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Pluriversal stories with Indigenous wor(l)ds creating paths to the other side of the mountain

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Abstract

In this article we travel through theorizing towards what we think Indigenous knowledge does, and how it works and gets presented, by using the concept of the pluriverse. As three researchers concerned with Indigenous studies, we ask how we create and share stories that bring us together in communities and become possible to be shared in the inter-existence of multiple worlds. With locally embedded pluriversal stories, which are grounded in Indigenous ontologies and Indigenous words, we seek to expand the space for different ontologies and practices to become part of the contemporary public and academic discussion. We claim that pluriversal storytelling is a way of practising knowledge together with diverse ontologies, through which the present moments and worlds are being made. It involves making words stand for the world; it is a world-making practice.

Keywords: pluriverse, storytelling, Indigenous ontologies, decolonization, writing

Introduction

In this article we travel through theorizing towards what we think Indigenous knowledge does, and how it works and gets presented through stories and storytelling. We are interested in how stories sustain human and more-than-human agency and world-making practices and how Indigenous concepts participate in this creative act. Knowledge and the telling of stories are entangled, as knowledge is embedded both in the epistemology and ontology of storytelling. In the following, we participate in the exploration of the possibilities offered by storytelling as a fruitful ontological, epistemological and ethical modality to foster worlds and knowledges (Blaser 2010). In addition, we engage with the concept of the pluriverse, which can help us think beyond the one-world approach of modernity (Escobar 2018; de la Cadena & Blaser 2018).

De la Cadena and Blaser (2018, 4) call the world of many worlds a pluriverse, with "heterogenous worldings coming together as a political ecology of practices, negotiating their difficult being together in heterogeneity". They explain that "presenting the pluriverse as an ethnographic proposal requires a caveat", namely, thinking of "ethnography as a scholarly genre that conceptually weaves together sites (and sources) called 'the theoretical' and 'the empirical' so that thereafter they cannot be pulled apart. ... Bringing the pluriversal into a rethinking of ethnography may also indicate excesses of the theoretical and the empirical – think earth beings or animal spirits that populate the forests again." (de la Cadena & Blaser 2018, 5.) For us this means bringing storytelling into public debate, here academic writing, to let storytelling populate the spaces of fostering worlds and knowledges again, and so recognize and respect ways of knowing and living in multiple worlds. We use storytelling as a fruitful epistemological and ethical principle to foster worlds and other knowledges. This not only means "multiple perspectives on THE ('one') world" but acknowledging the existence of multiple, different worlds (Rosenow 2019, 83) and expanding the space for different worlds (and stories), so that they may be allowed to be performed in public and political (and academic) debate (see also Blaser 2009). This is what we call pluriversal storytelling.

In this article we are interested in asking, how we create and share stories, which are locally and materially embedded and share embedded ways of life or ways of being a human (or an Indigenous person) and belonging to and building a community when the world or worlds already on the other side of the mountain seem different and odd to us? How do we create and share stories which bring us together in communities? And between those, how do we as researchers in Indigenous studies create stories which become possible to be shared, leading the people behind the mountain to think and come into existence with the different "formations of being-knowing-doing", like Escobar (2012, 76) describes the inter-existence of multiple worlds? With stories, how do we create paths between different communities, worlds on the other side of the mountains and oceans?

We, the writers of this article, are three researchers concerned with and working in Indigenous studies. We are three scholars with diverse backgrounds: one living in and researching a Norwegian-speaking Sámi community; another who, as an adult, revitalized her father's mother tongue, Northern Sámi, and strengthened the connections to ancestral lands in Deanuleahki (Teno River valley); and the third, who has travelled behind the ocean to research

and work with the Wixárika people. We will thread our readings of other scholars' texts together with stories of different trails that we have taken in order to unlearn what Blaser (2010) calls the modern myth and Rosenow (2019) defines as hegemonic, colonial modes of knowledge production, "namely to produce general insights that are able to move beyond the concreteness of a situation, and to do so with a level of stringency and coherence that enable readers to 'take home' clearly demarcated conclusions that can be 'applied' elsewhere" (Rosenow 2019, 83).

Storytelling in many Indigenous researches is already understood as significant and timely (see e.g., Kovach 2009; Wilson 2008; Cajete 1994; Datta 2018; Porsanger et al. n.d.). We follow Jackson's (2002) argument that storytelling serves as a strategy for transforming private – and local, we would like to add – into public, and also for sustaining human agency in the face of disempowering circumstances. Jackson (2002) is concerned with how we rework reality through making and telling stories in order to make life bearable. Storytelling is, as Blaser (2010) argues, a way of practising knowledge with performative qualities. Stories are not just narratives referring to something "out there", but rather they produce that of which they speak. Blaser (2010) explains that storytelling is one of the many local ways through which the present moment is being shaped. A story can have different purposes, and as a performance it can be a pluriverse in which the (Indigenous) teller may come into inter-existence and thrive along with other worlds. Storytelling is a strategy that involves making words stand for the world; it is a world-making practice, where Indigenous ontologies can exist in public. "The pluriversal is a critical move involving doing away with modernist ontological commitments deeply ingrained in knowledge practise" (Blaser 2010, xvi). Ontologies relate to what kinds of things do or can exist, and what might be their conditions of existence as well as the relations they depend on. Ontological conflicts reveal that alternatives to modernity exist, as they force modernity to reshape itself in order to deal with radical difference (Blaser 2010). Ontologies, Blaser argues, "also manifest as 'stories' in which the assumptions of what kinds of things and relations make up a given world are readily graspable. Yet, while myths are a good entry point to an ontology, attending only to their verbalized aspect, and not to the way in which they are embodied and enacted, reveals only half the story" (Blaser 2010, 3). Ontologies can be understood as the total enactments of worlds. In this sense, myths are neither true nor false; they just engender different worlds which have their own criteria for defining, performing and representing truth.

In telling stories, we reclaim a say in the way our lives unfold (Kramvig & Verran 2020). The act of telling can change the experience of an event, relations or the past. Storying otherwise offers a possibility to redo, reclaim and enact events that have long troubled us. Iseke (2013) argues that Indigenous storytelling can be mythical, personal or sacred. As Jackson (2002) explains, it can also be a pedagogical tool for learning about life. In addition, storytelling means witnessing and remembering how humans and non-humans have been – and still are – living together; thus, the act of sharing stories can create a community of awareness about inter-existence. In addition, and in particular for many Sámi artists and writers, stories insist that there is no single world. On the contrary, stories participate in making obvious the existence of the pluriversal, a world of many worlds. In this article we offer the concept and the practice of pluriversal storytelling, which we consider helpful in order to understand the concept of Indigenous theory.

Another introduction, or construction: Rethinking the concept of theory

> How do we encounter Indigenous knowledge, how do we come to know and feel that? Where and how is Indigenous knowledge, how do we get a touch on that? Is it possible to theorize it? What happens if we theorize it, lift it out from the lived practices, or how else could we see theorizing Indigenous knowledge? What happens to Indigenous knowledge when it gets put into words and on paper and in the forms and styles of academic knowledge production?
>
> When Indigenous knowledge and cosmologies are holistic and relational, we see more and more that this should and could interrupt and disrupt our academic practices, which are based on a Western understanding of dividing practice and theory, nature and culture, West and Oriental/Indigenous/what-so-ever, and not only bring these ontologies to the academy and represent them there, in hopes of protecting those specific groups and their (our) specific rights to land and livelihoods. It should not only be that we make theories and theorizations on Indigenous knowledge and present them in academia.

Modern societies are very theoretically driven, as expert knowledges associated with the rationalistic tradition have a profound influence on how we live our life (Østmo & Law 2018;

Escobar 2012, 2018). Following Law (2012), the idea that there is such a thing as theory[1] out there, separated from the practices of research, has been challenged since Kuhn's theory of practice, and in addition by science and technology (STS) studies, environmental studies and feminist studies, as well as most Indigenous studies. Law (2012, 225) writes, "'Theory', if we still want to use the term, turns up in the form of sets of questions, proclivities and sensibilities in the context of empirical work: the two get articulated together. So, it isn't just that theories are located, specific, and historically shaped (for this is always true). It is also recognised that this is indeed the case." Our realities are textually mediated by categories, and social groups access different resources dealing with these traditions. Nevertheless, theories are ontological as they inaugurate a set of rituals, ways of doing and modes of being. In addition, they are still heavily dependent upon mind-body dualism as two separate domains and all that follows, with theory and methods being different domains, in the objective worlds of physical realities, in addition to the emotional subjective world of the subject. Additionally, theories have been – and still are – often seen as something that can travel and would thus not be only local or cultural.

Indigenous knowledge is always connected to practice. Indigenous ontologies and knowledge practices are holistic and living, and documented, shared and distributed in oral histories, arts and crafts, other traditional practices, and language. Modernity on the other hand, together with its centralized economic and political institutions, has a tendency to forcefully make other

[1] The etymological roots and the meanings of 'theory' extend to contemplation and speculation, as well as to an approach or study as opposed to the practical (Oxford English Dictionary):

> theory, *n.*
> **1.a.** The conceptual basis of a subject or area of study. Contrasted with *practice*.
> **b.** *Mathematics*. The body of knowledge relating to the properties of a particular mathematical concept; a collection of theorems forming a connected system.
> **c.** An approach to the study of literature, the arts, and culture that incorporates concepts from disciplines such as philosophy, psychoanalysis, and the social sciences; *esp.* such an approach intended to challenge or provide an alternative to critical methods and interpretations that are established, traditional, and seen as arising from particular metaphysical or ideological assumptions.
> **2.** Without article. Abstract knowledge or principles, as opposed to practical experience or activity; theorizing, theoretical speculation.
> **3.** A conception of something to be done, or of the method of doing it; a systematic statement of rules or principles to be followed.
> †**4.** Mental view, insight; contemplation. *Obsolete*.
> †**5.** A spectacle which has a spiritual effect or provides insight into spiritual matters. *Obsolete*. *Rare*.
>
> The concept theorize, then, is connected to the construction of a theory of or about something. A theory which traditionally is opposed and divided from the practice.

ontologies fit into its categories and is itself one of the triggers of ontological conflicts. Modernity, as well as theories generated by it, has difficulties accepting anything different from itself. Indigenous knowledge is indivisible from life and its practices, and it includes in it both theory, which is based on long-lasting participation and experience in life in the environment through Indigenous knowledge, and life/practice itself. Indigenous knowledge is performed and lived through practices, in addition to being translated and shared with communities through stories, and it is often memorized and re-expressed through arts and crafts.

The "other side of the mountain" in our title is connected to a story told by a Sámi friend concerned with caring for the past memories of the land of his village. He has built a Sámi heritage site with multiple buildings and workshops, and marked and mapped sites of interest within the valley where he and his ancestors have lived since time immemorial. We talked with him about a Sámi festival that took place in a community not too far from his homestead. He told us that he once went there, driven by curiosity, but that he did not recognize the people as the same, so he would not speak on their behalf or generalize his enactment of the world upon them. The uniqueness of the community he belonged to, connected with experiences of place and self, has no claim to be universal. Within many Sámi societies, making statements on behalf of others, even though those others are in the neighbourhood, is only done with caution and care. Stories and then knowledge are always locally embedded. Others could have their own story to tell. They do have ownership of their own stories, and this autonomy needs to be respected. These acts of caution and care of participatory reciprocities enact pluriversal storytelling.

How can we then share our experiences with people who live on the other side of the ocean and speak different languages, if already behind the next mountain there is a different world with different practices? When we reach the other side and encounter the new world, we may feel bewildered and enter into ethnographic conflict. We try to translate our bewildering into the language(s) understood by the scientific community. In Indigenous studies we also sometimes tend to theorize and conceptualize, manifesting knowledge production and the translation of practices into the One-World understanding, towards the *general* and *abstract*, making stringent, overarching and coherent conclusions which might "make no sense in the context of other intelligence systems, but that need to be addressed in an academic article in order to make a conceptual argument compelling" (Rosenow 2019, 97–98).

Arturo Escobar (2012, 59) refers to Santos (2007) when he writes that the "transition/translation process cannot be led by, nor lead to, a general theory; in fact, the only general theory possible […] is the impossibility of any general theory". This transition/translation process "involves moving from the One-World Euro-American metaphysics (Law) to the world as pluriverse (without pre-existing universals, Blaser, de la Cadena and Escobar)" (Escobar 2012, 59). In addition, Rojas (2016) and de la Cadena (2015) are sceptical about the idea of translation, and they emphasize a more fundamental encounter where one is open to the other and ready to dislocate oneself. We follow Rosenow (2019) and her unease about how the overarching structures of science concentrate on knowledge *production* rather than *cultivation*. We follow the suggestions of de la Cadena and Blaser, who propose the pluriversal not only as abstractions but emerging from variously mediated ethnographic experiences of worlding that the fieldwork confronts researchers with, which "incite[d] us toward a disposition to be attentive to practices that make worlds even if they do not satisfy our demand (the demand of modern epistemology) to prove their reality (as they do not leave historical evidence, let not scientific)" (2018, 9). Thus, the pluriversal is not a matter of fact but an opening towards a possibility that we want to attend to.

Pluriversal stories as an ethical claim

In writing academic texts, the pull of hegemonic systems is difficult to deny and avoid. In this article, for example, in order to be able to do something else we need an arsenal of theorizations and concepts. We write in English, conscious of its hegemonic position in scientific writing and the fact that Indigenous worlds can never be fully translated. It is also the only language that we three researchers have in common. We dream and ask how we could both encounter and cultivate the different ontologies so that they become not only represented but lived, while also dislocating ourselves. Thus, following Escobar (2012, 34) we will attend to the question of whether non-dualistic attitudes, as found among many different Indigenous people, can be fostered in "Western" cultures – or in the pluriverse beyond the One-world worlding (see also de la Cadena 2016).

We will do this by sharing our own pluriversal stories, which tell about the dislocating and reconstructing of ourselves, when encountering and becoming refamiliarized with different ontologies in the Indigenous worlds of our own ancestors or behind the oceans. Through

sharing these multiple locally embedded stories – which only we, the three writers with the experiences we have had in our different research and life paths, can tell – we attest that for us it is actually the practice that feels right to do, not to talk, theorize, or generalize so much about the experiences or worlds of the people behind the mountain or ocean. Bringing pluriversal storytelling into the making and presenting of knowledge in public and academic discourse is our ethical claim. Why do we do this, as academics? First, we think we have been changed by and through the encounters and those have also changed our worlds, our ontologies. We have been cultivated. It is no longer possible to go back to knowledge production about any "reality", but more a matter of finding paths to different actions (following Rosenow 2019). Secondly, through taking the risk of telling more open-ended, auto-critical, uncertain and grappling stories (again following Rosenow 2019), we want to expand the onto-epistemological assumptions of the structures of which kinds of stories – which also academic papers are – are allowed in the public debate here in academia. Thus, with the following stories we want to break the border between traditional, theory-filled academic writing and Indigenous storytelling. Thirdly, we nevertheless also share the locally embedded stories or ontologies we have learnt and are all the time learning on the ethnographic 'fields' and in the human-non human entanglements. These following stories also illustrate ontological conflicts that create fruitful spaces of tension, spaces in-between, spaces where things are moving and changing, post-colonial moments where things and ontologies come together and our own ways of knowing get disrupted and changed. These stories, overlapping and tangling, are a multiplicity in their pluriverse.

Escobar (2012, 76–77) suggests pluriversal studies, which are no longer only pointing at the inter-connections and inter-dependencies for relationality, which truly exist, but seeking to take the next step towards the politics of the possible, ontologically designing and mapping the possible paths towards the necessary ecological and cultural transitions. In this process, pluriversal stories and knowledges can be seen as fruitful gifts to create those paths of possibility.

Thinking with gulahallat, nierika, and forfær

Both knowledge and theory are connected to understanding or knowing something. We will here use Sámi concepts in order to arrive at a word which could describe both understanding

and sharing the knowledge. *Gulahallat* has many connotations, as it means both to discuss and to understand. It is a reciprocal verb: it consists of *gullat* (‘to hear’) and the reciprocal suffix -*hallat*. Other examples, which Irja Seurujärvi-Kari presented years ago in her Sámi language course, were the verbs *áddehallat* (‘to understand each other’) and *birgehallat* (‘to get along with each other’). As *gulahallat* is connected to hearing or listening in-between and hearing or listening together, it is basically something that one can only practise with others. We truly think that the Indigenous language with all its suffixes and the possibility to use them in a creative way can also be used in the contemplation of Indigenous knowledge. Suffixes are wonderful tools for contemplating reciprocity and relationality!

In 2015, Sara Marielle Gaup-Beaska put (*bidját* is not the same as to make; joiks are ‘put for’ something, not ‘made about’) the joik *Gulahallat eatnamiin* in order to comment on climate change. Thus, *gulahallat* is a living verb and a living theory, a theory or an understanding which changes in relation to the changes in the environment, where the environment can be seen as meaning the land and waters, animals, plants and human beings. Aura Pieski (2019) has also used the concept *gulahallat*, both in the meaning of discussing and talking with research participants and in the meaning of discussing with (and understanding) the land and waters. Actually, *gulahallat* is not much used in the meaning of ‘to understand’, but more of to encounter with each other through hearing and listening, entering into the possibility of creating connections and relationality. We would thus suggest using the word *gulahallat* as part of the English text, like the Maori people do not italicize the Maori words in English texts.

As a way to come to understand the world, gulahallat is connected to hearing, listening and following the world (the land, the animals, the plants), and slowly, later, getting the gift to understand, when one has the patience to listen and hear. It takes time to come to understand how the salmon spawns and moves; it does not become a theory but an understanding connected to the practice of fishing, but also a practice of understanding the well-being of the salmon (as Solveig Joks (2016) writes about the Sámi salmon in her Ph.D. dissertation on fishermen, the salmon needs peace; see also Joks & Law 2016). This coming to know after discussing/listening and hearing the other (the land, the river, the salmon, the plants) can then be seen as a gift, or *áttaldat.*

In Wixárika communities of Western Mexico, understanding is connected with seeing. The word *nierika* means ‘face’, ‘likeness’, ‘picture’ or ‘a gift of seeing’ (Furst 1978). Only after taking part in civil-religious obligations, co-arranging ceremonies and learning Wixárika philosophy, arts and healing for many years with cultural specialists, and usually after completing many pilgrimages to the sacred land of Wirikuta, can a person receive *nierika* as a gift (Eger 1978). So the gift of coming to an understanding of the world is connected with community service, walking, healing and the arts.

Contemplating/cultivating Indigenous knowledge

I wanted to write about how and where I contemplate with the Sámi and Indigenous knowledge. I’m Sámi myself, my father was born and grew up in Deanuleahki, on the Finnish side of the Teno River and Sápmi. He moved away already as a young adult and never returned to live there again. He stayed, had a family, divorced, experienced ups and downs, and died in Southern Finland. Nevertheless, he had learnt Sámi as his first language, had lived as the third son in a fisher Sámi family, had given morning prayers on Sámi Radio, had brought his family (us) to visit áhkku (grandmother) and other relatives every summer. He did not stay there where his forefathers had lived for unmeasurable ages, he did not stay in the landscape of his roots. He moved away, he wanted to move South, he wanted to see the world, he didn’t want to stay. He wanted to study, he wanted to work and make money. He said “goodbye to his blood land”, as Sigbjørn Skåden (2019) put into words his moving away from the village of his Sámi roots.

(My) knowledge comes from autoethnographic writing-thinking-sensing (see Guttorm 2018).

I can write and think with the Sámi concepts,

I can write and think with my own experiences of being one of the language-loser generation but also one of the adult learners of the language,

I can write and think living in the South and not having that tight connection with the land of my father and our ancestors,

I can write with the travelling back and forth,

I can write with the questions I encounter in-between of the South and North,

I can listen-and-understand-in-between, I can gulahallat.
Gulahallat emerges from and with my body-heart-soul meeting the environment, encountering the land, encountering the waters, encountering the animals, the plants, the human beings. The last ones in this list make me sometimes sad. Lost. Disconnected. Not always easy to gulahallat.

I can travel to Sápmi and walk on the fells,
Walk on the paths of my ancestors,
Walk on the paths of the reindeer, following one path and letting it get lost in the mark, find another again, for some steps…
That's how also the stories can go, that's how my writing sometimes or nowadays more and more often goes…
It follows a path for a short time, then it gets lost or disappears, in order to appear somewhere else again…

My uncle has been practising gulahallat or áicat ('to see, to observe') with the Teno River all his life. Every morning he goes the ten steps down to the river to observe it and create an understanding based on gulahallat. He sees the young fish move in shoals, he sees the bigger salmon jump up from the water. He has learnt to know the fish and the moves of the salmon. He also told me how they once wanted to understand the spawning of salmon and set up huge searchlights on a river bank where they knew that the salmon used to come to spawn. There they sat in the middle of the night watching and observing the salmon to spawn. Made slow and timeless observations.

Gulahallat eatnamiin. Listen-and-understand-in-between-and-with the land. Getting sometimes sad when recognizing what humans do to and with it.
Gulahallat čážiin. Listen-and-understand-in-between-and-with the waters. Getting sometimes sad when recognizing what humans do to and with them.

Gulahallat ealliiguin. Listen-and-understand-in-between-and-with the animals. Getting sometimes sad when recognizing what humans do to them. Of course also other animals hunt and eat each other, but definitely they do not benefit in other ways… or do they?
Gulahallat šattuiguin. Listen-and-understand-in-between-and-with the plants. Getting sometimes sad when recognizing what humans do to and with those.
Gulahallat olbmuiguin. Listen-and-understand-in-between-and-with the humans. Getting sometimes sad when recognizing what humans do to and with each other and to the other beings and becomings on the Earth.

I want to, I need to feel the Sámi land under my feet,
I want to learn the paths,
I want to sense the fell,
I want to get to know the fell, want to get to know Eana, the Earth,
I want to hear, feel, see the wind, the reindeer, the birds, the plants, the waters,
I want to get to know them

In order to become whole
In order to decolonize myself, to decolonize the land
In order to tell stories,
In order to invite others to sense her, Eana
(Hanna)

*

Thank you, sisters, for inviting me to gulahallat together with you! I hesitate if I, as a non-indigenous artist-researcher, have the right to use Indigenous concepts in my writing. My Wixárika friends, when explaining Wixárika philosophy for me, tend to be easy and translate the most difficult terms, as they would do for a child. So, I am certainly not seen by the Wixaritari as an expert of theory.

For some days I have been with you, reading and contemplating your texts and the articles you sent. Hanna, I am getting tuned to the post-qualitative theory of St

Pierre and yourself, and Britt, I really connected with Giovanna Micarelli's and Helen Verran's comment on the book of Marisol de la Cadena. Like the Runakuna that de la Cadena worked with, the Wixaritari, too, are connected with entities "that do not inhabit but that are mountains, rivers, lagoons, and other visible marks of the landscape". The Runakuna call them tirakuna, Earth beings, and Wixaritari call them kakaɨyarixi. For de la Cadena, Indigenous and non-indigenous worlds are different but partly connected: "…even though there is a connection, the connections of the entities that compose them are incommensurable…" She uses the term 'excess' to point out that translation between the different worlds can never exactly take place; there is always something excessive and incommensurable (Micarelli & Verran 2018; de la Cadena 2015). When I visit Wixárika villages, the Indigenous worlds with their entities surround us. I have to get along with the kakaɨyarixi and accept that they affect my life, for example, when they appear in dreams for my collaborators.

(Lea)

Negotiating with ancestors[2]

In February 2019 we received an invitation to the opening of the community museum Tunúwame from the teachers and parents. For many years we had been collaborating on the planning and preparation of the museum, and we were happy to get the news that it would finally be inaugurated. We were, as usual, also invited to facilitate an art workshop for the pupils. We agreed by email that we would arrange a workshop of yarn painting and a video installation. The local artist Gregorio would teach the technique of traditional yarn painting (also called nierika), the young Wixárika documentarist Nuvia would teach video filming and editing together with my partner Pekka, and I would consider together with

[2] The Wixárika sacred landscape is inhabited by divine ancestors, the *kakaɨyarixi*. Special mountains, rivers, fountains, winds, animals, plants, the cardinal directions and celestial bodies are called grandfathers, grandmothers, great-grandfathers, great-grandmothers, sisters and brothers. The *kakaɨyarixi* speak to the people during pilgrimages, dreams and ceremonial chanting, and they can also be communicated with by means of sacrificial bowls, decorated feathers and other art objects. The *kakaɨyarixi* are present everywhere in Wixárika society; they influence everyday tasks as well as political decisions. (Eger 1978; Schaefer 1989; Kindl 1997; Liffman 2011; Medina 2012; Neurath 2013.)

everybody else how the paintings and videos could be combined together as an installation.

Usually we visit the community in October and November, after the rainy season, when the valleys are green, spotted with yellow flowers, and the families are getting ready for Tatei Neixa, the ceremony of first fruits. This time in May, the earth was dry, and the air was thick with dust and the smoke of wildfires. We were taken to the freshly painted museum building where we would stay for the next three weeks. The workshop would take place every afternoon. Two big mural paintings, nierika, would be prepared of the yarn painting,[3] and documentary footage of the work would be filmed together with the teenage pupils.

Our workshop was welcome because it made it possible for all the children in seventh grade to participate in the kind of artistic knowledge that usually is available only for the family members of artisans.

The day after our arrival we were ready to start the workshop, but all the teachers and pupils were at the tuki temple receiving the pilgrims who had just returned from the sacred land of Wirikuta. They were first busy with cleaning, preparing offerings and food, and the next day they performed dances together with the pilgrims. Only after some days could we join the teachers' meeting and agree on the schedule of the workshop. The next week there were two national celebrations: Mother's Day and Teacher's Day. The pupils were busy singing serenades early in the morning, the rest of the day was free, and the following week there was an additional free day because the pupils were tired after repeated early serenade tours.

[3] In Wixárika art, every figure and every colour carry a story, and the stories are told in the families while working. The yarn painting as an art form has been developed as an extension of miniature round or oval painting, *nierika*, attached to sacrificial arrows. The contemporary yarn paintings, often also called *nierika*, prepared out of beeswax and coloured yarns on a wooden plate, have been produced since the 1950s by artists or artisans and sold in markets and art galleries in the cities of Western México. Though they are sold as commercial products mainly for tourists, they are necessarily no less relational, spiritual or "true" than other objects based on Wixárika knowledge (Le Mûr 2015). Many artists making yarn paintings communicate with the *kakaɨyarixi* and receive their motifs in dreams (Eger 1978). The technique is usually not taught in schools, because the materials are expensive and not easily purchased in the communities.

The workshop started on a normal Wednesday afternoon. While the pupils were uncoiling wool yarn, Gregorio introduced himself and told how he had started dreaming his compositions and became a professional artisan. Pekka and I explained the purpose of the workshop and asked permission to film. Gregorio taught how to spread beeswax on the wooden plates. When the plates were all covered with wax, they were arranged on a large table as a big, yellow nierika. Gregorio drew a path with the footsteps of ancestors across the nierika. During the weekend we helped him to colour it with grey yarns. The winding path covered the plates partly, and the rest of the plates would be designed and coloured by the pupils. The nierika received the name Yeiyari, "the footsteps of the ancestors".[4]

Day after day the yellow surface of the wooden plates became more covered with lively and bright drawings. It was composed as a narrative path, starting from the creation of the first Wixaritari, leading to the contemporary village and winding forward towards the future.

A few days before our departure the teachers decided in their meeting that the inauguration should be suspended until the next year. An elder of the community had dreamed that a cow should be sacrificed at the sacred place on the school yard, and the time was too short for finding the cow and collecting the money. An inauguration of the painting would be arranged on the Pupils' Day instead.

On the Pupils' Day, a few minutes before the inauguration, the painting, the nierika, was ready. It was hung on the wall, and the process was documented on video. Only some nails were missing, and we did not get the rows of the paintings quite straight. A multitude of teachers, pupils and villagers came to the opening and wanted to take selfies with the nierika. The participants of the workshop were happy and proud that the nierika had been completed in time. We were happy, too, though the main purpose of our visit – the inauguration of the museum – was not realized and we would need to come back the next year to witness the sacrifice of the cow.

[4] *Yeiyari* is also the closest Wixárika word for 'tradition', 'religion' or 'ceremonial practice' (Liffman 2011, 68, 111; Neurath 2013, 21).

The Wixaritari are hospitable to their visitors, and they always give us a chance to express our aims. Different aims and needs are then negotiated in the meetings. The ritual obligations are, however, the priorities. Everything else can wait. Even an important communal event, like an inauguration of a museum, can be suspended if the ancestors reveal their will in a dream. Wixárika decision-making includes negotiation with the kakaiyarixi and is totally different than the decision-making that we are used to in our political and academic institutions or even in the meetings of our circles of activists and artists. However, if we want to continue working with Wixárika art and artists, it is important to visit the community during different seasons and to learn the annual cycle of events. And to learn waiting.

I remember the heat and wildfires in the Wixárika mountains. The smell of smoke entered the classroom and mixed with the smell of beeswax. I watched Nuvia teaching the pupils how to use the camera. I saw her panning over the plaza and focusing on the tree growing by the volleyball field. Leopoldo, one of the boys in seventh grade, sat in the tree and told a story that his friend Arturo recorded with another camera. The girls followed Nuvia's panning and watched the event through the viewfinder, and I felt so delighted at her choice of the right moment, when an oral story was unfolding at the same time that the other children were making painted and filmed stories, the soft performance of Nuvia's panning itself, the children immersed in their work, observing, learning, breathing. The children continue an oral tradition, yeiyari; they walk in the footsteps of ancestors, filming with their cell phones on their walks.

I remember Nuvia's panning movements and the words of Escobar while I read Hanna's poem, while I let her stanzas enter my body and mix with my breath.
(Lea)

Forfær in Sea-Sámi community, life and language

There is a Norwegian concept that I learned from Ingmar that I want to share with you. Forfær[5] was an important concept for Ingmar, a Sea-Sami healer I got to know as a friend and teacher some years back in time when I stayed in a coastal community that considered Sami heritage as stories from the past. They did not use the Sámi language, nor the traditional gákti (national costume) or other obvious or visual Sámi knowledge traditions. But still it puzzled me; were all the tracks of the Sámi memory really erased, or were they like hiding in practices (and, if so, which) or in Norwegian concepts, like forfær, that could be a Sámi concept dressed up as Norwegian? Did it hold so valuable knowledge that it needed to be kept hidden?

Ingmar always sat by the window when I visited. He kept a watchful eye over the fishing vessels, the daily passenger and transport boats and all the other traffic on the fjord. In addition, he was a very passionate observer of the influence of the wind direction on the cloud layers and the gulls' climbs on (for me) invisible winds. Sometimes seagulls can glide and soar for a long time, taking advantage of upward movements of air called thermals. The seagulls, like many of the other seabirds, are resting on currents of air that are moving upward. He did connect this movement to the shifts in the colour shades of the waves. Often he would turn and invite me to see in nature like he did: "now you see, now it's blowing it up". Often I did not know what to look for.

Some of that knowledge Ingmar thought it was absolutely necessary for me to learn was "to see in nature". When I asked how he could know where to go in the sea, when not to go out and how he knew where the halibut was, he told me: "I can see the clouds over the mountain when there is no reason to go out to sea. When the fog is steady and over the mountain top, the sea is difficult; when the fog is moving, the sea can be quiet. This is how nature works," he said, as he gathered and tied his fists, lifted them up and moved his body rhythmically and slowly back and forth.

[5] *Forfær* is a Norwegian word that does not have a clear English translation. It can mean scared, worried, angry, or overwhelmed with hard feelings. It may be a word which has come from Sámi language.

The sky and the clouds are just as connected as that good and evil. There is no need to be overwhelmed. “If you let fear take you, you do not stand a chance. One’s time is given – no more, no less. I have an uncle and a cousin who were lost at sea but one can't think of it – one has the time one is given.”

Ingmar talked about the relationship between himself and the world around, as well as what affected a person’s life. Simultaneously he draws my attention in that to knowing nature in ways that you could “see in the weather” more than “see the weather”. This is an important distinction. “To see in the weather”, as “to see in nature”, was not primarily related to what the eye could observe, but to the totality of those sensory experiences, and the systematization of these experiences, which Ingmar has gained insight into through a long life as a fisherman. This meant “seeing” but also healing as learning from, interconnected to nature and learning from the movement in nature as he relates, “the fog’s walk across the mountains’. It implied in addition to hearing; it was possible to hear both changes in wind direction, and ways the sea broke and the wind built. In addition, you could also smell when changes occur, either wind direction or the build-up of low pressure or high pressure. Ingmar, like others, greatly denigrated work in gaining interpretative competence about relationships that could provide him greater predictability in his daily work like fishing. Local (Indigenous) knowledge came from attending to these changes and trying to understand them as well as connecting it with the knowledge of other, making the public space where fishermen could negotiate such a crucial site.

To see in nature was for him to look for those connections which linked the embodied sensations and experiences not only between the clouds and the sea, but also between the clouds, the sea and the emotional stability of the body. Not to be “forfær” was for him a key entrance into being in nature. The relationship between man and nature is not one of difference. The in-between is for him where learning and knowledge come from. It disrupts a thinking where Ingmar sees himself as a subject and the surrounding landscape as the object of his actions. In this event where he was trying to address my questions about connections, he saw it as necessary to describe the movement of his body, the movement of the clouds and

> the sea, as well as how it affected his emotional mood and fate as a human being bound together.
>
> To see in nature was also to learn how to live according to the rhythm of the moon. Not only Ingmar but almost all of my friends in the community live according to the moon. It affected the movement in the sea, and by that what kind of fish we could get in specific spots and where the net and the angles were set. It affected when Beate cut her own hair, as well as when to cut the hair of the sheep. Harvesting, cutting the grass, buying timber for building material as well as slaughtering was all done according to the rhythm of the moon. Did you want fluid to run freely or did you want it to move slowly, did you want it to grow fast or slow after cutting, and what quality of the timber, meat or fish did you prefer? The face of the moon, being growing or shrinking, had an effect upon this as it had an effect upon the mood of the human body.
>
> (Britt)

Stories can be ethnographic accounts of the stories that need to be told in order to make the concepts present. Through performances of these stories, the concepts of *gulahallat*, *nierika* and *forfær* become more available for readers. The concepts are woven together by the land-, sea- and riverscape, the rise and fall of energy in everything alive brought forward by the movement of the moon, waters and ancestors; the concepts, as de la Cadena and Blaser (2018, 4) argue, are both theoretical and empirical, so that thereafter they cannot be "pulled apart". Within this practice, ethnography becomes a concept-making genre. De la Cadena and Blaser (2018) explain that they think of fieldwork as a crossroads of ethnographic concepts composed of both separation and connection, concepts that emerge with the awareness that they constitute practices and are thus worlding tools. Introducing the pluriverse, ethnographic concepts indicate excesses of the theoretical and the empirical. They emerge through ethnographic fieldwork. Still, it needs to be said that this goes beyond collecting information.

In these stories we have gone beyond collecting and analysing or theorizing knowledge. We have told stories of our own encounters with Indigenous worlds and words in different geographical and cultural locations that have intrigued and changed us. These encounters tell

about coming to know and starting to live and practice research with Indigenous knowledge. Learning about gulahallat, *nierika* and *forfær* is just the beginning.

Storytelling and decolonization: Stories having the capacity to travel and change worlds

Sium and Ritskes (2013) point out that Indigenous stories can be seen as a reclamation of Indigenous voice, land, and sovereignty, which are vital to decolonization. Indigenous storytelling as a world-making practice works to both deconstruct colonial ways of coming to know and construct alternatives, especially in order to disrupt Western imaginations of "theory". Saïd (1993, 219) argues that "decolonization is a very complex battle over the course of different political destinies, different histories and geographies, and it is replete with works of the imagination, scholarship, and counter-scholarship." Indigenous storytelling and the way of storying (also ourselves) otherwise participate in the making of Indigenous knowledge. Decolonization demands this specificity, demands this personal and relational understanding, and demands the richness and creative vitality that storytelling brings (Sium & Ritskes 2013, ii). In that way, stories are gifts. They are gifts of connections. Participating in a storytelling event is an invitation to be connected to the memories of a community; through these stories the community performs itself and the others who are co-dependent on being acknowledged and remembered. Graveline (1998, 66, as cited in Sium & Ritskes 2013, vi) argues that "the story is a living thing, an organic process, a way of life" through which Indigenous peoples are offered tools in order not only to remember and recall the past, but also to learn resistance of the land. Tuck and Yang (2012) have reminded us of the immediacy of decolonization, not only of our minds and actions but also of land. Storytelling and Indigenous land are both part of the sustaining and resurgence of Indigenous life, and they are not easily separable.

In Indigenous feminist writing, these aspects of the gift have been taken further: "The purpose of giving […] is to acknowledge and renew the sense of kinship and co-existence with the world. In other words, the gift is the manifestation of reciprocity with one's ecosystem, reflecting the bond of dependence and respect towards the natural world. From this bond, certain responsibilities emerge" (Kuokkanen 2007, 13). Sundberg (2013) argues that "decolonizing" means exposing the ontological violence authorized by Eurocentric epistemologies both in scholarship and in everyday life. Decolonizing involves fostering

“multiepistemic literacy”, a term proposed by different scholars, among them the Sámi scholar Rauna Kuokkanen (2007), who points to the importance of learning and dialogue between epistemic worlds. Dialogue between a diversity of epistemic worlds works to enact a “pluriversal world”. We need to ask if such a world is possible, as well as how it comes into being.

At the very beginning of this article we referred to Escobar (2012, 2018) and his suggestion for pluriversal studies towards the politics of the possible and the necessary ecological and cultural transitions in the current moment with huge environmental and cultural emergencies. We see pluriversal storytelling as a possibility both to embed Indigenous ontologies and epistemologies and to reveal the multiplicity of belonging to any language group or community. There is a diversity of worlds already in one community and those worlds are not always shared by every member of the community. Locally and even individually embedded pluriversal stories are capable of sharing the multiplicity without making generalizations or producing assumptions about the ontologies of someone belonging to one or another community. At the same time, behind the mountains and oceans there can be worlds and communities with which some stories can easily come together. These stories can travel between academic as well as local and global Indigenous communities without creating borders but by searching for ways to create and recreate communities, both inside the specific (Indigenous) society and between societies. At this particular time, we think we need stories, which can travel not only inside one community but between local, activist, academic and even political communities in order to create paths of understanding and caring between and over the mountains and oceans, referring to both material distances and colonial and other kinds of suffering, like embodied memories and mistrust.

The need for different worldings coming together is obvious when we realize the current historical moment, the destruction of the Earth, and through that recognize the need for better dialogue and imagination for conceiving new kinds of ecologies of practices. Stories can create dialogue, stories can create understanding of difference, and stories can open new paths to think. Stories are gifts. Stories have the capacity to travel and share different ontologies and worlds. Stories can change the worlds if we let them do so. Who and what kinds of stories are we allowing to sit by the fire and become told? How do we really make space for pluriversal stories?

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