

## **TOWARDS AN "INDIGENOUS PARADIGM" FROM A SAMI PERSPECTIVE**

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### **Abstract / Résumé**

The author discusses the need, significance and objectives of an "Indigenous paradigm" which is a way of both decolonizing Indigenous minds by "re-centring" Indigenous values and cultural practices and placing Indigenous peoples and their issues into dominant, mainstream discourses which until now have relegated Indigenous peoples to marginal positions. The author argues that the main objectives of such a paradigm include the criticism of Western dualistic metaphysics and Eurocentrism as well as the return to the Indigenous peoples' holistic philosophies in research.

Dans cet article, il est question des besoins, du sens et des objectifs relatifs au "paradigme autochtone". Cette approche constitue un moyen de décoloniser la pensée autochtone, en "re-centrant" les pratiques culturelles et les valeurs des peuples autochtones, et d'accorder aux Autochtones et aux questions qui les concernent—jusqu'à maintenant marginalisés—une place au sein des courants de pensée dominants. L'auteur émet l'hypothèse que les objectifs principaux d'un tel paradigme doivent impliquer une critique de la métaphysique dualiste occidentale et, parallèlement, un retour, au niveau de la recherche, à la philosophie holistique propre aux peuples autochtones.

The purpose of this article is to discuss what I call "Indigenous peoples' paradigm" or an "Indigenous paradigm"<sup>1</sup> as being part of Indigenous peoples' struggle for self-determination and the decolonization process. Today, there is an increasing global movement towards Indigenous peoples' self-determination, of which the latest example is the creation of Nunavut, the newest territory in Canada and the self-governing area of the eastern Inuit. Self-determination is also one of the most fundamental goals of the on-going UN decade of Indigenous peoples. Self-determination of Indigenous peoples deals with a range of various issues, one of them being the right to maintain and develop manifestations of cultural practices including the restitution of their spiritual and intellectual properties. The creation of an Indigenous peoples' paradigm is part of the process of claiming these rights.<sup>2</sup>

The need for such a paradigm is manifold and is connected to the deconstruction of the consequences of colonialism. Colonialism and imperialism have exploited and dispossessed Indigenous peoples everywhere in the globe for hundreds of years. Even today, in the era of so-called postcolonialism, Indigenous peoples are the targets of various forms of internal colonialism and neo-colonialism. The powerful colonial institutions, whether educational, social or economic, have also colonized people's minds which has led to internalized colonialism and the acquisition of "white lenses" (hooks, 1992:1)—Western values, ways of thinking and world views. In this way, these subtle forms of colonialism have made many Indigenous individuals devalue their own culture and anything that is connected to it.

In this article, I will discuss the need, significance and objectives of an "Indigenous paradigm". I will illustrate my endeavour with examples based on Sami cultural practice. I will also consider the significance of Indigenous peoples' literature as one of the best examples of the application of an "Indigenous paradigm" in contemporary forms of expression. While being aware of the dangers of categorizations and generalization, I will however use categories such as "Western" and "Indigenous" as a heuristic device in order to highlight that differences between these categories exist, although they are both diverse and contain differences within. Indigenous peoples in the world resist one, fixed definition for Indigenous peoples given the vast diversity of their political and geographical situations around the world.<sup>3</sup>

### **The Significance of "Indigenous Paradigm"**

Educational institutions have been central to the process of colonizing Indigenous peoples' minds all over the world. Ties to one's own way of life,

culture and language were cut off when children were forced to stay in residential schools and able to return back home only during longer holidays. This physical break from home prevented Indigenous children from learning their cultural practices and culture-based knowledge. In residential schools, Indigenous children were taught Western values, habits and behaviour. The break of generational continuation of one's culture on a daily basis has had several consequences of which many are still present in Indigenous peoples' societies.

Taking Sami society as an example, one can argue that one consequence is the dissociation from Sami cultural practice by many Sami scholars. Through the Western education system, they have been "immersed" into Western models of doing research which are often characterized by a Cartesian world view, based on metaphysical dualism and laden with perceptions that derive from the Enlightenment: the fragmentation of human knowledge and the distancing of oneself both physically and mentally from the research object. This has led to a situation where much Sami research follows and imitates prevailing Western paradigms and Eurocentered thinking without questioning its appropriateness or relevance. It is perhaps appropriate to note here that while discussing an "Indigenous paradigm" I am not, however, suggesting that there is only one way to do Sami research. My point is that if we acknowledge the importance of the decolonization process of Indigenous societies on the way to empowerment and full-self determination, it is also crucial that we reconnect ourselves to our cultural concepts, values and knowledge systems in order to also be self-governing intellectually. Therefore, an "Indigenous paradigm" would be a culturally specific discourse based on Indigenous peoples' premises, values and world view.

Another reason to create an "Indigenous paradigm" has to do with racist, dualism notions still prevalent in much of Western scholarship. An important task of an "Indigenous paradigm" would be to challenge these notions according to which the world is divided along lines of Western "high culture" and non-Western "folkloric" traditions. Although many contemporary practices of poststructuralism, feminism, postmodern and postcolonial theories have undermined and rejected these assumptions, unfortunately they still guide much of people's everyday thinking and actions. Unlike many Western scholars who can ignore this since it is not as common an academic approach as it used to be, we as Indigenous peoples cannot remain indifferent, since it affects us directly in various ways through dismissive and biased attitudes on our selfhood, our culture and its products. Kailo (1998:89) has noted that

the difference between dominant Western and Indigenous epistemological and philosophical traditions and forms of literary expression have resulted in a questionable ordering of knowledge systems: Western scholars often treat native ways of knowing as "primitive," "unsophisticated" or in other ways "inferior," simply because of their own inability to grasp the totality of the native approach to life.

A third reason for an "Indigenous paradigm" is to raise questions of relevant research regarding Indigenous communities<sup>4</sup> and to contribute our understanding of different ways of knowing and theorizing. It can introduce new perspectives to research by challenging and deconstructing dominant values, world view and knowledge systems. An "Indigenous paradigm" can offer a new set of tools for analyzing non-Western cultures which, for its own part, may diminish the dangers of misinterpretations of our cultural expressions.

### Objectives of an "Indigenous Paradigm"

Since the end of the 1960s, Western academic world has experienced some radical shifts in terms of perceiving knowledge. Various theories related to poststructuralism have seriously challenged previously held notions of Western metaphysics, universal knowledge and truth, subjectivity and language. This criticism of Western philosophical and theoretical foundations can serve as a starting point for an "Indigenous paradigm" since it shares similar goals with poststructuralist theories: anti-universalism, the decentring of the subject, the creation of alternative forms of writing and the dismantling of the Grand Narratives, hierarchies and dichotomies. According to Native American scholars Yvonne Dion-Buffalo and John D. Mohawk, postmodernism can be seen as "a movement which announces the abandonment of Western utopian ideologies" and it "should be seen as a consequence of the halt of five hundred years of European expansion" (Dion-Buffalo *et al.*, 1992:17). Thereby, postmodernism may promote diversity by making possible the existence of various realities with certain local, personal and community forms of truths (Rosenau, 1993:80).

In a postmodern world, boundaries and strict divisions between dualistic notions are blurred. This is also typical of Indigenous peoples' societies. Therefore, it is possible to suggest that Indigenous societies have always been "postmodern" and continuous interventions by Indigenous peoples have also made the Western world aware of "postmodernity" (and not necessarily the other way around).<sup>5</sup> From this point of view, the popularity of postmodern thinking in the Western academic world reflects the fact that there is a need and desire for alternative, less dualistic and less hierarchical

forms of paradigms. Jürgen Kremer notes however, that we should not be too dependent on postmodernist promises:

Postmodernity helps us to think about issues like "tribal" or "Indigenous" or "participation" differently, yet it is still "us" thinking "them". Despite the increasing breakdown of the grand narratives and the increasing multivocality in discourses, postmodernity is but yet another advance within the game of dissociative epistemologies. Even though postmodern epistemologies have split Truth in to truths and we can conceive of an increasing number of epistemologies, the politics remain the same: it is eurocentered thinking as the game master, even as the margins increasingly encroach (Kremer, 1997:32).

For Indigenous peoples, there is a need to go further than poststructuralist or postmodern objectives since, first and foremost, Indigenous peoples cannot remain apolitical in their struggles. This is a criticism that can be levelled against poststructuralism and postmodernism. Even if Indigenous peoples and poststructuralist theorists share similar aspirations, the ultimate objective of Indigenous peoples is, through the deconstruction of the consequences of colonialism, a true self-determination where intellectual self-determination has a significant role. Some feminist theories and practices also aim at social and political changes in a society, yet their approaches often exclude notions of collectivity as well as land rights which are central elements for Indigenous peoples. Second, to a large extent, poststructuralist theories remain within the very framework and forms of knowledge they criticize; that is, they do not exceed some of the fundamental Western world views, value systems or notions of the other (Smith, 1999:43). Third, there is a need for Indigenous peoples to become independent from Western intellectual structures since a significant part of colonialism is being dependent on modes, structures, epistemologies, and approaches of the West.

Therefore, the main objectives of an "Indigenous paradigm" include the continuation of the criticism of Western dualistic metaphysics, Eurocentrism and biased privileging of Western systems of knowledge. This critique may use poststructuralist and/or postmodern positions as its point of reference but it derives from and is based on Indigenous cultural practices. An excellent example of this is the Trickster criticism developed by Anishinaabe writer and scholar Gerald Vizenor, who takes the well-known, ambiguous figure of Native American oral tradition as a basis of criticism. In Vizenor's view

[t]he tribal trickster is a liberator and healer on a narrative, a comic sign, communal signification and a discourse with imagi-

nation. These anthropologies and tribal tricksters are not structural binaries; social science is a trope to power, the trickster is a language game in a comic narrative (Vizenor, 1993:187; 1988).

The main objective of the Trickster criticism is to challenge and deconstruct stereotypes (particularly the invented sign of "Indian"), fixed meanings as well as notions of unified voice, stasis and authority of Western discourse. It takes its cue in particular from poststructuralist and semiotic theories and defines the trickster as a semiotic sign and as a holotrope which means whole, freestanding, both signified and signifier (Vizenor, 1986:4).

A Sami model for the critique of Western dichotomical thinking, as I suggest, could be based on Sami cosmology. It is most clearly expressed and visualized in the Sami drum and it encompasses three realms: the upper realm, the middle and the lower realm. The middle realm is the world of ordinary people and daily life. The upper realm is the world of gods and spirits and the lower realm, also called *jábmii dáibmu*, is the world of dead people. *Noaidi*, the Sami shaman, and sometimes also other skilful individuals can enter the two other realms during a trance in order to find necessary information required in healing, hunting and other everyday matters. Taking Sami cosmology as a basis of Sami criticism allows us to be aware of the trappings of Western rationality and positivism which, since the Enlightenment, has separated the spiritual aspects of life from the "material" world and denied the existence of other realms than our visible, daily reality that can be placed under "scientific scrutiny".

There is another important aspect in Sami cultural practice which blurs the assumed clear-cut divisions: the river Deatnu. It is a river flowing between the states of Finland and Norway, thus a *border* river for state authorities and even for many non-Sami along the river. For Sami living along the river however, it is the opposite: a *borderless* river which embodies our understanding of the world where national borders carry little significance since on both sides of the river, people are related to each other, speak the same language, have the same culture and practice the same livelihoods. Before state interference, the villages of both sides also used to fish together. Furthermore, for Sami along the river, Deatnu is not merely a source of livelihood but a means of travelling, transportation and communication; thus a concept of *connection*.

Another objective of an "Indigenous paradigm" has to do with the recognition and full acceptance of other, alternative epistemologies as being equal to Western systems of knowledge within the academia. As long as Indigenous epistemologies are not recognized as being as valuable as

Eurocentric epistemologies, Indigenous scholars and research remain in a marginal, colonial position within the academic institutions. It is necessary that both Indigenous and non-Indigenous scholars acknowledge that Indigenous epistemologies have a value of their own right and that, as Jürgen Kremer has noted, there is no need to attempt to shape Indigenous epistemologies into Eurocentric categories, since "providing definitions of Indigenous science means allowing Western thinking to structure Indigenous being and knowing before it has unfolded its healing power" (Kremer, 1996:3). Kremer suggests that instead of demanding that Indigenous peoples give definitions satisfactory to the Western paradigm, it is time to ask minds conditioned in the Eurocentric ways of knowing to stretch into the narrative nature of Indigenous peoples' being and knowing (*Ibid.*).

### Characteristics of an "Indigenous Paradigm"

As it has become already evident, an "Indigenous paradigm" has a clear social and political agenda which aims at the overall decolonization of Indigenous societies. Second, it maintains a critical stand towards Western metaphysical dualism which still informs much of current patterns of thinking and research practices. Third, an "Indigenous paradigm" is based on a holistic approach which strives towards a balance between different areas of life and which does not separate intellectual, social, political, economic, psychological and spiritual forms of human life from each other. A Sami example of this could be *sámemárkan*, a time of the year when Sami from different regions gather together for an annual market and deal with various issues: socialize and meet with relatives and friends, get to know new people, exchange news, discuss topical issues, trade, deal with issues of litigation, and later also go to church and deal with issues with non-Sami authorities such as priests and police. It was, thus, a Sami event that looked after various spheres of life.

The holistic approach of an "Indigenous paradigm" also rejects Cartesian and Judeo-Christian dualistic splits between mind and body, according to which a person's intellectual capacities have to be separated and consequently heightened above more physical aspects of life. This has also been referred to as the Eurocentered process of dissociating one's consciousness from the ongoing interaction with place, ancestry, animals, plants, spirits, community, story, cycles of life, and cycles of the seasons and ages which is common to Indigenous peoples (Kremer, 1999:128).

Fourth, within an "Indigenous paradigm", research has a clear connection to the researcher's own culture. This means that cultural practices and forms of expressions are reflected in the ways of conducting research: in language, style, structure, methods as well as assumptions of knowledge

and the role of the researcher. Language and style, for instance, may reflect oral traditions of the particular culture, whether stories, songs, prayers or word plays. Again, a Sami example from my home region, along the river Deatnu, would reflect the strong tradition of vibrant dialogue in oral stories about, of and by local people.

The incorporation of "traditional" knowledge and epistemologies is also a crucial element of an "Indigenous paradigm". In recent years, the concept of "traditional knowledge" has gained more attention in the academic world. "Traditional knowledge" refers to a body of knowledge which is grounded in the so-called traditional way of life of Indigenous peoples and is often characterized by empiricism.<sup>6</sup> Traditional knowledge encompasses cosmologies, spirituality, relationships with the natural environment and the use of natural resources of a people. It is expressed through language, social organization, values, institutions and laws (Legat, 1991:12). However, the term "traditional knowledge" is problematic since "it can be argued that all knowledge is contemporary, for it is given meaning and value from a frame of reference that is being continually updated and revised" (Stevenson, 1996:280). Also talking about "traditional" ways of life or "traditional" culture can suggest racist notions of a frozen culture giving rise to false views of authenticity and "traditional practices". This, for its part, denies development and change in Indigenous cultures. Change is natural and inevitable to all cultures and also a prerequisite of a living culture. Lucy Lippard has reminded us of

how notions of authenticity imposed from the outside can lead to stereotypes and false representations that freeze non-Western cultures in an anthropological present or an archaeological past that denies their heirs a modern identity or political reality on an equal basis with Euroamericans (cited in Maclear, 1993:27).

Indigenous peoples have argued that their knowledge systems or oral traditions are a non-Western counterpart of Western science (e.g. Deloria, 1995:51; Colorado, 1996; Helander, 1992). These systems of knowledge continue to exist among present-day Indigenous peoples, albeit often in different forms than one might be used to when thinking of "science". "Indigenous science" has been defined as a term designed for conversations between Native peoples and the dominant Eurocentric cultures. Talking within the Native American context, Pamela Colorado notes that

[e]ach tribe has its specific methods, but for the purposes of introducing the concept of Native science and exploring its relationship with participatory research, we will deal in generalizations about "Native" metaphysics... Traditional Native sci-



ence must be articulated in contemporary terms to permit scholarly exchange, growth and to empower Native people in the scientific arena (Colorado, 1988:49).

If we have a look at the Sami epistemology or "traditional knowledge", we find out that it is in many ways identical to Western scientific tradition but that it also embodies elements that are ignored within Western science. In both systems, knowledge is received by direct and systematic observation although there may be differences between the ways observation is carried out. This is related to the holistic approach discussed above; in holistic observation one does not consider her/himself separate from or outside the observed but rather as part of a larger process. Thus, Sami epistemology is participatory and engaged. Yet there are other forms of receiving knowledge, which could also be termed as intuitive or shamanic knowledge. These forms of knowledge which are received through altered stages of mind such as shamanic trances or sudden glimpses of "seeing", are largely dismissed by Western epistemologies. Sami knowledge, as any Indigenous knowledge, is reflected in language and disseminated through storytelling and ongoing dialogue.<sup>7</sup>

## **Becoming Self-Sustaining Subjects**

Emphasizing a paradigm based on Indigenous peoples' knowledge is a way of getting rid of being/becoming the other of the West. Instead of defining "otherness" as something oppositional to subjective identification in order to create binary polarizations, contemporary cultural studies have given a new content to otherness and difference. Jonathan Rutherford has stated that

[i]n the hierarchical language of the West, what is alien represents otherness, the site of difference and the repository of our fears and anxieties... Difference in this context is always perceived as the effect of other. But a cultural politics that can address difference offers a way of breaking these hierarchies and dismantling this language of polarity and its material structures of inequality and discrimination. We can use the word difference as a motif for that uprooting of certainty. It represents an experience of change, transformation and hybridity (Rutherford, 1990:10).

From Indigenous peoples' perspective however, where the concept of self-determination is central, a mere redefinition of otherness may be inadequate. The decolonizing process of the "other" can be challenged merely as an attempt by intellectuals to obtain an instant solution to a complex issue and as just another desire to divide the world into new

polarities, such as center/periphery, self/other, in order to manufacture easily receivable constructions. Gayatri Spivak, for instance, has criticized the romantic notion of the colonized other as being "simply the revolutionary mirror-image of the Western Self" (Winant, 1990:83). According to Yvonne Dion-Buffalo and John D. Mohawk, colonized peoples have three choices in response to cultural colonization:

They can become "good subjects" of the discourse, accepting the rules of law and morals without much question, they can be "bad subjects" arguing that they have been subjected to alien rules but always revolting within the precepts of those rules, or they can be "non-subjects" acting and thinking around discourses far removed from and unintelligible to the West... Much of what remains of the range of human potential for creating versions of reality exists in the framework of the arts, stories, oral traditions, music and other cultural manifestations of these peoples. Their lived and dreamed experiences are the world's richest sources of exploration of the human potential (Dion-Buffalo and Mohawk, 1993:19; 20).<sup>8</sup>

By becoming non-subjects or as I term it, "self-sustaining subjects", we would not be dependent on values and views of the West. We have to be careful, however, with the distribution of our traditional knowledge so it will not "run away" from us; so that it will not be stolen or appropriated by those who still have better and wider access to publicity and power and who may use it as their own. We have to bear in mind that cultural appropriation (including knowledge) is another form of neo-colonialism which continues to exist in our societies (e.g. Kailo and Helander, 1998:4). Edward Said and Gayatri Spivak, for instance, criticize the way Western authors represent the "Third World".<sup>9</sup> In a similar manner, the Sami and other Indigenous peoples' knowledge can be misinterpreted and manipulated for purposes for which they are not intended. Therefore, we as Indigenous scholars have to ensure that our knowledge is addressed and discussed by ourselves.

As "Indigenous knowledge" is based on concrete experience received from the surrounding environment, it is important that we are able to maintain touch with reality and not to become as essentialist or elitist as those whom we are opposing and challenging. We need to address and work both at the grass-roots level and in the academic world. In order to be critical of and resist Western values and world-views, it is crucial to bring back to and share the information with our own people. As students and scholars we need to be willing to use the information for the benefit of our societies, and not only pursue careers of self-advancement in the academic arena.<sup>10</sup>

## **Decolonization Process, Oral Tradition, Literature and Aesthetics**

Contemporary Indigenous peoples' narrative knowledge has to be part of the decolonization process which is taking place within all Indigenous peoples' societies. Throughout history, oral traditions have been and remain the memory of a people encompassing all aspects of life regarded important within a culture. A common view of Indigenous peoples is that stories tell who "we" are. This includes stories of origin and of ancestors, world view, values and knowledge for everyday survival. I have linked the issue of an "Indigenous paradigm" with oral tradition and literature also because storytelling and literature reflect the values and world view of that culture. According to Paula Gunn Allen, they do this "by carrying forward archetypes through the agency of familiar symbols arranged within a meaningful structure" (Allen, 1987:565).<sup>11</sup> Oral tradition and later, written literature of a certain culture reflect the deepest meanings of a people. The Sami writer Kerttu Vuolab has noted that

[I]terature is the storage of a human being's inventiveness, knowledge and understanding. It is also the foundation stone of humanity, language and learning skills, and survival. Outsiders think that before the first Sami books were published the Sami did not have literature. But we have had literature for a long time. We still have very rich oral storytelling tradition (Vuolab, 1995:27).

In many occasions, Indigenous, black and "Third World" writers and critics have emphasized that storytelling has been their form of conceptualizing, analytical thinking and theorizing. Stories and contemporary writing have been called "theorized fiction" or "fictionalized theory".<sup>12</sup> The Métis writer Lee Maracle notes that

Academics waste a great deal of effort deleting character, plot, and story from theoretical arguments. By referring to instances and examples, previous human interaction, and social events, academics convince themselves of their own objectivity and persuade us that the story is no longer a story...It takes a lot of work to delete the emotional and passionate self from story, to de-humanize story into "theory". So we don't do it. We humanize theory by fusing humanity's need for common direction-theory-with story (Maracle, 1992:88-89).

In Sami society, "epistemological truth" is created and restored by storytelling, discussions, evaluation of previous activities, memorized ex-

periences and phenomena as well as through intuition (Kailo and Helander, 1998:2). Contemporary Sami literature, like other Indigenous peoples' literature is largely based on oral traditions both in form and in content.<sup>13</sup> Due to different world views, values, literary conventions as well as pure ignorance and ethnocentrism, Western literary critics have often dismissed Indigenous peoples' literature as "childish", "primitive", "having no plot" or "having too many characters" (e.g. Paltto, 1998:39; Petrone, 1991:4; Kailo, 1994:22). The Métis writer and critic Emma LaRocque writes how "[o]ral traditions have been dismissed as savage or primitive folklore. Such dismissal has been based on the self-serving colonial cultural myth that Europeans (and descendants thereof) were/are more developed ("civilized") than Aboriginal peoples ("savage")" (LaRocque, 1990:xvi).

There is therefore an urgent need to reconsider the appropriateness of Western aesthetics and literary theories in analyzing Indigenous peoples' literature. I am not suggesting that there is only one way to interpret Indigenous peoples' literature—as Krupat (1992:182) has noted, "diversity" of interpretation is certainly possible for any rich literature, but it is not the case that anything goes. My intention is not to limit the diversity of interpretations but to avoid an unconscious and uncritical imposition of Western aesthetic values and theories upon Indigenous peoples' cultures of which literature is also part.

One of the most persistent prejudices in the Western literary canon is that only certain categories of experience can be recognized as "literature" (Ashcroft et al., 1989:88). Furthermore, aesthetics as understood in the dominant Western paradigm has long been regarded as an autonomous area of theory, separate from ideologies. Aesthetic experience has been considered as neutral and independent from political meanings and power relations in a society. In contemporary cultural studies and in practices of poststructuralism, postmodernism and postcolonialism however, the relationship between aesthetics and politics has been reconsidered. Universalist claims of (Western) literary conventions are also being challenged. Trinh T. Minh-ha points out the bias of Western expectations of "good" literature:

to be "good" a story must be built in conformity with the ready-made idea some people—Western adults—have of reality, that is to say, a set of prefabricated schemata (prefabricated by whom?) they value out of habit, conservatism, and ignorance (of other ways of telling and listening to stories). If these criteria are to be adopted, then countless non-Western stories will fall straight into the category of "bad" stories (Trinh, 1989:142).

Indigenous peoples often have quite different views on "arts" and "aesthetics" from mainstream Western views. Although these terms may be new arrivals in vocabularies of Indigenous peoples' languages, they are not necessarily new phenomena. Many Indigenous artists emphasize that understanding of "arts" or "aesthetics" cannot be separated from other activities and daily life. Furthermore, it cannot be categorized into different boxes. According to the Sami writer Kirsti Paltto,

we have among us many people with multiple talents and knowledge. They write, draw and yoik. In fact, it is not appropriate to draw such boundaries since a human being is a whole. If only as children we could learn everything instead of being made to specialize in one thing. When a person takes a speciality in one and only one field, she becomes knowledgeable only in that even though she might have become well-rounded in many areas. Life is a form of art. And one's lifestyle is part of that art (Paltto, 1998:41-42).<sup>14</sup>

Kerttu Vuolab talks about the continuum of art when she describes her childhood experiences: many of her pictures create stories and many of her stories create pictures. She makes both stories and pictures herself, and she doesn't consider them to be different or separate from each other. For her, they are two different sides of the same thing. She learned both oral tradition and visual perception in her childhood by listening and watching her parents and other relatives on a daily basis. At the same time, she was told stories, that were an important part of her learning and upbringing (Vuolab, 1998:57).

Sami "aesthetic values" are determined to a great extent by practicality. In Kirsti Paltto's view for instance;

a tourist may find fells beautiful but to a Sami they may seem ugly because it is hard to walk there, difficult to get through. In the old days, a girl who was round and fat was considered to be beautiful because such a girl would better resist and get along in the cold. A landscape covered with heather is not as beautiful as one covered with lichen because reindeer need it to feed on, and so on. Aesthetics is thus tied to the land and the ability to feed the inhabitants (Paltto, 1998:27).

Native American and First Nations' views resemble Sami views on art and aesthetics. The Haida artist Robert Davidson tells that

[w]e Haida were once surrounded by art. Art was one with our culture. We had art that was sacred, brought out only for certain ceremonies. We also had art that was on permanent display, validating our place in this world. Art is our only written lan-

guage. It documents the histories of our families, it documents our progress as a people. Throughout our history, art has kept our spirit alive. Now, art is helping to bridge the gap of misunderstanding between our culture and yours (Stelzer, 1994).

The problem of racism and ethnocentrism is not only limited to aesthetics, but also applies to literary criticism. According to Allen (1989:3), the tendency to consider Indigenous peoples' oral traditions through Western aesthetics reflects "aesthetic colonization" and "intellectual apartheid". Miller (1998) has noted how non-Western literature have become another territory to be colonized and ruled by the Western world. Many black critics have also discussed the issue of "literary colonialism". In Macherey's view, for instance, as cited in Anderson (1995:2), Western literary criticism "bears alarming resemblance to colonization and the slave trade. Criticism colonizes the text, attempts to reduce it to an object."<sup>15</sup> Appiah (1984) remarks that European theories or modes of analyses do not necessarily increase understanding of the non-Western texts more than a comprehensive and sensitive reading would. For him, the first necessary step to take is to "locate" the text. Locating the text means that it is situated or embedded within its own social, cultural, historical and political realities. Wilentz (1992:xii) tells how writing on black women writers within the context of a White, male, Eurocentric literary canon, she had to develop an alternative critical methodology to challenge prevailing ethnocentric notions regarding creative art. For her, it is "imperative to use a literary criticism which is neither racist, patriarchal, nor Eurocentric." Christian (1990) has also insisted that non-Western critics develop various ways of reading their own literature that do not necessarily reflect the often prescriptive ideas of the Western literary theoretical establishment.

As regards Sami literature and different theories, I have written elsewhere that

if we start theorizing Sami literature too normatively, there is also danger in canonizing, changing and remaking; whether we are trying to make Sami literature fit into the literary genres of the Western tradition or inventing our own new categorizations. We, who are analyzing Sami literature from within, as Sami ourselves, should not apply ready established literary theories to Sami writings because, first of all, if accepting these theories, we also accept authority which still comes from outside and thus cannot be regarded as being fully appropriate... If we were to theorize, or sketch heuristic models for analyzing Sami literature, I would suggest basing it on the storytelling tradition itself: try to find its pivotal elements, ideas and structures, which could function as a mediation, position

and metaphors which resist the unheeded intrusion of foreign elements into Sami research. This also ensures that Sami stories will maintain their integrity, when the critique is derived from the stories themselves (Kuokkanen, 1996).

However, one has to be aware of the dangerous traps of decontextualization: many Indigenous writers and critics have emphasized the importance of the socio-cultural and historical contexts of oral tradition. Once decontextualized, stories may lose their meaning (Petroni, 1990:12) or, in written form, they can become merely "dead voices" (Krupat, 1996:70). We also have to remember that stories are not necessarily the only form of Indigenous peoples "theorizing"—we should not create new (and false) dichotomies by assuming that abstract theorizing is something that only Western peoples have practised.<sup>16</sup> Moreover, by calling for an "Indigenous paradigm" and more sensitive and culturally specific models of theorizing does not mean a total denial of Western approaches or terminologies. I am not suggesting a "purist" or what Appiah calls a "nativist"<sup>17</sup> approach but in my view, Indigenous peoples should practice what I call "reading on one's guards"<sup>18</sup> or "Cautious Reading" towards Western theories, and use ideas, approaches or concepts originating from Western theories as heuristic tools. In this way, it is possible to create a "Conscious Composite" of elements from both Western and Indigenous philosophical and theoretical traditions in order to achieve the least distorted interpretation.

## Contemporary Indigenous Writers as Cultural Pathfinders

In this article, I have discussed needs, objectives and characteristics of an "Indigenous paradigm". As a Sami writer, I have done this in the light of examples derived from Sami cultural practices. The ultimate goal of an "Indigenous paradigm" is to reach a self-sustaining and self-defining state of Indigenous societies; to reconnect the fragmented parts of knowledge and return to the Indigenous peoples' holistic philosophy in research. A related issue is the reconsideration of the appropriateness of dominant Western aesthetics and literary theories in analyzing Indigenous peoples' stories and literature. It is a process of decolonization of mind<sup>19</sup> and foreign values where contemporary Indigenous writers and cultural workers have a significant role. I consider contemporary Indigenous writers' work an excellent example of carrying "Indigenous paradigms" on to the future. Therefore, they are like *ofelacat*, or "cultural pathfinders" in their work of maintaining and sustaining their cultures. Writers also rely heavily on the power of words and symbolic language just as *noaidit*, shamans used to

do (Kailo and Helander, 1998:165). We know that language is power through its means of creating realities (see Ashcroft *et al.*, 1989:44; 89). The use of the power of the word has many times been the only means of resisting colonial oppressors. Indigenous peoples have to maintain their faith in that power.<sup>20</sup> Through the power of the word, we can regain our voices and be heard. And when we speak with our own voices, we can no longer be misrepresented. Sami and other Indigenous writers who continue to write in their own languages are also like *duojárat*, or "handicraft makers". They have to work actively with their mother tongues, which they did not learn to write in schools but which they have learned to write later, often as adults and now want to pass them on to next generations.<sup>21</sup>

Indigenous women writers may have a particular role in the healing process of decolonization. Often romanticized and stereotypically represented, Indigenous women resist biased notions and are to the forefront of cultural struggles in their societies. Kirsti Paltto discusses the stereotype of the mythical wild woman of the North and suggests that

[m]aybe it is like our women nowadays: they sit in meetings and make noise about themselves, lead parliaments and cabinets, they are the foremost artists and politicians, but during their free time they seek the company of mothers and grandmothers to hear stories of how life used to be (Paltto, 1998:28).

Stories of Indigenous women are particularly related to continuance, healing and regeneration. Vuolab (1998:51) notes that Sami women's stories are often about survival and also closer to nature and people than men's stories. Allen (1986:82; 160) also holds that the traditions of Native American women are mainly about continuity and the maintenance of life and that despite a history of brutality, contemporary women's writing is characterized by persistence and a sense of hope. According to LaRocque (1990:xxviii-xxix), specific themes of contemporary Native American women writers include nurturing, sense of vulnerability and fear of violence. In her book *Storyteller*, Laguna writer Leslie Marmon Silko tells stories of women's roles which emerge from the dynamic exchange of old and new stories (Krumholz, 1994). Furthermore, many Indigenous women writers, including Sami women, feel very strongly that their writing is necessary for the maintenance of their language. For example, the majority of Sami writers writing stories for children are women. In a sense, Indigenous women writers are a kind of *Gieddegeasgálggut*, wise women who share their knowledge with people in trouble or in need.

Furthermore, an "Indigenous paradigm" is a concrete use of Indigenous peoples' knowledge instead of merely recording and archiving it away from daily life.<sup>22</sup> It acknowledges the interconnectedness of theory and everyday



life which retains the common characteristics of Indigenous peoples' lives (see Maracle, 1988; Kailo, 1998). Hence it cannot be separated from the broader political and historical context and become appropriated by the New Age industry. My elaboration of an "Indigenous paradigm" reflecting Sami cultural practices should not be seen as the only possible model but rather an invitation for other Indigenous (and non-Indigenous) scholars to join in sharing their examples and ideas for the paradigm. An "Indigenous paradigm" is not a project towards homogeneity, attempting to lump Indigenous peoples of the world into one category, but it takes its form in the spirit of heterogeneity and affinity,<sup>23</sup> leaving room for differences within.

### Notes

1. Throughout this paper, the term "Indigenous paradigm" is enclosed in quotation marks to indicate that it is a concept that should be considered with caution since the concept of paradigm is not necessarily a term deriving from Indigenous modes of thinking and thus may be somewhat inappropriate.
2. For instance, bell hooks has discussed the connection between discourse of blackness and Blacks' struggle towards self-determination. She notes that "[w]hen discourse of blackness is in no way connected to an effort to promote collective Black self-determination it becomes simply another resource appropriated by the colonizer. It then becomes possible for White supremacist culture to be perpetuated and maintained even as it appears to be inclusive (hooks, 1994:149).
3. As a working tool, I will rely on the widely recognized UN working definition called the Cobo definition and the definition of ILO Convention No. 169 on Indigenous and Tribal Peoples. It is contained in the Study of the Problem of Discrimination Against Indigenous Peoples by the UN Special Rapporteur Jose R. Martinez Cobo according to which

Indigenous communities, peoples and nations are those which, having historical continuity with pre-invasion of pre-colonial societies that developed on their territories, consider themselves distinct from other sectors of the societies now prevailing in those territories, or in parts of them. They form at present non-dominant sectors of society and are determined to preserve, develop and transmit to future generations their ancestral territories, and their ethnic identity, as the basis of their continued existence as peoples, in accordance with their own cultural patterns, social institutions and legal systems.

According to the definition of the International Labour Organization's Convention No. 169 on Indigenous and Tribal Peoples, an Indigenous person is

regarded as Indigenous on account of their descent from the populations which inhabited the country, or a geographical region to which the country belongs, at the time of conquest or colonization or the establishment of present state boundaries and who, irrespective of their legal status, retain some or all of their own social, economic, cultural and political institutions (ILO Convention no. 169, Article 1(b).)

4. In my view, relevant research regarding Indigenous peoples' communities is research that in one way or another supports Indigenous peoples' endeavours towards self-determination.
5. E.g. Trinh T. Minh-ha has shown with her book *Woman, Native, Other* (1989) that postmodern style is not only a "privilege" of Western writers and scholars.
6. Other terms used to refer to this kind of system of knowledge include "Indigenous knowledge," "local knowledge", "traditional ecological knowledge", "customary law", and also "oral tradition."
7. On Sami knowledge, see Helander in Kailo and Helander, 1998.
8. Also Michel Pecheux (1975) discusses the need to develop the theory in ways which allows the subject's resistance to the discursive formations transmitting ideological positions. His proposal of three subjectivities is similar to that of Dion-Buffalo and Mohawk, except what Dion-Buffalo and Mohawk call "a non-subject", Pecheux calls "a third modality". By rejecting "Master Narratives" of the Western mind also approaches such as politics of otherness and difference have encouraged cultural "margins" become their own centers, which "increasingly support alternative (non-Western) discourses of reality" and which do this "in their own languages using images not derived from the West" (Dion-Buffalo and Mohawk, 1992:20).
9. According to Spivak, Hindu law has been misunderstood by British colonial powers and these misinterpretations cannot be corrected with the help of modern social science. They must be deconstructed, overturned, and re-revealed by an understanding of the "mechanics of constitution of the Other" (Spivak, 1987:271-313). On Edward Said's criticism, see for example, his "postcolonial classic" *Orientalism* (1978).
10. bell hooks has discussed the need for a visionary feminist theory based on the integration of the grass roots movement and theoretical thinking. According to her

[s]uch theory emerges only from a context in which there is either an integration of critical thinking and concrete experience or a recognition of the way in which critical ideas, abstractly

formulated, will impact on everyday life experience. Visionary feminist theory must be articulated in a manner that is accessible if it is to have a meaningful impact (hooks, 1989:39).

11. She continues by stating that

[i]t is the sequence in which the archetypes occur which allows the depth we customarily associate with literature, just as it is the accretion of meaning created by this structuring which gives a sense of wholeness and immediacy to the work (*Ibid.*).

12. See Nfah-Abbenui, 1927:20. Juliana Makuchi Nfah-Abbenyi justifies her method of reading texts as fictionalized theory or as theorized fiction by noting the

[t]he theory is embedded in the polysemous and polymorphous nature of the narratives themselves. These texts reinscribe and foreground teleological, ontological and epistemological insights and praxes relevant to the specific histories and politics that preceded the fictional texts (*Ibid.*).

13. In the case of Sami writers, see Kailo and Helander, 1998. On Native American writers and oral tradition, see for example Allen, 1986; King, 1990; Krupat, 1996; Lutz, 1991.

14. More on Sami views on art, see for example Valkeapää, 1971. On Native American views see for example Davidson in Stelzer, 1994; Jensen, 1992 and Jensen in Bell and Williams, 1997/98.

15. Cited in Anderson, 1995:2. Debra L. Anderson notes furthermore that

[t]he principles upon which colonization is founded constitute a systematic refusal of the colonized cultures and societies. The colonizer, like Macherey's critics, perceives only the gaps and voids of the colonized societies and these voids are determined by Western values. This colonizing refusal of African historical and cultural pasts includes the denial of the cultural components which make up African societies, one of which is oral tradition. This tradition has long been viewed or valued for its sociological or ethnological worth as a reflection of society. The oral text is therefore denied its intrinsic fictional or literary value even though it manifests itself as a literary genre with its own models, narrative structures and intertextuality (*Ibid.*).

16. On abstract theorizing and women of colour, see hooks, 1989. Also mixed-blood writer Damm (1993) reminds readers not to consider storytelling as the only literary form of Native Americans.

17. Appiah (1992) discusses the "nativism" in an African context meaning a search for an authentic and autonomous African literature and a denial of colonialist influences such as schooling. In reality, "nativism" is not possible since, as many postcolonial critics have noted

[i]t is not possible to return to or to discover an absolute pre-colonial purity, nor is it possible to create national or regional formations entirely independent of their historical implication in the European colonial experience (Ashcroft *et al.*, 1989:195-196).

Furthermore, Trinh T. Minh-ha has suggested that

there is no simple return to a time before history, a pre-industrial, pre-modern, primitive time of storytelling. Instead, it is only by juxtaposing storytelling with scientific history that the conformity and the uniformity of the categories of scientific history are made visible; but it is only then that storytelling seems to have the force and power both to refresh and to freshly wound (Clough, 1994:125).

18. Paltto (1998:41) discusses how colonialism has taught the Sami to be on guard regarding knowledge and passing it to outsiders. In my view, we Sami scholars can continue this tradition in our approach to Western theories, values and practices in order to avoid colonizing ourselves by accepting and using Western theories uncritically.
19. One of the first critics to discuss mental colonization and to analyze the psychological and sociological consequences of colonization was psychiatrist and political theorist Franz Fanon (1967; also 1959; 1961). Among others, Kenyan writer Ngugi wa Thiong'o has discussed the need for "the decolonization of mind". According to him, decolonization must involve a radical movement away from European values and structures, including the language carrying these values (Thiong'o, 1981; 1986; see also Riemenschneider, 1984).
20. On Sami views on the power of words, see for example Gaski, 1991:83; Paltto, 1998:25. On Native American views on power of words, see for example Allen, 1986; Kroeber, 1979; Lutz, 1993; Momaday, 1969.
21. On Sami writers as handicraft makers, see Lehtola, 1995:50.
22. On the problematic and rhetoric of TEK (traditional ecological knowledge), see Cruikshank, 1998:45-70. In the article, she highlights the conflict between approaches of Native Elders in Yukon and administrators, politicians and researchers who are "capturing", "harvesting", "integrating", "preserving", "transmitting" and "utilizing" the so-called "traditional knowledge" for different purposes. The article also dis-

cusses environmentalist views on traditional knowledge and the movement's appropriation of the imagery prevalent in "traditional knowledge".

23. The term politics of affinity is coined by Kailo (forthcoming) according to whom it seeks to move beyond the most divisive politics of difference and towards a politically informed and spiritually uplifting approach.

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