Dutkansearvvi dieđalaš áigečála

Relational ethics in Indigenous research – A reflexive navigation of whiteness and ally positionality

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Abstract

In this article, we discuss Sámi/Indigenous research ethics from the perspectives of positionality and relationality. The article builds on and draws from two ongoing PhD studies by white, Nordic euro-western doctoral candidates conducting research in the sphere of Indigenous research. Through a reflexive framework, we depict the ongoing process of decolonizing our practice as researchers and moving toward a relational ethics, a process of self-reflection we suggest is necessary for non-Indigenous researchers doing research that involves or affects Indigenous people. We aim to contribute to the development of Sámi research ethics for the wider public to consider and offer this article particularly to early stage researchers, graduate and undergraduate students, and educators in Indigenous studies.

Keywords: Indigenous research ethics, Sámi research ethics, non-Indigenous positionality, decoloniality, relationality

Introduction

In November 2018, we both separately attended a research workshop called *Re-Searching Indigenous Methodologies and Engaging Communities* in Aanaar, Sámi Homeland[1]. There, by engaging with Indigenous and non-Indigenous scholars, we learned that Sámi research ethics are in a continuous *process of becoming* (Braidotti 2018). Since the emergence of Sámi research, there have been numerous suggestions for the definition and application of Sámi research ethics. However, at this research workshop, many voiced a need for more tangible ways to apply them. Our own experiences as non-Indigenous doctoral candidates, and before that as master's students of Sámi and Indigenous studies, being trained and expected to participate in the development and application of Indigenous methodologies and ethics attest to this demand. We are navigating a forest that is somewhat familiar but without a clear map. Here, our ethical compass is our most important tool.

The Sámi-initiated working group for Sámi research ethics in Finland was formed in 2017 and now includes a combination of Sámi and Finnish institutions. The working group's ethical

considerations highlight Indigenous involvement throughout research processes, deliberations concerning the benefits of research, and returning knowledge back to communities (Lehtola 2019a). This article aims to deepen the contemporary discussion of research's ethical considerations, which especially apply to non-Indigenous researchers either wishing to conduct or conducting research involving Sámi/Indigenous people or issues. This article presents both theoretical contemplations and practical examples of paths chosen in our dissertation projects' process of becoming and in building relational ethics.

We propose alternative perspectives for positioning and conducting respectful research. We avoid taking an Indigenous concept and making it our framework as if it were our own. However, we do highlight the gift of Sámi/Indigenous concepts by foregrounding the notion of reciprocity/gift-giving as our point of reference (Maldonado-Torres 2007; Kuokkanen 2007). Thus, we hope to bring the reader to value the contribution of Sámi/Indigenous onto-epistemology to the discourse on research ethics.

In this article, we use autoethnography dialogically in both research methodology and article structure. An autoethnographic approach clarifies our position as meshed into the research – a position in which the subject and object collapse, and in which we are both the mode and the object of inquiry (Trahar 2009). This approach enables a critique of our 'selves' and the cultures in which they are embedded, allowing a contribution to onto-epistemic justice through a critique of hegemonic onto-epistemologies (Fricker 2007; Murris 2018). Applying a social constructionist approach in our reflections, which defines knowledge as a product of its time and cultures constructed in social interaction (Burr 2015), allows the reader to connect our claims with the cultures and time where they were uttered.

The process of knowledge production in a dialogical approach is enriched by working convivially, not in competition (Mignolo & Walsh 2018). Drawing from Sámi scholarly voices (Linkola & Keskitalo 2016), we occasionally move to in thematical dialogue that sheds light on the respective ethical choices of two researchers with different backgrounds and two different research projects, understanding that the ethical concerns of non-Indigenous researchers working within the sphere of Indigenous research demand more vivid and careful attention.

The concept of relationality in Indigenous methodology assumes asking only for what you need, giving back and taking care of each other, and requires time and knowledge (Kuokkanen 2007, 2000). This sounds simple enough in words. However, implementing them in a research project in a euro-western academic setting built on starkly different values poses complex challenges that require profound and collective ethical reflection.

We begin the first chapter by introducing our research projects. We then delve into how we are framed by and make use of euro-Nordic whiteness, proposing a strategy for reconstructing our identities and positionality. The second chapter focuses on how to approach relationality more deeply in everyday practices during the research process. We reflect on relationality as an Indigenous concept and propound how to link it with ethical considerations. The third chapter offers insights on ethical and decolonial choices which we consider a positive strategy that challenges social inequalities and Eurocentric research assumptions.

Dismantling whiteness - From outsiders to allies

> Helena: I am a Master of Arts in Sámi culture and a doctoral candidate at the University of Oulu, now working in the Department of History in the Northern Rural Youth in Flux project led by Adjunct Professor Kaisa Vehkalahti. My research focuses on the questions concerning intergenerational belonging to the place and space of the Sámi Homeland, paths to the future, and the spatial constructions of girlhood (Wexler 2009; Ultutgasheva et al. 2014; McGregor 2018; Farrugia 2016; Käyhkö 2017). Despite the hegemony of urban youth research, I do not confine myself to the view of youth as an urban phenomenon (Armila 2018). The approach of the study is interdisciplinary, combining Indigenous studies, history, and girl studies. I am working with 12 Sámi and non-Sámi girls as research participants. I apply different interview and visual methods in a youth-oriented approach. The follow-up setting includes several contact times with participants and time to build respectful relationships with them. This setting enables hermeneutical knowledge production and a question-making process that is reminiscent of an ethnographic interview (Tolonen & Palmu 2007, 92).

Michelle: I am a doctoral candidate at the Sámi research institute, Giellagas, at the University of Oulu. Examining decoloniality (as understood by Kuokkanen 2006, 2011; Vázquez 2012; Tlostanova & Mignolo 2012, and others) in Finnish teacher education with the aim of mattering the Sámi, the focus of my research is on understanding agential processes that are operational in upholding and resisting coloniality/modernity (as understood by Lehtola 2015b; Junka-Aikio 2019; Maldonado-Torres 2007; Quijano 2007; Vázquez 2017, and others). I have identified two main areas of decolonial construction within teacher education: one involving education in Sámi contexts; the other education in a majority context. These I examine through a participatory action research (Rink et al. 2013) and decolonial discourse analysis (Passada 2019) approach in the Ketterä Korkeakoulu (Agile Academia) project (2019—2021), which enables formally unqualified in-service teachers in Sámi cultural and linguistic contexts to gain formal linguistic and pedagogical proficiency. My doctoral research is comparative and transdisciplinary, moving and discussing with educational, decolonial, critical Indigenous, and feminist thinking companions (Jackson & Mazzei 2012).

Despite global acknowledgement of the colonization of Indigenous peoples, there is a lack of consensus concerning the colonial acts implemented in Europe's Nordic countries (Lehtola 2015a). The lack thereof in Finland and Sweden places them far behind the ethico-political developments already evident in Norway, where the state has acknowledged this problematic relationship (Lehtola 2015b). The western academy, as outsiders to Indigenous cultures and land, has made and continues to make explicit efforts to maintain colonial practices and oppression (Kuokkanen 2007, 12-15).

The Nordic countries form a distinctive geopolitical area in terms of coloniality. They are defined by their peripheral position in European global colonial expansion yet are complicit with it, both in benefiting from it and through the colonization of the Sámi people and lands (Lehtola 2015). It is necessary to explicate that we are influenced in our positionality by our Nordic geopolitical upbringing and formal education. For example, we are influenced by the

narratives of innocence[1] and exceptionalism[2] canonized in formal education in Finland and socialization into brick sensibility[3].

The vested interests (Tuana 2006) in ignorance about Sámi people and Finland's colonial history provides an incentive to maintain that position of hegemony over the onto-epistemological assumptions of the Euro-Western white academia to which we belong. We partly attribute this structural ignorance to the logic and set of values into which the academy trains and socializes us. This logic can be described by the notion of brick sensibility, with its orientation toward progress and the knowledge-based universality of one reality (Jimmy et al 2019, 13-18). Brick sensibilities value knowledge through its measurability, accuracy, and efficacy and communicate through normativity and reason, rendering those who operate according to thread sensibilities unintelligible or silenced. Brick sensibility is dominant in the euro-western academy, where it is perceived as normal, rational, and objective. This leaves thread sensibilities with the burden of altering their inter/-introspective and relational way of communication with brick sensibilities in order to be heard. Thread sensibilities are relationally oriented, aim for ecological sustainability, and view knowledge as something you earn rather than accumulate or transmit. Elwood Jimmy, Vanessa Andreotti, and Sharon Stein (2019, 13-18) propose these categorizations mainly for the expansion of our thinking to enable collaboration between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people, while clarifying that these categories are partial, incomplete, and occur in many forms, both having the potential to be generative and non-generative of collaboration.

Making space for thread sensibility within ourselves or others within the framework of a brick institution is tedious and has the capacity to throw off the orientation of the ethical compass we are attempting to keep on course. We have vested interests in getting research consent and seeing our research through. We are early stage doctoral candidates who intend to achieve

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[1] Contesting narratives of innocence in the colonial histories of the Nordic countries have produced the concept of Nordic exceptionalism (Jensen & Loftsdóttir 2012).

[2] Finnish and Nordic exceptionalism and innocence are concepts derived from Gloria Wekker's 'white innocence' critical discussion of past and current histories of nations tainted by coloniality yet erased from national narratives, rather than portraying an image of innocence (Wekker 2016).

[3] Brick and thread sensibilities are the seemingly binary definitions of logic upon which we are socialized to function. Brick sensibilities are characterized by 'individuality, fixed form and linear time', and thread sensibilities by 'inter-wovenness, shape-shifting flexibility and layered time' (Jimmy et al 2019, 13-14).

publication and doctoral degrees. Among other requirements, a doctoral degree demands the showcasing of one's individual abilities as an independent researcher (University of Oulu 2017). This places temporal and economic pressure on PhD candidates. It is important to ensure that these are not projected onto the relationships we form with our research partners (Mustajoki & Mustajoki 2017). In our research projects, we build on and operate based on philosophies of relational ethics and conviviality. However, the demands placed on us through academic performativity require us to operate on the basis of individualism. This is a continuous balancing act.

The space between bricks and threads

Our positions are also influenced by the fact that we are female academics from the rural north. As such, we are not immune to the sexism present in Finnish society and academia, or to the subtle yet defining south-urban-centricity and *methodological urbanism,* meaning urban-focused research settings, which thrive on the exclusion of north-rural issues and people in science, as well as in decision making (Sundgren 2014, 280-283; Terde & Pöllänen 2016, 130-132). We experience the struggle to be heard and taken seriously. In addition to whiteness, when we position ourselves, gender, religion, and age other issues connected with power and positions of otherness should be considered.

Like most people, we associate ourselves with several sometimes overlapping groups and oppressions. In addition to the socialization we have undergone into brick sensibilities, we have also been exposed to and influenced by thread sensibilities. Sámi ontologies, epistemologies, and axiologies are not our own, yet we have both been influenced by them and share similarities with Sámi worldviews based on our respective upbringings, making us lean toward thread sensibility. This entails a complex and sometimes simultaneous dismantling and reconstruction of identities. Ann Ferguson (1998, 201) would have us reconstruct our 'subjectivity in resistance to categorizations and ethical norms embedded in one's socially given identities.' Turning to Indigenous and decolonial scholarship, we refer to this dismantling as a process of learning to unlearn (Tlostanova & Mignolo 2018).

> Michelle: I grew up in a non-Indigenous family in Aanaar in northeastern Sápmi. My origins lie in Swedish-speaking southern Finland and the European USA. My

family settled in Sápmi in 1986. Being engaged throughout my childhood and youth in traditional and contemporary Sámi livelihoods and arts through friendships and community activities, my understanding of my selves, the world, and all our relations has been sculpted. Especially the notion of gift-giving as a fundamental trait of self and being has urged me to move to the borders of and beyond the colonial matrix of power and its impositions (Andreotti 2016; Mignolo 2011; Kuokkanen 2006). Conforming to the ethical requirements of Sámi research is supported by my upbringing in a Sámi community, because it helps me to understand some of the tacit knowledge that is not always straightforwardly expressed (Lehtola 2019b).

Helena: My background lies in the rural northern Finnish landscape. I grew up in a small rural village near Oulu, and I now live in Liminka in the middle of the fields with my family. Remote lifestyles, small communities, and relatively long distances to school and to friends are familiar to me, forming part of my childhood memories and everyday life. I come from the outside into the sphere of Sámi research (Smith 1999). My educational background is at the Giellagas Institute, where I began to study Sámi Culture in 2010. The entrance examination book of the Giellagas Institute, Vuokko Hirvonen's dissertation *Saamenmaan ääniä, saamelaisen naisen tie kirjailijaksi* (1999), inspired me toward the academic sphere of Sámi studies by leading me to question my understanding of gender roles and feminism, and prompted me to rethink questions of minorities and gender. Even if feminist literature was not new to me, I was challenged to see different critical views and unfamiliar power structures. At the same time, however, I could find familiar features connected to my rurality and position in the chain of generations.

Learning to unlearn

The process of learning to unlearn entails becoming comfortable with the uncertainty of not knowing. It implies letting go of epistemic authority. This includes a commitment to 'try to minimize, [...our] learned tendencies to seek quick solutions' (Jimmy et al. 2019, 29). For us, this means, among other things, remaining open to different interpretations from our own, maintaining an open and continuous dialogue, and allowing the building of research

relationships to take time. In laboring to dismantle assumed privileges and socialized sensibilities, we acknowledge that dealing with whiteness and self-assumed innocence is unsettling. In resistance to the academic demands of certainty, we embrace uncertainty in research processes and suggest, in line with decolonial thought (Mignolo & Walsh 2018), that the aim of our research is not to produce absolute answers but to propose a context-specific way of advancing toward more ethical research conduct in Sámi/Indigenous research contexts.

We do not remain silent about our whiteness, because we do not wish to partake in society's and science's vested interest in that silence and ignorance (Tuana 2006). Silence only contributes to the continued enabling of the prevailing dynamics of white privilege (Valkonen 2018, 150). By acknowledging the concept of white privilege, we do not intend to create or reinforce uneven power structures but to dismantle and reshape western thinking about Indigenous peoples as *'less than'*, highlighted by Margaret Kovach (2015, 51). Without analysis, whiteness remains the invisible norm. Instead, the entitlement that comes with constructed whiteness can be appropriated and used to bring attention to narratives of the subaltern, other, Sámi, Indigenous (Tlostanova & Mignolo 2012).

We practice in both our research activities and personal lives – which we do not separate binarily – the building of bridge identities within ourselves. Instead of an insider/outsider dichotomy, we choose to identify with bridge or ally identities as non-Indigenous academics in Sámi/Indigenous research. Bridge/ally identity politics may work as an 'antidote to the neo-imperialist relations' prevalent in euro-western human sciences (Ferguson 1998, 202). Bridge or ally identities are a strategy that considers historical and local contexts in research relationships, different groups with different and overlapping oppressions, and challenges researchers' power and privilege by demanding critical self-reflection and power sharing, for which we argue in this article. It seeks to create something unpredicted and contextually relevant through the 'braiding' action taking place at the edges of bricks and threads that encourages generative being in both sensibilities. It is characterized by collective decision making in 'a mutually defined process that centers the people impacted [...]; collective accountability; attention to different sensibilities' (Jimmy et al 2019, 34).

This form of collaboration comes with some preconditions, namely: an understanding of colonial history and the colonial present; the developing of a non-rigid language that makes

visible the generative and non-generative manifestations of bricks and threads; and commitment. An ally position is not chosen to improve one's image, for redemption, to justify one's position, as an excuse, or to speak for others; but for the purpose of making space and sharing burdens in acknowledgement of intertwined pasts, presents, futures, and health, and with a willingness to be uncomfortable, to be decentered (Jimmy et al. 2019, 37-40).

Sámi, other Indigenous, and more recent feminist scholars have called for the development of 'positive visions of ethico-political strategies to challenge social domination' (Ferguson 1998, 197) and methodologies, including pedagogies, which 'accentuate hope, love and shared community in Indigenous contexts' (Keskitalo et al. 2018, referring to Denzin; Lincoln & Smith 2008). We do not merely assume an affirmative perspective but attempt to address a recognized gap to shift the focus of research from the negative pull of coloniality/modernity toward finding positive solutions for recreating social justice (Keskitalo et al. 2018; Kuokkanen 2011).

Leaving objectivity – building relationships

Relationality/relationship and reciprocity are important features of Indigenous knowledge and value systems (Wilson 2008, 77; Chilisa 2017, 328), and reflect on research relationships built with Sámi/Indigenous researchers, the community, environment, and cosmos (Wilson 2008, 77, 80-96). By relationality, we mean consciousness of the importance of interaction and relationship in the research process (Heikkilä & Miettunen 2016) and an ontological stance of subjects without clear boarders that is interconnected with our being in this world (Braidotti 2006, 238-239; Kuokkanen 2007, 38). Relationality, like decolonial love, prioritizes communication between the self and Others over the preservation of the individual/ego, is preferential for the colonized and racialized of the earth, and seeks to restore or create a reality where all subjects can give and receive freely in societies founded on the principle of *receptive generosity* (Maldonado-Torres 2007, 260 drawing from Frantz Fanon).

Drawing from 'culturally compatible ontological and epistemological approaches' and methodologies can be a means of decolonizing research practices (Boekraad 2016). For example, in their discussion of relationality and ethics in Sámi research, Lydia Heikkilä and Tuuli Miettunen (2016, referring to Ranghild Nilsson 2016) draw attention to the concept of

soabalašvuohta – amicability, emphasized as a central value in Sámi culture, foregrounding the epistemological importance of dialog in Sámi research ethics. This notion supports an emphasis on dialog in our relationship with each other, our respective thinking companions, and our research partners in finding solutions together.

Shawn Wilson (2008, 77, 100) highlights the concept of *relational accountability* in building relationships within Indigenous communities and encourages researchers to ask themselves 'How do my methods help to build respectful relationship between the topic that I am researching and myself, and between myself and research participants' and 'What is my role as researcher in this relationship and what are my responsibilities?' Relational accountability builds on a critique of academic objectivity and focuses instead on hermeneutical knowledge production and accountability to oneself, the community, the environment/cosmos, and one's research topic. It considers the whole research process, from selecting the topic to presenting its outcomes (Wilson 2008, 100-107). A decade later, it can be noted that by thematizing these value choices, Wilson has created an important basis for other researchers to follow and shape their approaches toward more relational and sustainable ways of conducting Indigenous research.

In our respective research processes, we have constantly sought out Indigenous and decolonial thinking partners at conferences, seminars, and in private discussions to ensure the relevance and ethical sustainability of our research topics and methods as they develop:

> Michelle: Having deepened into decolonial discourses, I felt drawn to focus entirely on the decolonization of mainstream teacher education. I was, however, encouraged to also focus on the education development needs of Sámi-speaking people, as well as culturally sensitive (Keskitalo 2010) and responsive (Janhonen-Abruquah et al. 2017) teacher education, which I then chose to include.
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> My research is guided overall by Indigenous research ethics, and at this early stage of my research, I have focused on anticipatory ethics (*ennakoiva etiikka*) (Mustajoki 2018). The different stages of anticipatory ethics entail ethical analysis, clarifying questions about the researcher's vested interests, the power of choice, who benefits from the research, and a comparison of the perspectives of ethical justification to identify the values on which ethical decisions are based and act

accordingly. I have identified some of these values as respect, conviviality, self-effacement, and challenging hegemonies. Practicing anticipatory ethics means maintaining a continuous dialogue with the community of interest – the Sámi, within myself, and with the research community.

Helena: My research builds on two ethical approaches: Indigenous ethics and the ethics of childhood and youth research. In addition to the concepts of collectivity and power sharing, Indigenous ethics emphasizes, as stated in this article (Kovach, Kuokkanen, Wilson), a youth-oriented approach drawing from youth's own experiences, opinions, and interests. It takes note of the vulnerable age of participants, implies an objective of protection, and respects the differences of research participants (Vehkalahti et al. 2010, 16-17; Laukkanen et al. 2018, 93-94; Rutanen & Vekalahti 2019, 15).

Although the Finnish National Board on Research Integrity (2019, 61) demands an ethical review from the human sciences ethics committee for youth under the age of fifteen who do not have their parents' consent, in our research group, we have chosen to focus on the inclusion of families in the research process by asking for consent from both youth and parents, whether a young person is younger than or already fifteen. Research content and information sheets are translated into two languages, North Sámi and Finnish, and can be found on our project website (NorFlux 2018).

Heikkilä and Miettunen (2016) foreground the importance of localizing oneself as part of the interaction between the community and the researcher. The question *Where are you from?* is common among Indigenous groups and foregrounds the relationship with the community, but it also reveals the importance of family and relations (Wilson 2008, 84-86). Bagele Chilisa (2012) recommends the involvement of *community members* in both the analysis and interpretation of research findings. We pause on the interpretation of *community*. It is something that is also under discussion within the working group for the Sámi research ethics' board (Lehtola 2019a).

For us, as academics, the Giellagas Institute represents the Sámi community within our university and our daily research activities. The Sámi research community, which is a broader

community consisting of several universities and research institutes, also has some representational capacity. In addition, there are also local communities, the individuals with whom we produce data. In Helena's research, youth form communities of their own. Some of our research partners are located around Finland and Sámi Homeland, and we answer to them directly despite the geographical distance.

Toward responsible research ethics

As a possible approach for moving toward more responsible research ethics in the sphere of Sámi research in the Finnish/Nordic context, we suggest that research ethics be practiced relationally. An important step toward acknowledging Sámi people and cultural heritage in research was taken in the fall of 2019 when, for the first time, the Finnish National Board on Research Integrity (TENK) specifically mentioned that 'the Sami, as an Indigenous people [...] have the right to maintain and develop their own language and culture' as part of general ethical research principles. Ethical research principles provide instructions for the treatment and rights of individual research participants and set limitations to research practices and guidelines for the need of ethical review, which we follow as researchers based in Finland (TENK 2019, 48-54).

However, these instructions offer no specific guidelines for implementing respectful research that involves communal values, and therefore the tools that need to be created (Heikkilä & Miettunen 2016). The absence of a Sámi ethical review board in Finland and a clear set of guidelines challenges researchers to constantly reflect on ethics and cultural sensitivity in their everyday work. While Wilson sets his critique of the demand for objectivity in the Western research tradition, Inker-Anni Linkola and Pigga Keskitalo (2016) call for spatial contextualization in building an ethical approach, rather than seeking universality. We therefore argue that in addition to existing ethical guidelines and ethical (pre-)review, *relational ethics* that focus on cultural context, reciprocity, and communication are needed (Kaukko et al. 2019, 89-91).

The Sámi Parliament in Finland provides guidelines for researchers aspiring to do research related to Sámi cultural heritage or traditional knowledge, advising them to turn to the Sámi Parliament or the Skolt Sámi Village Meeting as representatives of the Sámi community for

preliminary consent (the Sámi Parliament 2019). Giellagas Institute 'has a nation-wide responsibility to organize, introduce and provide Saami language and cultural studies and research at the academic level' (Giellagas Institute 2019). Discussion of Sámi-based ethical review has been ongoing for decades in Finland. However, a working group for creating ethical guidelines for Sámi research has been established, which foreshadows changes to ethical practices (Juutilainen & Heikkilä 2016; Sámi Research Ethics, Working Group 2018). This process of defining Sámi research ethics in Finland might benefit greatly from non-Indigenous and Indigenous partners meeting 'each other across deeply learned divides, [to] revisit and deconstruct their shared past, and engage carefully with the realization that their present and future is similarly tied together' – not separate (Donald 2012, 102).

Community consent is crucial in Indigenous methodologies (UNDRIP 2007, Article 10). An acknowledgement of and emphasis on knowledges as co-produced, as well as power and benefit sharing (Boekraad 2016), leads to the destabilizing of power and privilege structures (Ferguson 1998). For us, obtaining consent is not merely a single disconnected action but a continuing dialog with research partners and the different communities involved, a process of the ongoing negotiation of consent.

On the path to decolonizing and indigenizing research practices/frameworks

In this article, we understand decoloniality through relationality, meaning that we consider how 'different local histories and embodied conceptions […], including our own, can enter into conversation and build understandings that cross both geopolitical locations and colonial differences, and contest the totalizing claims and political epistemic violence of modernity' (Mignolo & Walsh 2018, 5). Relationality here also implies the acknowledgement of interdependence and insufficiency without our research partners: '[It] shows us that there are limits that we cannot overcome on our own, […] that we are embedded in a history that configures our present' (Vázques quoted in Hernández & te Velde 2018, 100). Decolonial positioning is therefore about locating oneself in relation to others, the Earth, and different temporalities.

Decoloniality can also be discussed as hospitality toward the other, a philosophy of welcoming and responsibility for the other (Derrida 2002, 364, quoted in Kuokkanen 2011, xix — xx). Historically dominant practices of research on Indigenous communities involve *running away with* the traditional knowledge of Sámi and other Indigenous people (Kuokkanen 2000, 420; Kuokkanen 2002, 245-246). Studies involving and *on* Indigenous peoples have predominantly been carried out without community involvement and applying practices such as helicoptering, in which researchers have come, collected the required data, and left without giving anything back to the community (Ferreira & Gendron 2011, 154). As Rauna Kuokkanen (2007, 6-7, 77) highlights, *giving back* is a demand of contemporary Indigenous research, since Indigenous peoples have been exploited socio-culturally, economically, and epistemologically by western researchers for centuries.

> Helena: During my time in the municipalities, I have heard a number of stories about researchers gathering data and leaving without repatriating the knowledge. I have agreed to cooperate with different communities in later phases and to share the knowledge (Kuokkanen 2002, 251 referring Smith 1999) – for example, by participating in the local educational training and educational work at the university. Giving back to the communities in this project is a continuous negotiation process and demands ethical reflection on how to implement it, without endangering anonymity but offering the opportunity to make the impact young participants seek.

> Michelle: In my role as a researcher, I invite research partners, Sámi, and otherwise ethnically defined teachers in Sámi contexts to engage in developing and contributing to a culturally sensitive and responsive education program, the purpose of which is to meet the acute needs of Sámi education, and a decolonial reading of teacher education curricula. They are invited as theorizers and co-producers of knowledge.

> My responsibilities in research relationships require me to familiarize myself with and respect the 'historical, geographical, social, cultural and spiritual context, as well as the environment' of the people with whom I am working (my own translation of Heikkilä & Miettunen 2016, referring to the works of Kovach 2009,

Kuokkanen 2007, and Little Bear 2000). I bore this familiarity and respect throughout my childhood and youth in Aanaar, and continue to nurture it through friendships and engagement in Sámi cultural and academic activities.

Miranda Fricker (2007) and Karin Murris (2018) suggest that narratives of the *other*, such as the Sámi, should be considered macro-narratives that need to be heard with onto-epistemic justice. A way of practicing this is through prioritizing Indigenous sources and considering non-western forms of knowledge transmission such as storytelling (Wilson 2008), remembering (Vazquez 2009), music, and visual expression (Kallio & Länsman 2018) as equal in value to traditionally euro-western literary knowledge. This is applied in our research methodology to producing reflection outlets that take various audiovisual forms – for example, photographs and drawings. Appropriating Indigenous research discourse can be avoided, for example, by paying tribute to Indigenous scholars for their achievements. Kuokkanen (2002, 250) brings to our attention the benefits of reconstructing research relationships beyond dualist notions of the colonizer and the colonized, and that research methods based on western traditions can be used complementarily in Indigenous research.

Cultural sensitivity, which is key to respectful research practice, implies attuning to culturally bound definitions of time, place, and knowledge, and having a decolonial, decentering aim (Keskitalo 2010, 26-27, 249-253). In our respective research projects, we aim to interact in a culturally sensitive manner that enables community involvement in defining research paradigms and results. This aim does not go unchallenged.

The burden of proof and understanding falls predominantly on the shoulders of the marginalized (Jimmy et al. 2019). Knowledge of history, language, traditions, and culture has been seen as a key requirement for conducting Sámi research (Linkola & Keskitalo 2016, referring to Bull 2002). Kovach (2015, 51-53) has even questioned the possibility of indigenizing research due to western models and language-related limitations of epistemology. In the process of interpretation and translation, from spoken language to written script or one language to another, one is navigating between epistemologies, and some knowledge is lost along the way (Kovach 2015, 52-54).

Academic literature is predominantly available in English or in the majority language of a given country. Due to the colonization of the Sámi in Finland and the Finnishization process (Lehtola

2015a), there are generational gaps in the transmission of Sámi languages to current generations. Most of our research participants are therefore predominantly Finnish speaking. However, in Sámi research, considerable effort has been made to revitalize and increase literature and literacy in Sámi languages. Although it would be preferable, due to our limited language skills and temporary research funding, we lack the capacity to prioritize or process research participant communication *entirely* in any of the three Sámi languages in Finland.

Shifting the burden of proof and understanding remains unattained. In the context of Sámi research ethics and engaging in public Sámi discourse, our research projects are not comprehensive, because some literature remains inaccessible to us. We depend mainly on the dominant languages in both interaction with research participants and in publication, so our work is given back to the community in either Finnish or English. Despite this complexity, we do not remain unconcerned about language but strive in operating with our limited capabilities to offer opportunities to use the Sámi language as part of our interviews.

Another form of giving back and decolonial practice is to carve space in the academy for Indigenous and other non-European knowledges of thread sensibilities by acknowledging epistemic contributions. Kuokkanen (2011) calls the academy to recognize Indigenous epistemes as a gift, challenging the system on which the academy now operates with a radically different value system. It is the misanthropic skepticism, that is *who is* and *who is not*, in which euro-western science is rooted that inhibits it from accepting the gift that others, among them the Sámi, have to offer (Maldonado-Torres 2007). By doing research in which Sámi/Indigenous voices are the starting point of our research topics, decisive in our methodological choices, and highlighted in our research outcomes, our doctoral research projects respond to this call.

While foregrounding Indigenous and decolonial methodologies, we are unable to construe Indigenous methodologies ourselves, because we are not rooted in Sámi worldviews, community, and ancestral belonging, as the works of Kuokkanen (2011, 2000) and Saami Resilience Memes (2019) exemplify. Although these worldviews resonate deeply with us, it remains our position to walk *alongside* the Sámi on this path of decolonizing research. We therefore find it useful to move in our research projects with feminist new materialist epistemologies and ontologies, that opens new possibilities to dismantle the dichotomies between human and non-human, and reconstruct the understanding of temporality. We

therefore use both Indigenous and western-based research traditions in our respective research projects in accordance with these acknowledgements.

As an act of braiding/relationality, we commit to sharing the results of our respective research projects, with reference to Sámi and other local contributions, with schools in the Sámi Homeland, urban Sámi unions around Finland, and through the information channels of the Giellagas Institute, and where resources allow for it in the Sámi languages. The interview transcriptions of our projects will be archived in the Sámi Culture Archive, thereby returning data to the Sámi community under the archive's regulations (Sámi kulturarkiiva). This means that although we are ethnically non-Sámi, we play a role in giving, and bear a responsibility to *give* to, decolonization, and are therefore adding our voices to Indigenous/Sámi research.

Conclusions: 'Are you creating space or taking space?'[4]

In this article, we have laid out our journey toward unraveling our whiteness, backgrounds, and in-between position by reflecting on our position as *bridge/ally identity* in Indigenous research contexts and providing practical examples. Our discussions of our complicity and our privileged positions derived from *white* and *euro-western* academia, as well as of intertwined brick and thread sensibilities, lead us to reject the taking of either outsider and insider positions (Smith 1999): Although this is an explicit way of depicting the researcher's position, it does not resonate with the spectrum of approaches in Indigenous-related research. We have discussed how researchers' power and white privilege can be challenged by the co-production of knowledge and power sharing, how to interpret ethical guidelines, and how we navigate between Indigenous and western academic spheres in our own research projects.

We hope that our reflections on ethical choices and positionality can serve as examples for how non-Indigenous students and academics can apply these guidelines. In this article, we have pooled some important guidelines for Sámi/Indigenous research ethics that may help others in their ethical navigations. Our primary claim, based on our findings, is that everyone, and especially non-Indigenous researchers, should undergo a thorough and transparent process of relational ethical positioning when engaging in Sámi/Indigenous-related research. In a recent presentation on Sámi research ethics at a research ethics seminar for University of Oulu

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[4] Kovach (2015, 52).

researchers, Professor Veli-Pekka Lehtola urged research institutions and stakeholders to make ethics a point of deeper investigation rather than a mere formal requirement (Lehtola 2019a).

In choosing research methods, we consider the ethical implications of using a given method in an Indigenous research context – we ask ourselves again, in consultation with Indigenous sources, whether the topics and methods are helpful for the community, and whether they place Indigenous people in a position of inequality. This article shows that the treading of paths in Indigenous methodologies and Indigenous research ethics is not uncomplicated. As Vanessa Andreotti (2019) and Ann Ferguson (1998) warn us, we must be careful not to resort to simple solutions for complex matters, such as youth studies and decolonizing education and academia.

From our position as allies in Indigenous research, we 'challenge Western policy makers and academics' claim to universal expertise by juxtaposing voices of dissent and beliefs and the other in modern science' (Ferguson 1998, 196). We suggest that what we and others like us in their positionality can do in the context of Indigenous research, not excluding the realms outside of it, is to work with the Foucauldian idea of 'opening up spaces for subjugated knowledges to speak' (Ferguson 1998, 195). Although we have discussed our process of positioning ourselves, we have discovered that this process continues as the discourse on Sámi/Indigenous research ethics progresses, and the cultures and time we inhabit change.

Acknowledgements

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