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RE: Mindings

Co-Constituting Indigenous / Academic / Artistic Knowledges



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PREFACE

May-Britt Öhman opens:

“For indigenous peoples, place, land, sovereignty, and memory matter.”

– *Byrd, 2011.*

Mihá ja Gievrra

Dån tsamáda tjavgga

Divna gulli

Tjuorvo dav, dån le mihá

ja gievrra

Tsamáda tjavgga

Diededa gájkajda

Gulldal sielov, mihá ja gievrra

Värált le hárvas ájn

Fábmo le vájmodibme

Dån áro unnen valla bátsá

guhkáš

Gut duosstel álggusittjat

Ja bálos gieladimev

Ane dal gielav, divna tjoavdá dån

– *Negga, 2013*

Proud and Strong

You whisper loudly

Everybody hears it

Shout it out, you are proud and strong

Whisper loudly

Let everybody know

Speak from your heart, proud and strong

The world is still generous

The power is heartless

You feel insignificant but will last forever

The one who dares say something

Will defend the mute

So use your voice, and free us all

Buoris, hello! Let me start with a quote stating that *place, land, sovereignty, and memory* matter to indigenous peoples by Jodi Byrd from her recently published book *The Transit of Empire: Indigenous Critiques of Colonialism* (2011). And then I continue with the song and yoik by Sámi artist Lovisa Negga, at present 23 years old, and her first song in (Lule) Sámi. I suggest you also listen to it on Lovisa Negga’s own website found at <http://lovisanegga.bandcamp.com/>.

Now you’ve listened to the song and read the lyrics – maybe a couple of times. Let me explain my relationship to this song and yoik, and its place in this publication. In *Mihá ja gievrra*, Lovisa Negga is reclaiming her language, her history and memory and does so proudly. I am inspired by Lovisa. My background too is Lule Sámi – but in my family, this heritage was shamed away, kept a secret. I only learnt

about the extent of my Sámi background when I was 20 years older than Lovisa is now. *Mihá ja Gievrra* is performed in the Sámi language that my family once spoke. Unfortunately, I never learnt this language. It was considered unnecessary, and my family was supposed to become SWEDISH, and to forget all about our Sámi heritage. Today I am PROUD to say that I am taking back my history. My tradition. My yoiks and my memory. And I stand STRONG in doing this. Lovisa Negga's song strengthens me, supports me. Memory matters. Sovereignty matters. Place and land matter. To this I add waters, human and non-human relationships.

This publication is a collection of presentations made, intended to be made and inspired by the Symposium *RE: Mindings; Co-Constituting Indigenous/Academic/Artistic Knowledges and Understandings of Land-, Water-, Body-, and Lab-scapes*, Uppsala Second Supradisciplinary Feminist TechnoScience Symposium, October 10-12, 2012. When I started planning for this symposium it was indeed me asking for support from friends and colleagues, within Sápmi-Sábme – the land of Sámi people – and elsewhere in the world. My aim was to strengthen the position of Indigenous Studies in Sweden, both from an inside perspective within the Swedish academic setting, and also with perspectives from Indigenous allies, i.e. friends and colleagues who are not member of Indigenous communities, but do their utmost to understand and support Indigenous peoples in our struggles.

So what I did was actually to ask for support for *myself* – as a Sámi scholar – in my very own need to navigate through a positivist normative dominant society academia. As “crying out for help” is not really how we currently are supposed to formulate ourselves within Academia, I formulated my outcry in the Call for Participation and Presentations as follows: “the ultimate aim and focus of the symposium is to provide a platform for a comparative and critical analysis of the Swedish situation in regard to Norway, the US, Canada, Japan and Australia, and thereby to further the theoretical development”. Quite a lot drier, but the content, the outcry remained the same.

The symposium itself was organized by me, Dr. May-Britt Öhman (Ph.D. in History of Science and Technology) from the platform and support of the Centre for Gender Research, Uppsala University. The research project DAMMED: Security, Risk and Resilience around the Dams of Sub-Arctica (VR, 2010-2012), which I manage as project leader, made it possible along with indispensable collaboration from the symposium participants who assisted through chairing sessions or as discussants, as well as taking care of practical things. Some contributed to programme planning, suggesting guests to invite. Among these were friends and colleagues within *UPPSAM*, the Association for Sámi Related Studies in Uppsala

[Föreningen för samiskrelaterad forskning i Uppsala], The Hugo Valentin Centre, and History of Religion, Faculty of Theology, Uppsala University.

The Sámi association *Silbonah Samesijdda*, led by Agneta Silversparf, was a very important collaborator and contributor. The symposium was linked to, and supported by, the ongoing interdisciplinary research program *Mind and Nature*, with funding from the Faculty of Arts, Uppsala University. The event was also sponsored by SALT (Forum for Advanced Studies of Arts, Language and Theology) and received additional funding from *Vetenskapsrådet* [Swedish Research Council] which was crucial. My sincere thanks go out to all of you.

When I decided to go ahead and ask for collaboration in organizing this Symposium, asking colleagues, Indigenous scholars, activists and artists as well as Indigenous allies, it was as a cry for help and support. I felt an urgent need to receive help to deal with a situation for people like me, scholars who are Indigenous – Sámi – in Sweden, having to deal with a colonial situation both within academia and outside. I felt – and I still feel – lost in regards to how to formulate myself and how to challenge the current situation with an even more aggressive colonization of Sámi territory. My beloved places, lands, waters, human and non-human relationships, sovereignty and memory are currently under a huge threat of destruction. This certainly needs to be addressed within the academic setting, from an inside perspective. To my great joy, many persons responded. They – you – came to my support in organizing the symposium and participating in it. It is through our collaboration that this publication could be assembled. A lot of great work has been put into these pages.

My heartfelt gratitude goes to you all for your efforts and contributions. I avoid mentioning names, primarily because the list will be extremely long, and secondly I might forget someone. This publication carries the names of contributors, participants, presenters, editors, financers and article authors. However, you may not see those who have performed work that is sort of “invisible” – such as dealing with administration, language editing, inspirations and support in the daily life, the private and/or the public. However, you are all part of this effort and I am so grateful to you all!

I will mention one such person, a non-human person, who is always by my side and always supportive no matter what I do or don't do. That is Lexie, my German shepherd now approaching her seventh year. When I write this, she is recovering from a disease that four weeks ago almost killed her. Thank you, Lexie, for always being there and thank you all other for your extremely important contributors! Together, we stand PROUD AND STRONG!

I now welcome the two co-editors who have done so much work in making this publication happen: Johan Gärdebo and Hiroshi Maruyama. Without your efforts, this publication would not have been possible!

Hiroshi Maruyama: It was in June 2012 that I saw May-Britt Öhman for the first time in Hokkaido, Japan. I drove her to the Nibutani Community in Biratori Town, where the Ainu have lived since more than ten thousand years ago. It is the most densely Ainu-populated area in the world at present. May-Britt was shocked to see the Nibutani Dam, which had devastated Ainu cultural heritages and natural resources, including salmon and edible wild plants for Ainu life and culture, with her own eyes. She was also surprised to see that half of the reservoir had already been filled with sediments from upstream, even though the dam was completed in 1996. Furthermore, what made her gloomy was that the Japanese government had an intention to construct one more dam up the Saru River, on which the Nibutani Dam was located. Our trip to Nibutani gave us an opportunity to deepen our awareness concerning the relationships among modern technology, society and humanity as well as to strengthen mutual understanding.

An instinctive thread of fate may have connected me to Uppsala. In October 2012, I first set foot in Uppsala to attend the Uppsala Second Feminist TechnoScience Symposium, organized by May-Britt. But in fact, I had passed Uppsala earlier by train, already in October 2005, while traveling to Orsa for an inspection of the Orsa Bear Park after the 14th International Conference on Bear Research and Management in Italy. During my brief stop in Uppsala, I was so impressed by the beauty of the city that I suddenly had an idea to be back there in the near future. Unexpectedly, my visit to Uppsala became a reality around five years later after I had first passed it by train. What attracted me to Uppsala is not only instinct, but also the title of the symposium *RE: Mindings: Co-Constituting Indigenous/Academic/Artistic Knowledges and Understandings of Land-, Water-, and Body-, and Lab-scapes Uppsala Second Supradisciplinary Feminist TechnoScience Symposium [Re-Mindings Symposium]*. In fact, the symposium made a difference to me.

Many presenters revealed that the authorities have neglected the Sami and other Indigenous Peoples in the decision-making processes. They persuaded me to recognize again that Indigenous Peoples are still under the colonization of their territories by Nation-States. Even now I wonder why the *Convention on Environmental Impact Assessment in a Transboundary Context* or the principle of *Free, Prior and Informed Consent* are not applied to those problems. Further, Indige-

nous Rights are guaranteed under International Human Rights Law, such as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), ILO Convention No. 169, the Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD) and so on. Of the activists' articles I had read prior to the publication, none seemed to discuss International Human Rights Law. In this context, the *RE-Mindings Symposium* organized by May-Britt was essential for stimulating researchers and activists to work together for mutual solutions.

Almost all of the presenters, including May-Britt, expanded their presentations to their personal involvements in problems faced by them – or example possible detrimental damages to the Sápmi by further mine development and never-ending military drills. They spoke out about their genealogy, personal history and family life. It encouraged me to connect my research activities to myself and, consequently, to rethink what I have done through research. As a result, I decided to change my specialty from Environmental Sociology to Environmental and Minority Studies. I have been working in favor of local residents and Indigenous Peoples who struggle for local autonomy and social justice over environmental problems, despite the fact that the majority of them are silenced, in fear of social ostracism in their communities. In my opinion, Minority Studies represent the reality of my research much more than Environmental Sociology.

I am most grateful to all the participants in the *RE-Mindings Symposium* and the authors of this publication for making a difference to me, as mentioned above. At present, their presentations and papers are engraved in my mind and have become a part of myself. I have never had this sort of experience in other conferences, symposiums and seminars throughout my career. Lastly, I would like to express my heartfelt thanks to May-Britt Öhman, for her generously involving me in the *RE-Mindings Symposium* not only as a presenter but also as co-editor of this publication. I was quite happy to be able to work with Johan Gärdebo, an intelligent Master student at Uppsala University, now Ph.D. student at KTH Royal Institute of Technology, although my contribution to the publication is infinitely less than his.

Johan Gärdebo: To me, this publication is about belonging. It is about how one may be connected to a place, while at the same time remain detached from its society, of being both deprived and entitled to resources. And how it is that 'indigenous' all too often is synonymous with 'otherness' in many societies around

the world. On these questions of belonging, Indigenous Peoples, academics and activists may identify commonalities in their challenges, and build foundations for cooperation.

The brief time I have worked on topics where society, indigenoussness and natural resources intersect have acquainted me with their complexity. I am reassured that this publication is both an introduction and invitation to you as a reader on a longer journey; one that comments on how indigenous groups are distinct, but also what many peoples around the world share and cherish in common.

Regardless of your own heritage, it is fully possible, and necessary I think, to reflect on the effects that modern society have had for different forms of human and natural beings. I myself am descended from inhabitants in the Swedish provinces of Värmland, Hälsingland and Uppland. They were farmers, teachers, priests and entrepreneurs. I was told they were well adapted to their societies; their practices and believes were recognized by peers in their communities. They viewed themselves from within a societal framework where they belonged. But their Nation- and Welfare State also labeled groups like the Sami as *being* 'other', outsiders and outliers of the community. And this too is part of the society that my grandparents' generation contributed towards building.

RE:Mindings raises several questions as to how differences among humans are acknowledged in modern society – what the Nation-State has meant for the rights of its minorities and Indigenous Peoples. And it is this relationship – between *society*, *Indigenous Peoples* and *natural resources* – that run as a red thread throughout the articles compiled herein: These areas will resurface throughout the publication as the experiences of Indigenous Peoples and minorities are discussed. It is not only an issue of nationalities and ethnic groups in conflict with society: but of approaches to knowledge; of legitimacy when writing history; of the defects prevalent in maintaining Nation-States as models for modern society.

Then again, what are our alternatives? It is this question that we as academics and activists have sought to address. One way forward is to re-interpret citizenship; that by democracy *we refrain from the might of the many, to uphold the rights of the few*. Practically, this may imply the parliamentary representation of Indigenous Peoples and minorities, or to discuss what regional and cultural plurality means to the State in terms of future challenges of environmental threats and conflicts over resources. But regardless, it starts by seeing yourself in another being and in being an 'other'.

I find the implication of this publication to be that acknowledging difference is a means for developing new forms of similarity, with humans globally and environments locally; to respect humans and nature that are seemingly apart from oneself. Affinity need no longer be a prerequisite for coexistence.

As I begin I conclude. This publication is a contemporary comment on modern society, one that may be said to emerge globally. Though not a member of any Indigenous community, I have come to understand, and believe, that solidarity is chosen and as such the issues of the Sami, Ainu, or Mapuche may become my own and that of majority society. I wish to extend my gratitude to May-Britt Öhman for encouraging me to take on the Symposium publication, despite my novel degree of knowledge on the subject matter prior to the project. I am grateful to the editorial team – to India Reed Bowers for her proofreading as well as comments on factual content; to Viktor Wrange for layout; to Hugo Valentin Centre for brief and brave revising efforts in the 11th hour. Lastly, I am indebted to co-editor Hiroshi Maruyama, who opened my eyes to the global character of this work. Writing across our time zones enhanced the feeling of international collaboration between different groups of peoples in varying contexts; as one went to bed in Sweden, another rose in Japan to continue the work.

May-Britt Öhman, again: I'd like to end with a few questions – a challenge to the reader. These questions regard one of the central issues in Indigenous Studies as well as within in all mainstream academic disciplines, in the *RE-Mindings Symposium*, and in this publication. I also find these questions are of the utmost importance to address, so as to ensure a successful and mutually supportive collaboration between Indigenous Peoples and Indigenous allies. I refer to a quote by Jodi A. Byrd, concerning how *Indigenous Peoples, place, land, sovereignty, and memory matter*; but then I am reversing it, to ask the questions of those of you who are not members of a specific Indigenous People.

The questions go like this:

- I am quite sure that “place, land, sovereignty, and memory” matter to all human beings. Most human beings have one or several specific places, relationships, and memories that really matter. But when one is part of the dominant society, you never – or rarely – have to talk about or explain it. Not in every academic article you write. Not in every discussion or presentation you make on your specific topic. *Why* is this so do you think?

- What is your own relationship to the place, land, waters, memory, sovereignty that you are part of?
- How can you reverse your own gaze, when you are part of the dominant society? How can you write, present, illustrate differently from the norm?

Well, those are my questions and my challenge. I am quite confident that this publication may provide quite a lot of assistance for you in your further reflections.

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