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Let's Vote Who is Most Authentic! Politics of Identity in Contemporary Sami Literature

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Introduction

In mainstream literature, the well-known image of the Sami¹ has been created by non-Sami writers. Since the 18th century, explorers, scientists and other adventurers have been visiting *Sápmi* (Samiland) and other northern areas in Europe, and have written books about their experiences. They have described both the fabulous nature and the people living in the region. According to these books, the Sami are small, dark, filthy and ugly with slanted eyes, flat noses and high cheekbones. They are as calm as their reindeer, hospitable, frank, modest, healthy and happy people whose only bad habit is drinking too much alcohol. By these explorers, the Sami were admired for their freedom and unspoilt nature, reflecting Rousseau's notions of "the Noble Savage." These descriptions by non-Sami visitors also created the persistent myth that only the reindeer herding Sami are the real Sami (see e.g. Nousiainen).

Even in Finland, school children were reading similar stories about the Sami as late as the 1950's and 1960's. Sakari Topelius, the respected 'story-teller of all Finland,' described the Sami in his famous book *Maamme-kirja* (1954, Our Land), which was used as a text book in all Finnish primary schools, as follows:

In summer time, a Lapp village is not a pleasant sight. Everywhere on the ground one can see fish bowels, fish scales, rotten fish and other garbage, which contaminates the air. From the low doorways of the tents crawls a group of people covered by dirt. They themselves are not bothered at all... [the] Lapp's body is short, the forehead low, eyes small and cheekbones prominent. By nature he is slow, melancholic and morose. He is blamed to be envious, relentless and shrewd, but others thank his good heart, his hospitality and chaste behaviour, when he is not tempted by alcohol. (Topelius 118-9)²

These images based merely on the physical appearance of the Sami and quick notions of their nature after a short acquaintance have spread all over the world and are still the basis of stereotypical attitudes and biased views of the Sami, even in the countries within whose borders the Sami live today. These stereotypes are not only incorrect but they may also have an impact on the formation of a person's Sami identity by creating false demands of 'authenticity.'

Due to the powerful stereotypes, the images of the Sami people created by Sami themselves are overlooked. In this article, my intention is to study the representations of Sami identity in contemporary Sami literature, as it both reflects and creates reality in various ways. For this study, I have chosen writings from four Sami writers: Kirsti Paltto, Jovvna-Ánde Vest, Inger-Mari Aikio and Kerttu Vuolab. Three of the writers are female and one is male. All are from the Finnish side of *Sápmi* and three are from the Deatnu Valley. These divisions effectively represent the current situation in Sami literature: most contemporary Sami writers come from the Finnish side of *Sápmi*, particularly from *Vuovdaguoika* in the Deatnu Valley. This might be the result of the strong and lively storytelling tradition of the region and also thanks to the influence of Hans-Aslak Guttorm, a writer who also taught at the local school.

Definitions of Literature

Literature is the storage of human being's knowledge, understanding and inventiveness. It is also the foundation stone of humanity, survival, language and learning skills. Outsiders used to think that the Sami did not have literature before our first books were published. But we have had our own literature since time immemorial and we still have a rich oral storytelling tradition. (Kerttu Vuolab 1995:27)

One of the most persistent prejudices in the Western literary canon is that only certain categories of experience can be recognized as 'literature' (Ashcroft et al. 88). We have learned that literature means written books and that the existence of literature is a sign of a 'civilized' people. For peoples on the margins, writing has often been a political and social act and its collective dimension has been significant. Minority and Indigenous writers have often stressed their critical and oppositional relationship towards mainstream societies. Paula Gunn Allen, a Pueblo-Laguna writer, has said that

literature is one facet of a culture. The significance of a literature can be best understood in terms of the culture from which it springs, and the purpose of literature is clear only when the reader understands and accepts the assumptions on which the literature is based. (Allen 54)

Within the Western tradition, written literature is regarded as a crucial step towards 'a civilized society' entering the sphere of 'culture.' What precedes written literature is only the folklore of a 'people of nature.' For many Indigenous scholars, however, using the concept 'literature' to refer only to written texts implies judging everything else – the whole storytelling tradition – as being subordinate to written forms. If literature is to be redefined from the Indigenous point of view, oral traditions must be included since they play a crucial role also in contemporary writing. Agnes Grant for instance defines North American Native literature as "Native people telling their own stories in their own ways, unfettered by criteria from another time and place" (Grant 124).

Evolving Sami Literature

When we speak of Sami art, it's worth remembering that we have our own cultural background, but that we have adopted a quantity of words from neighbouring nations – words like war and hell – and art and artists... Walls used to be unknown in the Sami culture, and nobody hung up pictures. When you think how heavy books are, they're not the first thing one puts into one's supply bag when one heads for the mountains to herd reindeer. (Valkeapää 58-9)

Sami literature has always reflected, in its own specific ways, social phenomena and responded to them. In the history of Sami literature, two upward trends can be seen which are clearly connected to historical events of Samiland. The birth of written Sami fiction and the press occurred in the early 20th century when the actions of the states and the pressure of dominant societies aroused tensions between settlers and the Sami. The Sami writers of that time, such as Anders Larsen, Matti Aikio, Johan Turi and Pedar Jalvi described the prevailing conditions of Samiland in various ways (Lehtola 40).

In the initial stages of written Sami literature, the Sami language has been crucial in the struggle against cultural alienation. For some writers, it has been the most important reason to write. According to the late writer and teacher Hans-Aslak Guttorm, it is

possible to describe Sami culture *only* in the Sami language, because an individual's experience 'lives' in the words of the person's mother tongue (ibid. 49). Most of today's Sami writers could not agree more with Guttorm who is considered a connecting link between Sami oral and written traditions. Thus, contemporary Sami literature is still written in the Sami language (with the exception of few writers) despite all the odds the writers are faced with.³

Since most current Sami writers did not receive their education in Sami, they have been forced to learn to write in their mother tongue in later life. Their readership is quite small (although eager) because many Sami are not able nor used to reading their Sami; a factor complicated by the fact that a common North Sami orthography was not established until 1979. The few Sami publishing houses (Davvi Girji, Dat and Sámi Girjijt) that exist are so starved of funding that some of the *Sápmi*'s best known writers are forced to publish their own material. Lack of funding makes the publishing process very slow, as writers usually have to wait a year or two to see their manuscripts realized as books. In spite of the difficulties Sami writers experience writing in their mother tongue, there is no indication that they are willing to change their language of expression. The reason for writing in Sami is the maintenance of the Sami language as a strong and living language. There have also been some institutional attempts at improving the current situation: the Sami Council, for instance, has an on-going campaign to encourage people to read more Sami literature. Moreover, Sami educational institutions have also arranged courses for Sami adults to learn reading and writing in their mother tongue.

Sami women were at the vanguard of the breakthrough in contemporary Sami literature in the 1970's and the 1980's. The first Sami woman writer was Kirsti Paltto with her short story collection based on traditional storytelling called *Soaggu* (1971, Marriage Proposal). After her, many other Sami women started to write, particularly poetry and stories for children. The most prominent Sami woman writers include Kirsti Paltto, Rauni-Magga Lukkari, Elle-Márijá Vars, Inger-Mari Aikio and Kerttu Vuolab. The first Sami novel, *Arbeatman luohiti* (The Yoik⁴ of the Inherited Land) was published in 1981 and was written by Eino Guttorm. Until then, Sami writers were educated people who left their homes to go to study in larger towns in the south, and thereby were forced to negotiate their Saminess in new ways and to find new ways of expression. Eino Guttorm was the first writer who stayed

in his own environment and started to write from that position (ibid. 48).

Niils-Aslak Valkeapää also started writing in the early 1970's. He has written several poetry collections which have been translated into many languages (Finnish, Norwegian, English, German). He is also a musician and visual artist, a 'multi-artist' who does not want to be put into any particular category. *Beaivi, áhččázan* (*The Sun, My Father* 1997), which is a collage of poems and historical photographs, was published in 1988. For six years, Valkeapää collected photographs of Sami from museums across Europe and America for the book, which is a conscious attempt to create a Sami national epic. It can also be read as a creation story; the poems and pictures start from the time before the existence of human beings and ends with death. Moreover, it is a polemical statement on Sami rights and a Sami history and interpretation of colonialism.

Kirsti Paltto: Let's vote who is the most authentic!

Since the early 1970's, Kirsti Paltto has written poems, short stories, stories for children, theatre and radio plays and other writings concerning many different elements of Sami culture. In 1987, she published her first novel *Guhtoset dearvan min bohccot* (Pasture in Peace, My Reindeer), which tells about a Sami village just before the Second World War. The Finnish translation *Voijaa minun poroni* (1986) was shortlisted as a candidate for Finlandia literature prize in 1986. The sequel novel *Guržo luottat* (Tracks of the Omen, translated in Finnish *Juokse nyt naalin poika* 1993) came out in 1991.

Paltto's books are deeply rooted in Sami traditions. They are based on description of a whole community. For this kind of storytelling, common amongst Indigenous peoples' literature, she has been criticized for 'fragmented' and 'unfinished' works (Aikio 1987). On the other hand, it has been claimed that Paltto's novels are structured like a Western novel "and thus falls much more easily into a class of European literature than just Sami literature" (Dana 1995:8). According to the writer herself, it is only the structure which might resemble Western models; otherwise the novels clearly follow the Sami storytelling tradition (personal comment 1995; see also Dana 8).

Paltto's novel *256 Golláza* (1992, 256 Golden Coins) is a satirical work of fiction about a people who call themselves 'orbbežat' (Orphans) and who live far up north beneath Ursa Ma-

for⁵ on an island called *Goddeshápmoaiivi* (Lemming Top). According to one anthropologist, they call themselves ‘orbbežat’ because they feel like lonely orphans on that far north island, in the middle of the Arctic Ocean’s floating ice. Near *Goddeshápmoaiivi*, there are three other islands which are also inhabited by *orbbežat*. These four islands are not independent states as larger states have already marked each island to themselves a long time ago. These four states are called *Hoasša* (*Equisetaceae* species, cf. Sami word *Ruošša* for Russia), *Suorbma* (Finger, cf. Sami word *Suopma* for Finland), *Ruolla* (Evil, cf. Sami word *Ruotta* for Sweden) and *Nordalas* (Nudger, cf. Sami word *Norga* for Norway).

256 *Golláza* is a detective story set at the end of the 20th century and as the prologue tells it, it is a story about money, or rather about the lack of it, and what happens when the big world starts roaring in *Bollomohkki*, a village on *Goddeshápmoaiivi* Island. One November morning a young man called Bieraš is woken up early in the midst of winter’s darkest and coldest season. The phone call is from the panic stricken municipality treasurer Begá claiming all the municipality’s savings have been stolen. Only the empty box where the 256 Golden Coins were held has been found in the middle of Begá’s office. Bieraš is asked to work as a detective to find the thief – according to Begá, the police cannot be brought in yet, as there are important guests from *Ovttastuvvan Jurohpa Stáhtain* (Integrated European States)⁶ visiting *Bollomohkki* and the ensuing public chaos would have a negative impact on the guests.

The tone of the story is highly sarcastic and critical of both home and the ‘big world’ outside. At the same time, the story is overtly humorous: some of the characters gain comical features and the central theme of the novel, the search for the 256 Golden Coins, becomes a farce: the money was eaten by the cleaner’s dog. But there are also serious, sorrowful elements in the story. It represents the current situation in *Sápmi* in a very straightforward way covering issues such as self-determination, the expansion of tourism onto the traditional reindeer grazing lands, the language, land title and human rights, nature conservation, use of natural resources, the activities of researchers, the controversial role of Christianity and the exotic ‘Wild North.’ There are (at least) two groups whose interests clash: those “backward fanatics who want to be even more backward” and those who run after development and money – themes in many Indigenous peoples’ societies. Moreover, as it becomes clear in the book, the division is not simply a Sami – non-Sami one.

Saminess in Palitto’s novel 256 *Golláza* is extremely multifaceted: on one hand, there are old people who are afraid of “Natural Development.”

You need to believe that we orbbeš people won’t exist anymore in this world, if we don’t start protecting and defending ourselves. I don’t like this tourism nonsense. They don’t belong here. I’m already an old man and I know how orbbeš people used to live in a way that they survived in this tough world. Our life is in peace, in the lap of the forest, the hills, the rivers and the lakes. The big world will drown us and our life. They coach us into a too easy life and we won’t go up to the mountains as we used to. In the cold weather, young people don’t dare to go outside the house. And without a snowmobile they can’t get anywhere no matter how good the weather is. They can hardly ski. That’s why I hold a different opinion. (68)

On the other, there are the modern, educated ‘traditionalists’ who promote the culture, language and Sami values and who demand land rights and public services in their mother tongue. Some even dream about their own state:

I know that some dream about an independent orbbeš state, Begá flared up. I guess you too. But we can’t push time backwards, whatever comes. We will stay within the Suorpma state and other orbbeš will stay within the states where they belong. A new time has arrived – also for God-desápmoaiivi and orbbeš fanatics shouldn’t try to get us back into the goahit⁷ time. Do you understand? (*Palitto* 44)

There are also those like *Begá*, ‘red apples,’ according to whom the orbbeš language is not worth the paper it is written upon (*Palitto* 161). There are also non-Sami ‘wanna-bes’ who want to learn the language, probably even find a reindeer herding man and start making Sami handicrafts and helping at the reindeer round-ups. There is an interesting conversation between Bieraš and two non-Sami women one night after coming from the bar:

‘Are orbbeš language and orbbeš life so holy that no outsider can touch them?’ Pirjo got annoyed.
‘Oh no, for my part I don’t mind!’ Bieraš waved with his hand. ‘Dear Pirjo, for my part you can be whatever you want. But wouldn’t you let me also be what I want? If you want to be orbbeš, nobody will prevent that.’

'That's not true! There are also those who don't want us to become orbbeš,' said Anná-Liisse.

'Like who?' Bieraš doubted.

'Those model orbbeš people who have one suorbmalaš parent or grandparent.

Those types who try to watch orbbeš people's blood.'

'Do those kind of people exist?' Pirjo asked.

'They do!' Anná-Liisse was getting angry.

'I say only that our language and life aren't toys which can be grabbed when you feel like and then thrown away when not interested anymore. At least my language and life are one with my blood and the whole body. That is not anything that can be dragged around or traded, that's all I can say.' (Paltto 129-130)

As Paltto suggests in her novel, Sami society is not homogeneous nor is it without conflicts. The Sami are not a peaceful, humble people living in harmony with nature or with each other. She also discusses the 'right' Saminess: through the character of Bieraš, she considers what it might be and asks "why don't they organize an election on who is the most authentic orbbeš?" (Paltto 32). Bieraš himself is an unemployed young man who has been living away from his hometown and has returned only recently. Back home, he feels he is an outsider, a strange bird, although according to himself, he is a frank person who neither schemes nor pretends. In *Bollomohkki*, he has few upon whom he can rely; there are too many who just want to trade gossip about your property or your family – it seems that everybody is a product of one's family and tied to those qualities forever. According to him, people in the village do not seem to care much about other people's thoughts, feelings and values or if someone is in trouble or hurt by the cold-hearted world. What really matters is physical appearance. In *Bollomohkki*, your value depends on your clothes and your car – even owning a house is not considered as important as owning a car.

Paltto's novel is a realistic representation of Sami society. After coming out, it was considered by some critics a protest against the European Union. For others, the story was too critical and too close to the bone. Yet as Paltto points out, the reality is often more complex than the idealistic and sometimes even romantic notions of harmony. Perhaps the best strategy of resistance in Paltto's novel is a certain kind of double communication: a reader can take it as an entertaining story that makes fun of municipality and EU politics and their politicians (both Sami and non-Sami), as a joke

about the prevalent situation of Sami society or as protest literature and an oppositional stand against the current state of affairs.

Paltto is critical towards everyone by using the power of laughter. Many Indigenous writers maintain that a unique sense of humour, scintillating satire and dry understatements combined with a twinkle in the eye are the strongest weapons in the cultural struggle against assimilation (e.g. Awiakta 210-1). We have to learn to laugh at our oppressors but also at ourselves, even in grief.

Jovvna-Ánde Vest: The Big World Makes You Excited

Jovvna-Ánde Vest was born in Roavvesavvon, in the Deatnu Valley but currently lives in Paris. His first autobiographical novel *Čáhcegáddái nohká boazobálggis* (The Reindeer Path Ends by the River) was published in 1988. In the novel, Vest describes his family and particularly his father from the 1950's to the 1970's. Central to the novel is the writer's examination of the father-son relationship. Everyday life on the Deatnu River is also represented in a very vivid manner. Veli-Pekka Lehtola writes:

Where 'people of nature' have been seen especially in ethnographic and ethnologic descriptions as solidly traditional and practical, even one-sided people, Vest draws an entirely opposite picture of his father. His hero, 'Little-Vest' is a Deatnu Sami, who instead of everyday work, gets excited in everything new and unpractical like a child. (67)

Through his father and the rest of his family, Vest describes the modernization of *Sápmi* after the Second World War. Vest's father is the first one to buy a tractor in the region. Later the motorbike and the camera also come into the picture. The change from a traditional way of life to a modernized one was not easy in *Sápmi* and, in his novel, Vest illustrates clearly how it was faced by one family (ibid, 67-8).

His second novel, *Kapteainna ruvsu* (The Captain's Rose), which I have chosen for this paper, was published in 1991 and differs radically from Vest's first novel. *Kapteainna ruvsu* is located far away from Samiland, in the 'New World' behind the 'Big Ocean.' It is a story about Kapo, a Sami man, who as a child dreams of going to see the big world. Kapo is a descendant of the famous *Guovža-Dávvet* who had arrived in Kapo's home region from the East and gradually gained wealth and fame as a healer. During fishing trips with his father, young Kapo loves hearing everything about his great-grandfather but also his father's stories

from abroad which he has learnt during his times on a fishing boat. A strange longing fills young Kapo's mind when he hears about people living on other continents on the other side of the world. He decides that one day he will leave *Dávvetnjárga*, his home, and its simple life (Vest 18).

When that day finally comes, he signs upon an old ship called the Esmeralda. He spends a few years working hard and sometimes even doubting whether he has made the right decision in leaving his home. Later, he ends up in a city in the 'New World,' not really knowing what he will do on this new continent. He ends up in a cozy little guesthouse called Madam Sally's Oasis. Madam Sally, a friendly woman feeling sorry for this strange backpacker, helps him adjust to his new life. She easily arranges citizenship for him, helps him with shopping and gives him a job as the guesthouse janitor:

That man has lots to learn, the hostess thought. First, he has to buy proper city clothing and leave those ugly patched rags behind. And if he just takes care of himself a bit, it might even be possible to make a man out of him. Well-meaning Sally wanted to help the permanent guest even more when she saw how unskilled and incapable he was. He was not like the others who came from beyond the seas who immediately started looking for work and worrying about the future. But Kapo – the poor fellow was like God's bird who does not worry about the next day. (Vest 49)

At the guesthouse there is also a cook, a young woman called Nelly McCullish whose parents came to the 'New World' when she was very young. She is a lively, cheerful red haired woman and a hardworking and diligent cook, whose presence in the guesthouse is received with great pleasure. Since their very first acquaintance, Nelly makes Kapo feel restless and soon he is in love with her. After some problems with Sally, who behaves possessively as if Nelly was her daughter for whom only the best man was enough (and Kapo is definitely not that), Nelly and Kapo get married and start the family life. For many years, Kapo has dreamt of having a son who will be named Paul David, after the Captain of the Esmeralda and Kapo's great-grandfather *Guovža-Dávvet*. He has also thought of speaking his mother tongue to his son in order to have proper chats without the need of trying to remember strange words. Life does not however give him a son, but rather a

daughter named Sally Elisabeth to whom, for some reason, Kapo does not speak his own language. One day, he thinks, he will teach her a few words.

In the 'New World' Kapo also learns the meaning of money. With the help of money, Sally arranges his stay in the country. "Money is so powerful here that you can get almost everything" Sally explains to Kapo (Vest 51), teaching him to take his savings to the bank:

He flips it, wonders at the stamp with an eagle's picture. And that strange number. Into that fit everything he owned. For the first time in his life he wanted to become rich. Get rich! Get rich! there was a voice in his mind. Lots of money and possessions! Kapo was also caught by the lust for money, which made people run. (Vest 54-55)

Samineess is not mentioned once in *Kapteinna ruvsu*. Kapo, the main character, does not speculate about his identity nor do others ask him about it. Kapo does not miss his home back in *Dávvetnjárga*, yet he is not fully satisfied with his present life either. He does not complain, but he thinks that it would be nice to have somebody to speak with in his own mother tongue. Despite this, he does not teach the language to his child which is probably because of the outside pressure felt by many Sami in non-Sami speaking environments. There are, however, a few glimpses of Kapo's 'difference' from city people:

But there was one thing on which they could not agree. The woman was a city person and as such she used to rambling in all kinds of shopping malls and shops. There she used to look at nice things, compare prices and consider if it was worth buying or really needed. It could take hours in a large shopping mall. At the end, Kapo felt dizzy, his knees became sore and his eyes could hardly see the bright beauty. (Vest 129)

Instead of nicknacks in the shopping malls, Kapo pays attention and recognizes people's moods and their physical condition. These skills seem to be inherited from *Guovža-Dávvet* who paid attention to every small landmark in order to survive in nature. From nature, he used to read directions and was also able to see from other small things whether it would be sunny or rainy (Vest 94). Kapo has left his Samineess behind but nevertheless has retained some characteristics which remind him of his background. His Samineess resides

in his traits and in his outlook. Others consider him to be 'different,' a simple and unmannerly man who first is under Sally's and later under Nelly's control.

Vest's novel is storytelling without extraordinary events. It could be considered a self-conscious, self-healing story for the writer himself living far from *Sápmi* as he does. In many ways, Kapo is an example of an urban Sami living outside Samiland. Others struggle with their identities asking and questioning their Saminess, others become assimilated and do not want to identify themselves as Sami for various reasons. In a way, assimilation could also be seen as a survival strategy, a response to the outside pressures particularly if they become too overwhelming to resist.

Inger-Mari Aikio: Words are Nourishment

Inger-Mari Aikio was born in *Buolmatjávri*, the northernmost village within Finnish borders. Her first poetry book *Gollebiekkat almni dievva* (Sky Full of Golden Clouds) came out in 1989. Since then she has published two poetry collections: *Jiehki vuolde ruonas gitta* (1992, The Green Spring Under the Glacier) and *Silkeguobbara takca* (1996, The Cream of a Silky Mushroom). Her poetry is concise and it rarely deals directly with questions of Saminess. Like Jovvna-Ánde Vest, she has admitted her inability to reflect traditional Saminess and values (Lehtola 71).

In Aikio's poetry, nature's presence is palpable. The way she deals with the surrounding environment is one of the most striking features of her writing. Taking a closer look at a few poems from her collection *Gollebiekkat almni dievva*, I will particularly consider the relationship between the poet and nature and how her words evoke nature. The first poem is both a wish and a love poem, where creatures of nature are part of the two people's relationship. *Bižus* (Golden Plover, *Pluvialis apricaria*) is a common bird up in the cloudberry swamps of *Sápmi*, whose whistle follows you everywhere:

vare moat oktii	if we once
salošeimme duoddar alde	could embrace atop the fell
allin ja áidna olmmožin	high and as a single person
boaimmáža biškkanas	scream of eagle
guhkes máidnasa álgun	beginning a tale
bihčoša luohti viidnin.	yoik of bižus like wine
njála suollemas geahčeastat	sly look of Arctic fox
balggisin vilges batvvaidd	pathway to the white clouds'
čábbaseamos máidnasii.	beauteous tale. (8)

In this poem, the central element is a wish to become one with the person she loves. Despite the theme of love between two human beings, nature plays a significant role in this relationship. The poet wants to become *as a single person*. Although the reference is made to a human being, there is also the possibility of a desire to become one with nature. Different elements of nature are part of her experience and feelings of love; they also show the *pathway to the white clouds' beauteous tale*.

The following poem is a critique of the disastrous effects on the land caused by human beings:

jurddašmeahttu giehta	thoughtless hand
gaikkoda soahkelastta.	rips off a birch leaf.
gihpu coahkká	pain pulses
rukkes bárrun.	like a red wave.
oasážat gahččet eatnamii	little shreds fall onto earth,
isket njammat goiki suonaide	try to suck into their drying veins
beaivváža dálkkodan suolnni	dew which the sun has healed. (22)

In the poem, a person deliberately violates nature: a human hand rips a leaf from a birch. The pain caused by this act is illustrated in a very tangible manner: it is a red wave, like blood bleeding from a wound. It is the concrete pain of nature which we often ignore although we can see it. This reflects the idea that human beings are hurting nature with their actions, ignorance, pollution and technology. The only cure nature can receive is the sun's medicated dew. Although Aikio does not consider herself an activist in the traditional sense (Kailo & Helander 78), she can still sympathize with the pain caused to nature. Perhaps her accusations are hidden; without finger pointing the reader can still sense nature's pain.

The following poem is about *skábma*, the winter season when the sun does not rise above the horizon, and about the seemingly quiet nature:

seavdnjadasa gufhtariid	candles in the eyes
čalmmiin gintalat	of the <i>gufhtars</i> of darkness
dorkkas skilžžit.	ice drops in fur.
geahppa skilla	a light tingle
duottarravddain.	in the fells.
násttit savkkástallet	stars whispering
gižahit buollaša.	creaking the cold.
lihkastat bulžu	movement freezes
varra jávohuvvá	blood quiets down
dušše vuorddanas coahkká.	nothing but expectation pulsating. (26)

The poem is visually very intense. It is not difficult to see the image she is drawing in front of the reader's eyes or even to hear the light tingle or feel the cold. She also makes a reference to Sami oral tradition, to "gufhtars," who are the underground people who resemble the Sami in many ways.

In these three poems by Inger-Mari Aikio, the permanent presence of nature is outright. It is expressed in the atmosphere and images that she creates, but also through her use of words: they are natural and concrete. Her poems are sprinkled with only a few abstract words and only a few words refer to human beings. In most of her poems, nature's presence is an inseparable part of the atmosphere she creates. Many times, her writing resembles a certain kind of animism where nature and the human being become one, or at least the border between these two elements is very vague. In Aikio's poems it is difficult to say where nature ends and the human being appears: "movement freezes/blood quiets down/nothing but expectation pulsating" (26). She discusses nature through her own experiences and feelings and vice versa. The images she reveals are not merely metaphors or observations but events of which she is a part. She does not have to step into nature from the outside, she is already there with her poems. The vicinity of nature and Saminess intertwine; nature is the everyday life through which she lives.

Her use of words reflects the traditional Sami way of life; she does not want to waste words but uses them only as much as is needed. In many poems, she discusses the ways in which words are nourishment for her and the very act of writing is an inner cleaning process. The power of words is strongly connected to nature: single words are like visual tracks leading the reader's mind to create their own images; she 'drops' highly visual words onto a page for a reader to pick up. Thus she invites the reader to become a part of the poem as well as a part of her experience in nature.

In Western literary tradition, nature writing has been defined as a distinctive genre emanating from essays describing the surrounding nature. In Indigenous writing, however, it is not limited to a specific genre; nature is present in almost all the literature. Indigenous peoples' relationship with nature and land is interdependent and continuous throughout annual cycles rather than dominant and objectified, as it has often been in Western tradition springing from Biblical authority (Schweninger 47). Despite her own comments that she does not deal with Saminess in her writing, Inger-Mari Aikio discusses one of the most important elements of Sami

culture – the land. This demonstrates the way in which core elements of Saminess stay close and bear significance, no matter how a person feels estranged or alienated from 'traditional' values or Saminess.

Kerttu Vuolab: School as a Source of Insecurity and Emptiness

Kerttu Vuolab was born in *Vuovdaguoika*, in the Deatnu Valley. Her first book *Golbma skihpáračča* (Three Friends) came out in 1979 and the second, *Ánde ja Risten jagi fárus* (Ánde and Risten along with the year) in 1990. They are both children's books illustrated by the writer. Her latest book, *Čeppari čáráhus* (1994), is a novella, a story about a young Sami girl starting school. *Čeppari čáráhus* is set in the late 1960's. Máret's experiences and feelings resemble those of the writer's: after starting school, she feels increasingly estranged from home as she has to stay in the residential school for most of the year. In the residential school, she misses the security of home, yet at home, she feels alienated. Therefore, she often has the feeling that she does not properly belong anywhere (Vuolab, 1994: 5).

The story begins with Máret packing her clothes in order to get ready for the first trip to school. She is slightly afraid of her forthcoming life and wonders whether she will learn anything there at all. Her family escorts her to the post bus, which takes the children to school. On the bus Máret checks out the other children: "Nobody has a Sami hat. Only me. And those big girls have such nice curly hair. If only I had the same..." (Vuolab, 1994:12). Máret quickly learns that school life is full of orders and restrictions and that timekeeping is particularly important. She is roomed with an older Finnish girl called Tuulikki. Tuulikki is disappointed to get her as a roommate as she wanted to share a room with her own friends. From the very beginning Tuulikki and her friends tease and mock Máret. They also forbid her to speak Sami. The girls pick on her clothes and once they rush into Máret's and Tuulikki's room and start messing up Máret's closet. They pull all her cloths down from the shelves and laugh at what they see:

'You have forgotten your lasso and the hay for your shoes!' Hannele cackles. 'And where are you going when wearing that gákti?' Ulla giggles.

'Maybe you're going to dress up so that the teachers also from the South can see a real Sami girl,' Tuulikki starts.

'That will make our school real fancy and even the tourists will find it worth seeing! There is a student in this school

who is such an authentic Sami that her clothes still smell of smoke!' The girls start laughing together.

'Perhaps you don't even have a real house as a home. When your father brought you here with reindeer bulls, which mountain goahti did your family stay at?' (Vuolab, 1994:25)

Máret's hiding place is the washroom where she runs away from the girls. Behind the locked doors, she cries until she falls asleep. She often escapes to the forest where she can talk with the creatures of nature; once when lost, she suddenly realizes that she can understand the crow's croaking and the languages of other creatures as well, who tell her how to get back to the school. Only in the forest Máret has friends to whom she can talk:

'I don't want to go back to the residence. It is much nicer here. Here I have friends. In the residence I'm so lonely and others mock me all the time!'

'I also used to be very lonely in this swamp in the beginning and I used to think that everybody is in my way. But then I started to practice to stretch towards the sun. So that's how I started to get on. If you don't get on with yourself then you won't get on with anybody. But it is also true that nobody gets on alone. I would have been taken by the wind a long time ago already if I hadn't friends helping me to hold onto the ground,' the hay tells. (Vuolab, 1994:67)

In the forest she also runs into a young reindeer herding man who used to think that attending school is much easier than working hard in the woods, but who changes his mind after hearing Máret's story. Máret is also teased as Čeppari čáráhus,¹⁰ a swot who is the teachers' favourite. Máret herself is happy to hear somebody praising her after all the mocking:

Serves them right! Now you see that I also understand things although I know only standard Finnish from the books, Máret thinks very contently. Now they probably do not dare to tease me anymore because I am so clever. (Vuolab, 1994:37)

But it is not the case. Bravely, Máret goes to the girls during the break and asks if she can play with them. Full of spite, the girls tell her to go and read her grammar and other textbooks. Máret realizes that they have just gained another reason to mock her. Things get a little better when she changes rooms and gets a new room-mate Kirste, who is Máret's relative and much nicer than Tuulikki. After

that, Máret's life becomes easier. Her second semester is not as bad, but she still does not have any good friends. Finally Máret finds a friend in Láilá who is another shy little girl. Unfortunately her new friend moves to southern Sweden with her family after the spring semester. By the end of that semester, Máret has already learned to defend herself quite well against the bullies and to hold her own.

Gradually Máret's life at school becomes easier although she still feels lonely. She has grown up enough to be bored at home with her younger siblings. Eating becomes her new way to escape loneliness. Sweet cakes that she bakes sweep her along like a stream and the further she goes, the more she eats until she feels ill and throws up. She sees herself as too round and large, and she is concerned about the fact that she can never become a model. Towards the end of the story, Máret is going to the fifth class, and there are two different voices talking inside her: one child's and one adult's voice.

Čeppari čáráhus is a story about the change which Sami children had to face in the 1950's and the 1960's. It is also a story about the painful experience of attending school – a traumatic experience that marked a whole generation. Sami children were teased for being Sami, strange people with all those 'funny clothes' as Tuulikki and other girls point out. Vuolab herself describes the situation as follows:

After the Second World War, lots of babies were born. First as little kids, we filled all the rooms at home. When I was at school, all the residential schools were full because of us. After the school, we filled all the jobs. Because we were so many, the competition over managing in life was tough. For my generation, not many could gain a living from the traditional livelihoods. Grazing lands would have not taken all our herds. Farming offered a living only for one child in a family. Bits of land would have not given a living for anybody if they had been divided any further. To get a job or go to school meant that many of us had to leave our home region. That caused feelings of insecurity and emptiness. (Vuolab, 1994: 5-6)

In Čeppari čáráhus, Vuolab demonstrates the ways in which pressures of racism and assimilation are a part of the Sami identity. Even today, people bear marks of (continued) colonialism such as feelings of inferiority and shame. Many times a person is caught

between two opposing worlds like Máret at the end of the story: she has a dream where she is skiing up in the mountains and carrying a big bag with her. This Máret is the young one and the adult one is waiting on the top of the mountain. The adult Máret gets angry when she sees what the young Máret is dragging with her – why does she not have a backpack? And what is she doing with high-heel shoes and make-up in the mountains? According to young Máret, they are a good shield behind which it is easy to hide (Vuolab, 1994: 105).

Multidimensional Identities

Obviously, the writings of four Sami writers do not give a complete picture of the contemporary, many-sided Sami identity. They do, however, demonstrate effectively the ways in which previous assumptions of Saminess have been misleading and limited. Out of such various identities, we can sketch a picture where every part of Sami literature contributes uniquely to the Sami continuum.

In her novel *256 Golláža*, Kirsti Paltto describes both the positive and negative aspects of contemporary Sami society; one could say that she represents it as it is. There are those who feel strongly about their Saminess and want to maintain it through the language in particular. There are also co-opted Sami who do not regard Sami culture or language as having much worth but who rather pursue economic development and want to catch up with the 'big world.' Paltto's way of telling is at once joyful and serious so each reader can perceive it differently. Paltto's style is bitingly sarcastic which may bother some readers. Nevertheless it is a literary strategy as well as one of the most useful survival skills. Although the image of Saminess she gives is diverse, her central message to the reader is to emphasize the significance of laughter. As she herself puts it, "*juos ii leat leaikkastallan, dalle ii leat ii ilbmi tige álbmi*" ("if there is no humour, there will be no air nor nourishment").

Jovnna-Ánde Vest is writing outside Samiland which is also part of the contemporary Sami reality. Many Sami are living outside the Sami region; Oslo, the capital of Norway, for instance, is claimed to be the biggest Sami village with 5,000 Sami! This is the situation for many other Indigenous peoples as well. It is important to take their realities as seriously and as 'authentic' as those living in 'traditional' areas (which is, in terms of history, also a relative concept). Vest's main character Kapo starts a new life in the 'New World' and while not really longing for his previous life, he still has retained some Sami features. Sometimes assimilated Indige-

nous persons like Kapo are rejected and ignored by their own people. The important question would be whether it is really possible to fully get rid of your ethnic identity and its manifestations. No matter how difficult it is for most of us to respect the choice of these people, we should remember however that assimilation can also be a response to outside pressure,¹¹ one survival strategy among others. As Paula Gunn Allen notes:

The crucial factor in the alienation so often treated in American Indian writing is the unconscious assumption that Indians must ally with one particular segment of their experience and not with another. The world is seen in terms of antagonistic principles... For many, this process has meant rejection of Indianness. (Allen 134)

Inger-Mari Aikio represents the younger generation in contemporary Sami literature. She has said herself how her writing is not involved in promoting Sami culture, but that the act of writing is rather an inner cleansing process for her (Kailo & Helander 79). Yet she admits that the Sami language is an important basis of the culture: according to her, without Sami language there would be nothing to distinguish us as a people (*ibid*). Despite her personal comments, a reader can sense a worry about the future of many elements in Sami culture. Instead of direct statements, her opinions are expressed through feelings and visual images linked closely to the presence of nature. In many poems, the writer becomes one with her environment; her feelings and nature's feelings enmesh. Despite her claims of alienation from the traditional Sami values, she still is in the midst of the most important element of Sami (and other Indigenous too) culture, i.e., nature and the land.

Kerttu Vuolab is one of the writers who describe the situation experienced by Sami children in schools in the 1960's and the 1970's in a very open and honest way. As Vuolab illustrates, school attendance was a traumatic experience for many Sami and the ramifications are still with us in many ways. The sense of inferiority and shame involved in using one's own language has not completely disappeared. Many also have difficulties in finding a place in the society, since they feel that they do not adequately belong anywhere. There are also many people like Máret who feel that they are struggling between two worlds and between two sets of traditions and values.

The main purpose of this paper has been to demonstrate the way in which contemporary Sami literature reveals multiple and

complex representations of Sami identity. Representations of the Sami created by non-Sami explorers and others have usually been very limited and stereotypical and have perpetuated discrimination and racism. In many cases, these stereotypical images have functioned as a basis of defining who is Sami. This in turn has led to a controversial debate over authenticity. The writings of the four contemporary Sami writers studied in this paper clearly show however that there is no single representation or identity of the Sami that could be termed 'real' or 'the most authentic.' These writings also indicate that Sami identities are a long way from the stereotypical images of Topelius, as described earlier. As with any contemporary identities and representations, Sami identities are expressed in numerous ways. They are not fixed nor are they without contradictions, as the selected texts demonstrate.

It is important that while discussing Indigenous identities, we look at the diverse representations and perceptions created by our own people rather than lapsing into stereotypical notions created and perpetuated by outsiders. Oral traditions and written literatures offer powerful insights into the ways in which Indigenous identities have always been diverse and multidimensional. As scholars of Indigenous literatures, it is however critical that we pay attention to the theories and methodologies we apply to our research. Analyzing Indigenous peoples' literatures through Western literary theories may violate the integrity of these literatures, as Western literary theories tend to dismiss non-Western literatures as 'primitive,' 'child-like,' 'overpopulated' or as 'having no clear plot.'

In my view, it is crucial that we consider and remain open to new models of theorizing that particularly derive from our own traditions, practices and epistemologies. I have suggested elsewhere (Kuokkanen 2000) the development of an 'Indigenous paradigm,' a perspective and a framework of concepts based on Indigenous peoples' systems of knowledge and cultural practices. In my view, a conscious attempt to create a closer connection with the subject is needed in order to avoid misinterpretations. Another important task of an 'Indigenous paradigm' would be to challenge often subtly racist, dualist notions still prevalent in much of Western scholarship, according to which the world is divided along lines of Western high culture and non-Western folkloric traditions. An 'Indigenous paradigm' may also introduce new perspectives to research by challenging dominant values, worldviews and epistemologies. Last but not least, a point particularly relevant to this paper: an 'Indigenous paradigm' can offer a new set of tools for ana-

lyzing non-Western cultures which, for its own part, may diminish the dangers of misinterpretation of our cultural expressions.

Notes

1. The Sami are also known as the Lapps or Laplanders, terms created by outsiders, which today are increasingly considered derogatory and outdated. The Sami are an Indigenous people living today in the northern parts of Norway, Sweden, Finland and the Kola Peninsula, Russia. There are approximately 75,000 – 100,000 Sami, most of them living in Norway. (For further information about the Sami people, see for instance Kailo & Helander 1998.)
2. All English translations are by the author of the article unless otherwise indicated.
3. Currently, there are a few books on Sami literature available in English. See the list at the end of the article.
4. A yoik is a Sami way of communication in a special form of singing. Traditionally, it is also an identification of a person; a child did not fully become a part of her/his society until she/he received her personal yoik. The Christian missionaries banned yoiking as a sinful activity. Today, there are many well-known (also internationally) Sami yoikers.
5. This is an interesting reference to the Sami anthem *Sámi Soga lávlla*, which starts with the words *Guhkkín davvin Dávvgáid vuolde* (far up north beneath the Ursa Major).
6. This is a playful reference to the European Union.
7. The Sami 'teepee,' a temporary dwelling.
8. A traditional Sami costume.
9. *Čáráhus*, as Vuolab explains in the preface, is a traditional creature in Sami stories who used to tease people in their dreams. *Čáráhus* is both a trouble and a strain (Vuolab, 1994:5).
10. There is also, of course, the possibility of assimilation without apparent pressure.
11. It can of course be argued that not only the Indigenous peoples are close to nature but for Indigenous peoples nature and the surrounding land is the first condition for survival as distinct peoples.

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