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Conceptualizing fireside dialogues as gulahallan

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Introduction

Fireside dialogues for the Sámi, the one surviving Indigenous people of Northern Europe, are sometimes said to be a tradition of the past. These kinds of comments coming from the Sámi themselves indicate an understanding of such storytelling situations as located by a real fireplace in a context that belongs to another time and place. As such, the comments are a reflection of the fact that our way of life has changed tremendously during the last century.

I see some of the changes very clearly when I compare, for example, the lives of my grandparents, my father, and me. My late grandfather, Niillásaš Ándaras Ásllat, was born in 1909, my late father, Niillásaš Ándaras Ásllat Niila, was born in 1949, I, Niillásaš Ándaras Ásllat Niila Hanna-Máret, was born in 1978, and my first-born son Ándaras Ásllat was born in 2005, almost 100 years after my grandfather. We are and have been children of our time, and the timespan our lives expand over includes some of the most intensive lifestyle developments in human history, and definitely in the history of the Sámi people. Despite all the changes in our lives, our Sámi names still bind us to a common ancestry and keep us grounded in our Indigenous community. My late grandfather and my late father still remain and will remain as long as their names are spoken. My son and I are the ones to keep these names alive. Our name histories are part of the lively culture that roots us in our homelands. Another part of that tradition has been, and, I argue, still is, our storytelling tradition.

My grandfather told me stories about his travels and journeys in Sápmi as a young man. He did a lot of walking, and he stayed overnight in many places. He often shared a fireside with others, and they exchanged life stories, information about local happenings, and other descriptions of local life. When I was a young woman, my grandfather came to live with us for a period of time. He shared the stories of his youth as real life teachings. I was fortunate to have him live with us because there were not many spontaneous opportunities for me to share fireside


conversations with other people than my closest friends. Even those occasions had to somehow be preplanned and organized, many times in the guise of a mountain hike or a fishing trip.

My father was also a very skilled storyteller. He had learned from the older generation. However, there was already a slight difference in the way those two men told their stories. My grandfather kept a foot in the local and in the spiritual, mostly telling about journeys or about mysterious ghostly experiences. My father blended together stories from world literature, his own life experiences, and from numerous other sources that he kept secret from the listeners. When I was little, for instance, he told me numerous stories about how he learned to cook burbot (*Lota lota*) in Paris while he was an apprentice for a world famous chef named Pierre who owned a busy and fancy restaurant. When I was in my teens, I found out that he had never visited Paris, other than through literature. It took me a couple of years to situate the stories in my home village and in the simple kitchen of our neighbor, Piera. What I did learn a lot quicker was three or four good ways to skin a burbot, and several different seasonings for this strange fish. It was perhaps easier to understand and learn the purpose of the stories, but I also had to learn to navigate and to interpret these stories in different ways. There were valuable lessons to be learned.

In my own home there is no fireplace, but I have realized that the fireside in fireside dialogues is not a necessity for the storytelling to continue. It is more about an attitude toward sharing experiences and telling stories, and it can be done, and should be done, whenever people meet, including in virtual spaces. These sharing sessions can be spontaneous, but there is also a need for organized and planned situations where we can meet and discuss without the burdens of everyday life hanging over us all the time. In the Sámi educational context, storytelling traditions have been used as a method in, for example, courses in multiculturalism (e.g. Balto and Østmo 2012). Therefore, the concept is not new to my fellow academics in Sápmi, although the naming of conversation or *gulahallan*¹ as a specific part of Sámi studies' methodology is still not common.

In this particular piece of writing, I want to reflect on the opportunities for sharing stories and opening up for dialogues as a vital part of Indigenous writing retreats. I will do this by narrating

¹ Gulahallat – a verb in North Sámi – to be able to hear one another/each other; make sense of each other's talk, understand each other; to talk, to converse, to discuss; to hear from each other as in keeping in touch.



my experiences on a five-day Indigenous writing retreat where I first learned about dialogue as a research methodology. I also realized that our Sámi *gulahallan* was in many ways related and similar to the Tongan *talanoa*, which our mentors on the writing retreat referred to on several occasions. Afterwards, it was clear to me that I had already been using *gulahallan* as a methodology without really knowing it or without giving it the value the concept should have. I will return to the two concepts a bit later in this chapter. I have also chosen to arrange the subparts of this chapter in the same manner, or according to the same storytelling strategy that my grandfather used when telling me his life stories. First, he would introduce the topic, then he continued with some kind of a goal or expectation for the story, then he would go on to set the scene, after that he would give a vivid description of a fair or happening, sometimes there would be a problem or a situation to solve, and finally he would reflect on his own story and invite me to discuss it with him.

The expectation

I attended my first organized writing retreat in September 2019, in Gilbbesjávri. I was very excited about participating in the retreat as it was the first Indigenous writing retreat that I had heard of in Scandinavia. Initially, I knew very little about the goals and potential of such retreats, but after having read Haring et.al. I knew that such specific writing retreats are a “relatively new phenomena in academia and are increasingly becoming a much-needed element in Indigenous landscapes” (2018, e2).


I also knew that the retreat would give me another kind of possibility to feel grounded and at home, as the participants were all headed to Sápmi, the traditional settlement area of the Indigenous Sámi people of Northern Europe, that is, my people. I had also seen some familiar names on the list of participants and was looking very much forward to meeting my Sámi colleagues and other Indigenous researchers. In a way, I was expecting them and the other participants to have “a strong foundation in Indigenous community knowledge, culture, history, and tradition,” as had been the case in the successful Indigenous writing retreat described by Haring et. al. (2018, e5). Although Haring et. al. were describing a writing retreat in a different context and for different purposes, mostly within Indigenous healthcare and wellbeing, I was also able to relate to the concerns “expressed through the evaluations that participation in the

event be open only to those who were Indigenous people in order to maintain a more focused atmosphere of peer exchange and support for their writing goals” (Haring et al. 2018, e8–e9).

When it came to supporting writing goals, I was especially curious to meet our on-site mentors who were Māori and Tongan. I was looking forward to hearing more about the Māori and Tongan worldviews and perspectives on research, wishing that they would resemble the worldviews I was familiar with through Sámi studies. This wish was perhaps mostly based on my personal desire to recognize resemblance between us Sámi and our Pacific colleagues. On a more general level, I also feel at home in what a Sámi scholar Rauna Kuokkanen – Jovvna Jon Ánne Kirstte Rávná – refers to as “Indigenous scholarship,” and I agree with the argument “that other peoples (or cultures) cannot be known from the perspective of cultures based on entirely different assumptions and worldview” (Kuokkanen 2007, 99).

For the retreat, I was not only expecting there to be a common ground to share, but I was also hoping for this, since I had had a lot of experience of summits, meetings, conferences, and other social and scientific gatherings where I always had to start off by explaining things. All that explaining, and sometimes even defending my research, my culture, my language, our Indigenous rights, our values, and our way of interacting with our surroundings had made me weary of most academic contexts. As a daughter and granddaughter of good storytellers I knew that some stories are worthy of telling several times, while repeating others consumes the honor and self-image of the teller.

A more practical expectation of mine had to do with coping with the workload that I was under during that autumn. I was in the final phase of an International Post Doc assignment, which meant that a fair amount of academic writing and production of papers and articles was expected of me. At the same time, I was struggling to find a suitable strategy to continue “giving back” to my research partners, also after the project was finished. I was definitely feeling the pressure that Linda Tuhiwai Smith describes as “the pressure from the academy to turn research into peer-reviewed publications and the differing expectations from communities that researchers should not be building their careers from research” (2006, 17). I saw the writing retreat as an opportunity to meet at least some of the deadlines that I was facing at the end of 2019. I had not decided what writing to give preference or prioritize when I signed up for the



retreat, but when I got to my destination it became very clear to me which piece of writing was going to take form there.

Setting the Indigenous scene of the retreat

On my way from Ubmi/Umeå in Sweden to Gilbbesjávri in Finland, I travelled between two seasons in one single day. The beautiful early autumn colors changed in front of my eyes the further north I came, and when I finally arrived in Gilbbesjávri, after 1000 kilometers, almost all of the leaves were already on the ground, having already been touched by the snow in a couple of occasions. The research station, where I was headed for the retreat, was located at the foot of the great mountain Sána/Saana. Already the first day when I arrived at the research station, I wrote a short message to a friend, who is originally from that area. Her life is now in my home village even further north, and that is where our paths have come to cross and to intertwine. I sent her a photo of Sána and immediately I got an answer from her. She told me that the site is dear and familiar to her. That is where her late father had herded the reindeer for a long time before my friend was born. She welcomed me to her landscape, to her father's and family's landscape. I was very grateful for the welcome wishes, since I knew from that moment on that I would be successful in writing my text. I knew the text would now be rooted in this landscape as it is in also my home area through my Sámi authorship.


The lake Gilbbesjávri is at the intersection of three national borders, drawn on Indigenous land by southern bureaucrats who decided how the land should be divided between three Nordic national states in the 1700's and 1800's. The Norwegian border is drawn in shorter straight lines over mountains and waters – when one looks at it closely on the map, one can imagine how the ruler was held over our holy waters, mountains, and valleys. The border between Finland and Sweden divides the large lake in half. Our venue was in the outskirts of a local village on the Finnish side of the lake.



Figure 1. The author and the Sána-mountain in the background. (© Ánne-Sire Länsman)

After having travelled from Sweden, I noticed the change of countries best at the local gasoline station, since most signs were now in Finnish instead of Swedish. There were almost no signs of being in Sápmi, other than some tourist souvenirs. This made me think of the ways that the two societies that I live in and belong to understand land and place. For the Sámi, there are no borders, other than in a purely legal meaning imposed by the national states. It is an absurd thought for a Sámi to divide the water, either in a lake, across a river, or on the sea. Only the land can naturally divide the water, and as such the land together with the water decide or dictate where the people should live and where the animals should graze. Traditionally, the Sámi have lived and moved along rivers and coasts, sometimes passing high lands and mountain tops. Families or groups of kin have lived and prospered in Sápmi without the need to own the land or to draw lines in nature.

When I reflected over the differences in how to view land and borders, I got a very firm feeling of what I should be concentrating on during the retreat. It was clear to me that I had come to Gilbbesjávri to write a chapter on Sámi pedagogy for a handbook for teachers who are not familiar with minorities in the North. I was going to write for the new and old teachers who encounter pupils, parents, and situations that require a special knowledge of a Sámi upbringing, pedagogy, and the special settings of a multicultural classroom in the far North. I could not have written that chapter in Ubmi where my academic life is based. I needed to return to



northernmost Sápmi in order to gather my thoughts and to hopefully engage in *gulahallan* and *ságastallan*² with my Indigenous peers.

The long talk

When I arrived at the University of Helsinki Biological Research Station, most of my co-participants had already made themselves comfortable and had started writing and having discussions. I shared a room with a Sámi colleague. We were very quick to get involved in all sorts of discussions concerning our families and *ságat* (Eng. a talk with someone, news, rumors, speech, lecture) from our home communities/municipalities. It was a joy for my heart to be able to discuss things in my mother tongue, *sámejiella* (North Sámi spelling). From the more casual talk we went on to discuss our personal goals for the retreat. In my Swedish academic landscape, there are only one or two people who know my language, and most academic discussions are in Swedish or in English, both foreign languages to me. This time we could continue talking in Sámi, although we were now discussing research and academia. We had a serious discussion about the pressures we both were experiencing when having to apply for funds in order to be able to do the research that is valuable and timely in Sámi society.


After the first talk, we went to the social dinner to meet the other participants of the retreat. Two Sámi colleagues greeted me directly when I entered the dining hall. I was also welcomed by the main organizer of the event whom I knew from before. There was a pleasant and inclusive atmosphere that gave promises of new acquaintances and fruitful networks. A few minutes later, another Sámi researcher, Dr. Anni-Siiri Länsman – Nillá Piera Ánne-Sire – came to the dining room, came to hug and greet me welcome to the camp. The two of us had been spending time together in Oulu in Finland, where the Sámi research unit, Giellagas Institute, is located. We instantly started speaking in Sámi, following the same greeting ritual as my roommate I had earlier in the afternoon. Ánne-Sire had a very interesting research project on her hands, and I could not wait to hear more. We then decided that we would have a talk-walk the next day in the afternoon so as to catch up and discuss research. We agreed on taking the mountain Sána as our first destination.

² Ságastallat – *ling*. a verb in North Sámi – to talk to someone, to discuss, to talk to each other.

Later that evening, the entire writing retreat group met by the fireside in an outdoor hut next to the main venue. This was the first time I joined the retreat collective. I did not know many people from before, and I noticed that the common language of the group was English. In a way this was the natural language choice, since our mentors, Mere Kēpa and Linita Manu'atu, were from Aotearoa, and many of the members of the group were multilingual. However, even if it was natural for this particular group to communicate in English, I immediately felt that it affected my experience in a negative and delimiting way. All I managed to do that first evening was to greet the others and tell them my name. The leap from the casual private conversation in Sámi to the use of academic English in a group was a too difficult move for me to make that first evening, but it gave me more time for listening, which was probably what I needed the most at that point.

It was this first evening when the term *talanoa* was mentioned for the first time. Anne-Sire and I were both intrigued by the term and hungry to know more. Our mentors did not really explain the meaning of the term, but we both understood that the way our mentors, Mere Kēpa and Linita Manu'atu, used the term implied that it was about inclusive and open conversation. I later found out that the linguistic meaning of *talanoa* in Tongan consists of two parts that together refer to an act of talking (*tala*) about things (*noa*). Often the linguistic meaning refers to casual and non-planned conversation in general (Suaalii-Sauni and Fulu-Aiolupotea 2014, 333). The same term is also used for a specific Pacific research methodology. According to Suaalii-Sauni and Fulu-Aiolupo “*talanoa* and *faafaletui* as methodologies and methods seem to privilege a process of storying that wherever possible is open and face to face. Such storying, whether deep, serious or casual, is carried out using a process that is focused on building culturally appropriate and respectful relationships, not only between researcher and participant, but also between researchers themselves” (2014, 335).

The next morning, I was eager to get my writing project started. In the late hours of the preceding night, I had thought quite a lot of the *talanoa* concept, and somewhere in my mind a plan to write a chapter that was a dialogue with my readers had ripened. I had never felt such an ease when writing anything academic in my entire career as a researcher. I had also never tried to write a narrative text as an academic book chapter. But now I sat there, looking out from the conference room window out onto the lake, Gilbbsjávri, and I was speaking to my future readers and telling them about the Sámi pedagogy of patience and paying attention.



In the afternoon, I finally got the chance to talk about my experience with Áinne-Sire. We were hiking higher and higher on the Sáana mountain trail, and at the same time we talked constantly. That afternoon I was the one doing most of the talking, and Áinne-Sire was listening and asking me questions. We were talking about the ways we learn and teach in Sápmi, which was directly relevant for my chapter, but also an interesting discussion topic for ourselves. Later, working on this paper and getting to know the *talanoa* concept a bit better, I learned that also *talanoa* sometimes “requires movement, at times spontaneity, and can take place nearly anywhere” (Tecun (Daniel Hernandez) et al. 2018, 158). It was an exciting discovery to learn that the way Áinne-Sire and I were co-processing our research was already a part of another Indigenous methodology. On our way back down the mountain, I asked my companion if it was ok for me to take another path back to the research station. I needed some time for my inner dialogue to digest everything that had been said.


While walking back to the station, a very dear memory from my childhood came to mind. It was about the numerous ways my father had taught me to recognize the path I was walking on. One day when we were hiking together, he and I laid down on the ground in order to feel the inclination of the ground; the next day he would teach me to look back and forth and to see how the stones and the small trees looked from different angles, the next time we would study how the sun and the wind felt while we were walking, and this would go on for weeks. I never knew he was teaching me, but I was for sure learning. When the winter came, he would ask me to describe how those paths looked, every little curve and drop on the way. I can still remember some of my favorite paths by heart, I can see them as clearly as if they were in front of my eyes. I also realized that I had been teaching my own children the same skills without really reflecting over it. I am hoping that by knowing the land, it keeps us rooted in the landscape that we no longer get to roam freely on whenever we want. This memory also became a central part of the book chapter that I was writing, and a way to describe the pedagogy of catching one’s attention through patience.



Figure 2. The author's son, Ándaras, lying on the ground and feeling the inclination in the mountains in Outakoski. (© Hanna Outakoski)

Back at the station, it was already time for dinner and for the *talanoa* session with our mentors. I felt very welcomed and honored by the mentors as they paid a tribute to the ancestral lands of the Sámi where our meeting was being held and to the Sámi as an Indigenous people of the land. Many of the retreat participants got the chance to speak that evening. I realized that many of them had an interest in the Indigenous, without necessarily identifying with the Indigenous themselves. Accordingly, they also had many concerns about their role, their perspectives, their research questions, and many other research and ethics-based questions.

It occurred to me, that I was very fortunate in a way. I had never questioned or doubted my motives or the reasons why I was doing my research. I had always been studying the Sámi context for the Sámi as a collective, and not for myself. While I was thinking about this, Mere Kēpa asked the participants what Indigenous meant to them. Then she said something that I have kept with me ever since. She said that for the Indigenous, there is no Indigenous, we are all peoples, and our research is for our people. So, for a Māori researcher there exists Māori research, and for a Sámi there exists Sámi research. They are not the same, although we are both Indigenous peoples. According to this view, Indigenous research as an umbrella term brings together research done by and for Indigenous peoples, and we share a set of values and ethical codes, but not necessarily methodologies and methods. This was the first time I dared to join the conversation and I raised a question that had been bothering me for a long time. I wanted to know where our priorities as Indigenous researchers should lie, with our people and



the local contexts, or with foreign and distant groups of Indigenous peoples. She answered that she would not choose to leave her community and do research elsewhere. For her, Māori research for the Māori came in the first place. For me it was a great relief to hear her answer. I have always, since I started my academic career, been interested and curious about other Indigenous contexts, but I have also felt that my own community should be the first to benefit from my research. It is in my own community that my knowledge is anchored and nurtured. I have realized that I will never have the same connection to other communities.

The next day, Áinne-Siri and I went for our second walk. This time we had chosen to hike on the land ridge that divides the great lake Gilbbesjávri into two lakes. We were looking at Sáana mountain from a different angle so that it now looked like a giant wave that was about to swallow the lake underneath it (see Fig. 1). This meant we had a new perspective and a new talk. This time it was Áinne-Sire's turn to speak. She told me about an exciting new project that she was working on, and about some of the core concepts of the project. These were Sámi concepts, and her main material was interview material gathered in Sápmi.


One of the concepts we discussed had to do with close family relations. While discussing the concept from many perspectives, we also found out that the concept had great relevance and importance in both of our personal lives. I felt a great closeness and familiarity with Áinne-Sire, the deeper we dove in our discussion. We were talking about relations, how they are built, broken, rebuilt, and constructed. At the same time, we were talking about our relations to the land back home. Her homelands are further south from Outakoski, and I needed some orientation to her ancestral lands around a small Sámi village in the southern outskirts of Inari municipality. This orientation was neatly combined in our walk, as we also discussed the land properties of the place where we were walking in comparison to our own paths at home. That day I got a much deeper understanding of some of the kinship concepts that Áinne-Sire was working on, and we both got a chance to talk seriously about relationships and families. For my writing project, this gave another perspective on how important it is that our Sámi pedagogy be rooted in local knowledge and in relationships and kinship that a local school can nurture in a different way than a boarding school or a school in a large town ever can.

That evening I missed most of the social discussion that was scheduled for the group since I felt a need to write down some of the most important reflections from the talk-walk. However,

I did manage to hear some of the stories or accounts of the participants at the end of the social discussion. It was the participants' turn to present their projects and discuss dilemmas they were facing. It became clear to me that my understanding of the Indigenous had been, in a way, quite narrow and needed widening. Some of the participants in the retreat spoke of the hidden trajectories of their people. Some of them had not known about their Indigenous ancestries before they were adults or began studying local histories. Some of them also spoke of broken ties to the culture, and of hope to mend some of the wounds and repair some of the ties. This made me reconsider the expectations I had had for the retreat. It was perhaps wrong of me to expect the other participants to have strong connections to the Indigenous culture, language, and knowledge when there were so many contexts in which the Indigenous had been hidden away for long periods of time. I understood that writing and research was their way back to the cultural context that they had lost. That same evening, we all went to sauna and for a swim in Gilbbesjávri. It gave us a more casual and relaxed opportunity to talk and to find similarities in a situation where the hierarchies and other inequalities were wiped away.

On the fourth day of the retreat, my writing had taken shape. This time I was writing about the principles of Indigenous education. Or actually, I argued that there is no Indigenous education as an entity. However, there are a set of common principles that are partly involved in shaping the local pedagogies. Our pedagogies cannot be the same since our lands, customs, traditions, languages, settings, and livelihoods are not the same. This revelation made me consider the words of Linda Tuhiwai Smith who argues that “[i]t is not, therefore, a question of whether the knowledge is ‘pure’ and authentic, but whether it has been the means through which people have made sense of their lives and circumstances, that has sustained them and their cultural practices over time, that forms the basis for their understanding of human conduct, that enriches their creative spirit and fuels their determination to be free” (Smith 2006, 16). Indeed, it must be the understanding of Sámi lives and circumstances that lies at the heart of Sámi pedagogy.

The walk-talk on that day gave me and Ánne-Sire a third perspective on the Sáana-mountain (Fig. 3). This time we headed to the backside of the mountain, away from the village and the lake. We passed a site where someone had recently burned down a cottage that was built for the visitors and tourists. We had heard of this in the news just a few days before. This time we were discussing conflicts between different ethnic groups in the area, and the distress among the Sámi who were fighting for their traditional livelihoods and land rights. A lot of this distress



is also present in the Sámi school system. It has been inherited and it lives and thrives in the families. Numerous Sámi children grow up surrounded by activism, protest, and a never ending struggle to receive human value. From there these things follow them throughout their lives. For example, my colleagues at the language department in Ubmi teach Swedish, English and other modern languages, but they do not come to work having to worry every moment about the future of the language that they teach. They are not burdened by the weight of responsibilities connected to linguistic and cultural revitalization. This is something that distinguishes Indigenous scholars from other scholars. We live and breathe this distress; we do not only sympathize with it.

During the last social meeting with our mentors, we finally got to discuss some of these more serious and emotionally heavy issues as well. However, I did feel that we were tiptoeing through some of these themes due to their sensitive character. At that time, I felt slightly provoked by this wariness, but I have later realized that Ánne-Sire's and my earlier talks had already put me in a slightly defensive state, which affected my evening and participation in the social meeting. I guess I was mostly provoked by the fact that we were in the Sámi-land, but the retreat had not put any focus on the local knowledge or traditions. It made me somehow feel like a tourist in Sámi surroundings; a tourist or an old-time ethnographer, who does not have to carry the burdens of belonging to the land and the community, but who can take and interpret the land and the discussions as they please. That sounds very harsh, and the way I felt that evening does not pay tribute to the knowledge and the experiences we were sharing. Therefore, it has been extra valuable to be able to write a reflective chapter on the retreat experiences and to really inspect the retreat from a different angle, like Ánne-Sire and I inspected the Sána-mountain from different directions.




Figure 3. Hanna-Máret and Áne-Sire, third walk. (© Áne-Sire Länsman)

My last day at the retreat was a quiet day. The late evening discussion was still affecting me. To my surprise, the wrapping up session with many voices and experiences seemed to only boost my writing. I finished the first full draft of my book chapter on Sámi pedagogy by noon. It was difficult to believe that I had been so productive during that week. Having had the opportunity to really dive into the writing without distractions during the day, and to discuss the work and relations with Áne-Sire in the evenings was a great experience in creativity. This made me consider Linda Tuhiwai Smith's words that pointed out that "[r]esearchers who work in the margins need research strategies that enable them to survive, to do good research, to be active in building community capacities, to maintain their integrity, manage community expectations of them and mediate their different relationships" (2006, 24). I could certainly include the writing retreat into those specific strategies, and I am glad that *gulahallan* with my Sámi colleagues, and especially with Áne-Sire, gave me the opportunity to mediate, test, and improve my own research ideas, and to learn more about other Sámi projects.

The challenge

In the beginning, I did struggle quite a lot with the fact that we used the epithet Indigenous for this writing retreat. My first idea for a narrative in this journal issue involved discussing the



loss of the Indigenous in contexts that carried the epithet but turned out not to be Indigenous. I believe this struggle was, and still is, strongly connected to the fear of having to deal with different forms of ignorance and arrogance. It has been my personal challenge to win over that fear, and to find a way to expand and widen my own views.

During the writing retreat, my fear was proven unnecessary on several occasions. Instead of ignorance and arrogance, the retreat had an atmosphere of curiosity, respect, and reciprocity. Both the senior and the junior researchers were treated with equal respect and given a chance to talk. Our evening meetings were an open and safe place to share experiences and knowledge, true *talanoa* and *gulahallan* situations. Many fears and dilemmas were openly discussed, and at least some of the dilemmas seemed to receive a solution that pleased the participants and was in coherence with Indigenous ethics and its principles.

One of the discussions that I had during this week did, however, raise my concerns about the need for more guidance for allied researchers that have an interest in Indigenous issues, but still lack a footing in the Indigenous community. It was a very deep and insightful conversation between one of the other participants and me at the retreat. I learned a number of new things about a certain type of research that was being conducted in other Indigenous contexts. I also got a chance to tell my conversation partner about the collaborative school research that I was doing. For me, it was crucial to explain and discuss the principles of collaborative Indigenous research where the needs and the context of the partner community were the focus of all parts of the project from the planning phase to the dissemination phase. When I asked my fellow researcher about these aspects, most of the answers focused on the interests of the researcher, and not on the interests or needs of the community. The conversation circled around the I and self of the researcher, and not on the I in the Indigenous as a collective. The researcher perspective, that I was introduced to by my conversation partner, began with the personal interest of the researcher on certain aspects of an Indigenous culture that the researcher did not belong to. The research questions were formulated by the researcher, and not in collaboration with the researched community. The research methods were pre-planned so as to suit the researcher's own practical reality and some Western research traditions. I remember feeling that weariness that I had been so familiar with in other academic contexts when I met people who had a desire to study some aspect of the Sámi culture without having any connections to the culture or the people and their community.


My greatest challenge was to find a way to continue the conversation, and to come up with a conversational strategy that would give my conversation partner a chance to reconsider the nature of the principles behind the planned project without preaching or pushing down. Usually I might have given up, but this time I was encouraged by the concepts of *talanoa* and *gulahallan*. I did my best to listen carefully, and to place questions, that hopefully made my partner think of the importance of reciprocity in all Indigenous research. I am looking forward to seeing whether that conversation became a part of the research methodology of my conversation partner or not.

What comes to me, is that the retreat felt like a continuous stream of encounters and discussions that made me twist and bend my own perspectives. All that twisting and bending was good for me. It was also a great challenge for me to share so much personal and academic information with a colleague. In the end, all those conversations and all that *gulahallan* was rewarded as my writing took shape, and my personal ties to my Sámi colleagues were once again strengthened.

Time for reflection

It was very useful for me to hear our mentors' and the other participants' perspectives and thoughts on some of the core issues in Indigenous research. During the retreat, I was continuously reminded of the importance of communication, conversation, and mutual understanding of ethics in doing Indigenous research. I borrow Linda Tuhiwai Smith's words in dressing my thoughts into writing saying that "[f]or indigenous and other marginalised communities, research ethics is, at a very basic level, about establishing, maintaining, nurturing reciprocal and respectful relationships, not just among people as individuals, but with people as collectives, as members of communities and with humans who live in and with other entities in the environment" (2006, 10).

Indigenous research as an umbrella term can mean a shared entrepreneurship for the Indigenous communities, Indigenous researchers, and the allied researchers from different disciplines. However, there is still space for Indigenous research that springs from the localities, values, and knowledges of different Indigenous cultures. Our Sámi research has value on its own, and a special place in the epistemologies of the Sámi people, such is the case with other Indigenous



peoples as well. There is also a good reason for the Indigenous research to guide allied, involved, and engaged research which can never have the same rooting in the Indigenous culture and community as does the research that belongs in that land and in that context. After my experiences on the writing retreat, I dare to assert that Indigenous writing retreats can provide a mutual and safe arena for such guidance and support for both the Indigenous and the allied researchers.

The invitation

The invitation is sent out to my fellow researcher within Sámi and Indigenous studies to continue discussing *talanoa*, *gulahallan*, and other forms of open and safe conversations as an important part of our Indigenous methodology. I am also looking very much forward to arranging and participating in the first Sámi research and writing retreat in the future.

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