between production and consumption.

¹⁹ Here I refer to individualism as rooted particularly in Renaissance humanism and characterized by a strong emphasis on unique, self-sufficient, independent individuals whose possibilities and freedoms are viewed as limitless. This does not imply that the notion of individual is nonexistent in indigenous communities. Emma LaRocque asserts that the question of collective vs. individual is more complex than generally perceived by many non-Natives and Natives alike. She argues that "The issue of 'individual' versus 'collective' rights is a perfect example of Natives resorting to a cultural framework when boxed in by western liberal democratic tradition that are associated with individualism. Perhaps unavoidably, Native leaders have had to overemphasize collective rights to make the point that such rights are even culturally feasible. However, the fact that native cultures were egalitarian in organization does not mean Native peoples acted on some instinct akin to a buffalo herd with no regard for the well-being of individuals!" (1997: 87).

²⁰ Radical exclusion and hierarchization of realms of the self and the world has a long history in the intellectual tradition of the West, starting from the Greek philosophers and further articulated by Descartes. Though it is beyond the scope of my inquiry to delve into this in detail at this point, it would be good to point out that this is one of the cardinal differences between philosophical traditions of the western and indigenous worlds (cf. e.g. Silko 1996: 37 and Mander 1991: 212-24). Armstrong has also pointed out how the traditional Okanagan teachings and prophecies caution "that we are cutting ourselves off from the ability to live well by distancing ourselves from the natural world. This is what my generation has been told by our elders. We are cutting off the abilities that we previously had that gave us the best chance to be in a healthy relationship with ourselves as people and with the rest of the world" (2000: 7).

²¹ It is beyond the scope of this article to discuss Derrida's argument in detail. In my doctoral dissertation, I suggest along the lines of Derrida's (and others') thought that due to commonplace, often sanctioned ignorance in the academy, indigenous epistemologies remain an impossible gift (Kuokkanen 2004). A longer version of this article can also be found in my dissertation.

²² As examples of circular gift practices, as well as several stories from European folklore tradition. For the *kula*, see particularly Malinowski (1922, esp. ch 3).

²³ This is not to assume, however, that circulation of gifts (or goods) exists only in indigenous or "pre-capitalist" societies. As Rodolphe Gasché notes, modern economy is also characterized by circulation. Yet the circulation of the modern economy "seems to be somehow deficient because a certain privilege of accumulation tends to produce absolute impoverishment. The privilege of accumulation makes closure of the circle of circulation as well as its compensatory action simply impossible" (1997: 107).

²⁴ These differences are not, of course, absolute between the different systems of thought. Many modern concepts, for example, are imbued with a Christian tradition of hospitality.

²⁵ Happyhook observes how in the colonial context, these cultural responsibilities have been forced into a framework of "Aboriginal rights" to be defended usually "in an adversarial system of justice". These rights are, however, at their root first and foremost responsibilities (2000: 11).

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