



# Dutkansearvi dieđalaš áigečála

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## Foreword

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The aim of the special issue is to initiate and inspire the present and next generation of scholars to consider their experiences and perspectives of Indigenous Studies and coexistence more profoundly. The event that gave rise to this special issue, *Indigenous Studies and Conceptualising Coexistence*, was the *Indigenous Studies Writing Retreat* held in Gilbbesjávri (Kilpisjärvi) on the Finnish side of Sápmi in September 2019. The writing retreat was a five-day event, organised by the University of Helsinki, and it brought together scholars from different stages of their careers and from various fields, disciplines, backgrounds, and nationalities. Thus, the gathering was fertile ground for conceptualising coexistence in Indigenous studies. The theme of coexistence is also timely and poignant, as this resultant publication comes to fruition on the heels of a global pandemic and widespread social upheaval.


The retreat was organized around daily writing sessions, punctuated by breaks for lunch and dinner provided by the facility where we stayed, the University of Helsinki Biological Station. There were also evening gatherings and activities, such as saunas and hikes within view of, or even to the top of Sána— one of many mountains held sacred to the Sámi people. Some of our evening gatherings were around *árran* (the hearth) in the *goáhti* (the hut) which allowed for more intimate conversation and connection and for the exploration of important themes and issues in Indigenous studies. The organizers and hosts of the retreat had invited our Indigenous mentors from Aotearoa/New Zealand, T. Mere A. Kepa (Māori) and Linitā Manu‘atu (Tongan) (herein “Mere and Linita”). They were joined by Taina Tautakitaki (Tongan), the daughter of one of the co-authors of one of the narratives in this publication, Mele‘Ileini (Tongan). Mere and Linitā have extensive experience organizing Indigenous writing retreats in Aotearoa. Their



non-hierarchical, unassuming, and supportive mentorship proved invaluable in the natural and cultural landscape of Sápmi where the state-imposed borders on the Sámi people's lands and the figurative bordering of belonging are features of living Indigeneity in ongoing colonialism. Mere and Linitāi introduced the value of conceptualising *with* and *through* Indigenous epistemologies and ontologies, such as through the use of the Tongan concept of *talanoa* (respectful dialogue). Beyond asserting the inherent value of using terms from Indigenous languages when working with Indigenous peoples, by framing research approaches within Indigenous relational concepts and honouring Sámi places, the authors have manifested Indigenous methodologies and systems of ethics.

On the final day of the retreat, a group wrap-up session was held. Like the other sessions, the authors in retreat were invited to share and participate and everyone had an equal say at the table. At the encouragement of Mere, the group decided to publish a book or special journal issue to reflect on the retreat together. We decided that the book or journal issue would follow the same theme as the writing retreat: “conceptualising coexistence in Indigenous studies.” All of the retreaters had room to exercise agency in determining approaches, genres, sub-themes, and the timeframe of this collectively produced work. Of critical importance to some of the authors, was the opportunity to write in ways that broke with strict academic writing norms and structures. After some discussion, the group decided to write narratives as a way of storying their experiences of the writing retreat and related themes. We brainstormed about sub-themes that would serve as prompts for-reflective pieces. The inclusion of poetry, epigraphs in the mother-tongue or heritage language of the author, images or other visuals were encouraged, but not required. Co-authorship of narratives would be allowed, and creativity was encouraged. The final narratives have been designed so that the authors have been able to contribute individually and collectively.

This special issue includes one research article and a special section with seven narratives. Besides addressing the topic of co-existence, the narratives are also a window to a Writing Retreat as a methodology of embodied thinking and writing. The narratives have been reviewed by the co-editors, and the research article manuscript went through an external peer review process. All of the works furthered the work of “conceptualising coexistence” and employed storied strategies in academic writing. The seven reflective narratives addressed various themes and issues with relevance to Sámi and Indigenous studies, including: borders, dialogue, writing



in retreat, Indigenous languages, co-productive methods, Indigenous pedagogies, gender, movement, migration, and place. The peer-reviewed research article addresses Sámi-centered approaches to storytelling methodologies in Indigenous studies as conceptualized through the term *oktavuohta* (connection, togetherness, unity).

We would like to acknowledge the scholars, writers, and researchers who shared their ideas and experiences during the roundtable discussions each evening of the retreat. To the writers of the narratives: thank you for your conceptions of coexistence. We also would like to thank the following: the anonymous reviewers; Sofie Henriksen, an intern in Helsinki Indigenous studies, who provided editorial assistance; Attila Paksi who designed the texts; and finally, the editorial board of *Dutkansearvvi dieđalaš áigečála* for accepting our special issue for publication, as well as for offering this channel for broad dissemination of research in Sámi and Indigenous studies.

Finally, Mere Kepa would like to give thanks to Dr Pigga Keskitalo and Associate professor Pirjo Kristiina Virtanen, Indigenous Studies, University of Helsinki, whose support and generosity enabled Dr Linita Manu'atu and her to travel from Aotearoa, New Zealand to take part in the *Indigenous Studies Writing Retreat*.