NOMADIC CIRCLE OF LIFE

A Conversation between Kaarina Kailo and Elina Helander about the Sami Knowledge System and Culture

Kaarina Kailo: Could we begin by discussing the traditional knowledge systems of the Sami?

Elina Helander: In my opinion, traditional Sami knowledge can be directly compared with scientific knowledge. The Sami make systematic observations just like scientists. The knowledge that has been acquired in that manner has remained tied to the Sami language and mind but has not necessarily been written down in book form. If somebody explains a particular thing orally, it does not carry as much weight as when someone comes and shoves a pile of paper into your hands proclaiming that idea to be true, real knowledge. Both of them, however, rely on the empirical method. Sami knowledge is not more subjective or objective than that gathered and expressed by mainstream science. It is true that the Sami subject interprets the things observed according to his or her cultural background, but researchers from the mainstream society are no different. They choose research topics and interpret findings according to their cultural background and projections, just as the Sami do.

Sami traditional culture is largely based on observations. Many parents' methods of child rearing are based on the notion that children make observations themselves and on trusting that children will draw their own conclusions instead of being taught everything by direct communication. The observations about important things are done systematically, and they are discussed in strategic places, for example, by the lakeshore, in a lavvu (tipi tent), or in mountain huts set up beside the reindeer herding grounds. For instance, one makes observations about the sun, the moon, the color of the sky, the behavior of reindeer, the structure of snow, and on that basis one makes decisions regarding action or the pending behavior of the reindeer.

The Sami also possess the kind of knowledge that Western culture does not fully acknowledge as valid knowledge. A person is able to comprehend things in their totality, in a "flash." But what that flash is, where it comes from and what its content is, are difficult to explain succinctly on the basis of the Western system of knowledge. Sami knowledge is immediate in the sense that living as they do within the cyclical, nomadic circle of life, the Sami occasionally land in situations where they can free their thoughts and open themselves up to reality without observing it consciously. A person can become part of reality without having to construct it first. The direct knowledge gained through shamanistic methods and experiences and through a long-lasting stay in nature makes people conscious of the interrelatedness of animals, stones, and other natural objects and beings. Ecological thinking becomes an important factor in the maintenance of those mutual relationships (Helander 1996).

KK: Speaking about shamanistic methods and experiences, do you consider artists to be functioning in some ways as the shamans of today?

EH: It depends on the definition of the word noaidi or shaman. If we tie the Sami concept of ofels (a Sami word meaning pathfinder) to shamanism, then we can add a dimension of meaning to the term noaidi or shaman that includes one who works as a pathfinder and guide on both a personal and a collective level. A shaman can foretell both the concrete

and symbolic direction that one should follow. In this respect one could consider writers and other cultural workers as some kinds of shamans, pathfinders, especially if they see as their task to maintain and develop Sami culture. Artists use symbolic language. The shamanistic world is also very symbolic. Everything visible in our dimension arrives as a form of divine communication from other worlds or as potential manifestations of life possibilities sustained by those worlds. Shamanism is a very creative form of activity. Within shamanism you leave room for momentary interpretations and choices. Sami artists are similar in that their work does not have prior models to follow. They are free to choose new motifs and models.

KK: The word shama, has come to mean many things in North America; the definitions include New Age views that romanticize the shaman as the seeker of trance states and as a sort of psychic time-traveler. In a loose sense, many alternative healers, even artists and psychic healers, are seen as shamans.

EH: I do not want to argue that everybody who writes a poem or paints a picture is a shaman. It is too simplistic an explanation for the phenomenon. And in this context I cannot help wondering whether that isn't the wrong sort of a question, In the past there were efforts to appropriate Sami spirituality from the Sami. And whatever the case may have been, it is now the offspring of the former colonialists, their children and grandchildren, who are selling spirituality and shamanism back to the Sami, First they tried to take it away by safeguarding it in museums and archives, and now it is to be given back, but in an altered form. I would find it hard to accept if an outsider came and defined writers, for example, as being types of shamans. If such definitions are given from within Sami society, that I find easier to accept.

KK: Yes. I hear outsiders, from as far as California. have began organizing courses and shamanistic workshops in Finland and Samiland.

EH: Yes. they organize courses about shamanism in Inari. Maybe it is partly because of that fact that the word shamanism has a negative connotation for us. The Sami are able by themselves to define what kind of shamanism is good for them and who is a shaman.

KK: Shamanism in its modern manifestations has led to many hot debates in North America. I am thinking for example of the so-called white shamanism which of course you are aware of. In North America there has been a lot of criticism directed against the so-called New Age shamans, who appropriate. misinterpret, and sell the shamanistic wisdom of other cultures for profit. White shamanism is considered to be a new form of colonialism, based on commercial exploitation of the native peoples' spiritual beliefs, which never involved profiteering (Churchill and Jaime 1992; Coltelli 1990; Dandie 1990; Keeshig-Tobias 1990; Maracle 1989; Lutz 1990).

EH: Traditional Sami shamanism is a very serious issue for me because it is connected with the human, natural, and spiritual worlds and their interrelationships. Those interconnections are visible on the prepared hide surface of a shaman's drum in an allegorical form. A shaman can activate those connections with the help of his or her beliefs and procedures; those connections can likewise act upon him or her. It is manifest in the images of a shaman's drum where a human being does not occupy a central position in the universe in relation to others. For me it is difficult to say who out of those white shamans is "authentic" and who is not. We might have certain stereotypes about

white shamans: that they just write books, and earn money, and play with something that has been stolen from others. I think one ought to find out what kind of a thinking pattern or ideology is behind those phenomena. On the other hand, good intentions, for instance, a common interest does not justify anybody appropriating the knowledge of indigenous peoples or their other property. Ethnological literature established long ago that shamanism is about to become extinct or is already extinct. Some may believe that when a certain part of a culture dies out, it becomes common property.

KK: The problem seems to be that the commercialization of Sami spirituality--shamanism as a merely exotic commodity damages the Sami cause. What is it that disturbs the Sami the most in that regard?

EH: I have not been thinking of the disadvantages, but I think that some representatives of the mainstream cultures, as a result of their own action, have landed in a conflict with themselves. By appropriating spiritual beliefs foreign to their culture, they create for themselves a chaotic situation based on illusions. Due to the commercial and deluded aspects of shamanism, indigenous shamanism and spirituality as phenomena end up being presented in an unfavorable light. What is more, many members of the mainstream societies want to get hold of a magic key overnight, and they have a great wish to gain instant access to all sacred truths. In the commercial sense, they use the knowledge acquired by native people so that they can dominate nature and exploit its resources more effectively. Or, in turn, they distort aspects of Sami culture. From the Sami point of view, shamanism is an integral component of Sami culture forming a basis for identity and well-being.

KK: Even so, some of those who appropriate the intellectual property of other cultures are not necessarily conscious of the impact of their deeds.

EH: Yes, of course, it does not have to be conscious. We have again arrived at an era where colonial exploitation takes place in different forms on a very huge scale. Behind it all, you find the kind of one-dimensional approach that is tied to economics and power and is supported by an antiquated scientific paradigm. With modern information technology, in our global society everyone is in a position to appropriate something, if not oil and gas, then ideas, knowledge, patterns, songs, healing methods, beliefs and other cultural items. One does not need initial capital for that kind of exploitation. Consequently, it can take place in the midst of everyday life without anyone even noticing it. Partly, those phenomena are due to the fact that people are not informed, educated, or "civilized." The so-called civilized people are in fact primitive and uneducated. By the time children enter school, at the latest, they should be taught facts about the Sami culture and about the cultural concepts of others, so that the lack of knowledge and the various prejudices that exist do not have a chance to grow out of proportion. In addition some people within the Western cultures have grown tired of their own beliefs, and they wish to get mental nourishment from other cultures.

KK: That might reflect the fact that Christianity is undergoing its own crisis. Many people--women in particular--no longer accept or feel spiritually empowered by the patriarchal beliefs and teachings of Christianity. The androcentric interpretation of Christian writings has created dichotomies such as culture/nature, mind/body, as well as the hierarchies of man/woman, civilized/primitive, human/animal, in which the

first term is considered superior. Women from mainstream cultures, for example, are trying to patch up the gaps created by those dualisms by seeking out theories and alternative visions from indigenous peoples. In my classes on female culture, I have witnessed a tremendous, passionate yearning for gynocentric spirituality beyond the male prescriptions of female divinity. Some, myself included, go back to the pre-Christian myths and beliefs of their own cultures (in my case, to my own Finnish, shamanistic belief system) in search of more egalitarian and holistic philosophies. Overall, that reflects the crisis of Western spirituality (Kailo 1994).

EH: Yes, it sure does, though many things are moving in a more positive direction. As an example I could mention that lately the representatives of indigenous and mainstream communities have organized many conferences together on biological and cultural diversity and the knowledge of indigenous people within the framework of sustainable development. However, the Western world is undergoing a spiritual crisis, is faced with an ecological catastrophe, and is threatened by the potential abuse of nuclear weapons. That is because nature has been objectified, that is to say, isolated. Human beings, too, have been objectified. That presents a real challenge to the validity of Western science. Western science and world view is forced into a confrontation with itself. It now has a chance to break away from false assumptions and to find solutions to the crises that it has contributed to. The indigenous culture, too, is carried along with the modernization into the same crisis, which means that indigenous groups must also review critically the concepts they have adopted from the mainstream cultures.

KK: In my own research on ancient circumpolar bear cults and societies (Kailo 1996a, 1998), I have become more aware of the moral and holistically oriented philosophy of animism, which also characterized the ancient Finnish world view. And instead of the Christian hierarchies privileging men (man made in God's image), the animistic societies stressed the interdependency of all. In my view, the bear provided a more powerful paradigm and first principle of social organization that moved further beyond ideological hierarchies than the most daring concepts put forward by contemporary theorists, even the "third sex." After all, the image of the she-bear has nothing to do with reverse essentialism--replacing one set of oppressive symbols of power with another--but has to do with the very displacement of dualistic models such as male/female, nature/culture, civilized/primitive. Before the bear was replaced by Christian male symbolism and godheads, it was respected as the ancestor of humans--a hybrid, a bridge between the interrelated realms of nature and culture. The displacement of dualistic models based merely on a reversal of the various "isms" can most effectively take place when we consider the functions that rigid boundaries serve: control and mastery over the "other," over nature. When the antithetical models are replaced by a focus on distinct and/or equal symbolic spheres for the sexes, and a sociocosmic "first principle" transcending sex, class, race, sexual orientation, age, ability, and speciesism, we get an example of postmodernism in action. Shared respect for our natural resources becomes the root paradigm for all other relations. Since postmodernism questions all dualisms including individual vs. society, and man vs. animal, time is right, in my view, for rethinking the religious systems that underlie negative attitudes toward nature, women, and indigenous people.

But to return to the state of things in Finland today, as you told me earlier, there exists

unconscious, invisible, and subtle forms of racism in Finland. Could you elaborate on that?

EH: In Finland people are quite open about their racism toward immigrants. When it comes to the Sami, it is of a different kind, a discrimination covered over with soft mosses. Many people who have racist tendencies are anxious that they will be deprived of something, such as political power and rights to the land.

KK: Do the Sami themselves have misconceptions, prejudices?

EH: We Sami also have prejudices against others. Therefore we must continually check our own points of view. On the other hand, our prejudice is harmless in the sense that we do not have the power and access to public channels and systems through which we might spread our misconceptions. That is a question of power, but then also of mentality.

KK: Is there then something in the Sami philosophy of life, say non-hierarchical values, that would account for that different mentality, as you see it?

EH: I can mention some key words: animism, tolerance, respect, collective thinking, and the belief in the interconnectedness of all life forms.

KK: Have you as a Sami adopted a specific strategy or approach to allow for more fruitful and less projective cross-cultural exchanges or collaboration?

EH: I think that it is necessary to continually raise questions, to stay alert, and to be on one's guard. I call key aspects of my own approach, the epistemology of suspicion and the epistemology of disturbance. They aim at bringing to light the mechanisms of power and the hidden racist tendencies connected with it. One should understand the method as a strategic approach with which it is possible to reveal certain mechanisms connected with power and oppression. The method also seeks to reveal many other views that have so far been regarded as self-evident. The inner values of a researcher or any other person may of course begin to shake in their foundations if they are fenced in like a reindeer, if they are. so to speak, kept enclosed for observation. The Sami, too, need to be subjected to scrutiny, but on the other hand, they have already been closely observed and measured as scientific objects during several hundreds of years---at school, by the church, and so. NO other people has been subjected to attempts to mold and Christianize them for as long as the Sami. Mind you, this did not necessarily meet with success. The old colonialists were educated. They were church ministers, state representatives, county police commissioners, high ranking officers in the government, kings and others. They believed that the Sami were heathens and lived in ignorance,

That kind of a demeaning mentality may still exist, and it is as a phenomenon quite the same as the old one.

What I have in mind with the epistemology of disturbance is to shake the foundations of the prevailing Western paradigms of knowledge and scientific discourses, especially when their application results in threats towards indigenous and other life on Earth (see also. Dion-Buffalo and Mohawk 1992).

KK: It seems to me that such an approach overlaps with the ecofeminist and other political, postmodern discourses and activities aimed at exposing the most destructive aspects of Western thought.

EH: When there are enough drops of water, there is hope that a stream or a river will be formed.

KK: There is a feeling in many academic and activist circles that the Western "Master Narratives are shaking m their foundations, losing their status, and that there is an epistemic crisis within Western discourses. If I have understood it correctly from our other discussions, the method you call the epistemology of suspicion and of disturbance aims precisely at shaking the foundations of the Eurocentric mind. It provides researchers with an opportunity, or at least the challenge, to avoid pure voyeurism. In other words, through your questioning of their assumptions. you break into the fenced-in space of the interviewer particularly as it is tied with the potential abuses of power and asymmetrical research relationships. It gives him or her a better chance, on a cognitive level, of partaking in the reality of the research object.

EH: I am not convinced that a researcher from one culture can fully participate in the reality of the research object of another culture. In my view, the worst specimens within the research circles are those who understand things halfway, who use the kinds of arguments that they belong to the Samis' verdde system. Nielsen (1962,752) provides the following definition for verdde: "Guest-friend, person one usually stays with when visiting a place, and person who usually stays with oneself; person with whom one has some other special connection, e.g., Mountain Lapp who looks after one's reindeer, or person whose reindeer are looked after by a Mountain Lapp." Alternatively, the researchers may argue that they have researched the Sami or have sat in the same boat with them. They may, of course, have some knowledge of Sami thought.

KK: True, but is there not the danger of essentialism in suggesting that only the Sami can have access to Sami philosophy, if that is your suggestion? Being a Sami does not guarantee that one can understand the full depth of Sami philosophy any more than being Western prevents one from breaking out of Western molds. Is it not most important that one is honest, probing, open-minded and committed when seeking to delve deeply into less-familiar worlds?

EH: By no means do I wish to idealize the Sami. It is just that we want to develop our culture from our own point of view. There are still enough missionaries among us, and we are continually pressured to analyze and defend our culture because of the ongoing modernization and assimilation process to which we are subjected by the mainstream society. One is forced to stay on guard regarding the intrusion of ideas or values reflecting other cultural backgrounds, which may conceal ulterior motives of the non-Sami. I want to underline that I continually have to be on guard regarding the values the researchers stand for; I do not question them personally as individuals or as experts.

KK: The epistemology of suspicion is in that case the result of a continuous colonization process towards the Sami as well as the asymmetry within science where the Sami have been placed in the position of an object (Keskitalo 1976).

EH: The method should not be taken too literally because then it would not be the method I have in mind. Besides, it is not desirable or customary in the traditional Sami system of communication to reveal all aspects of the topic under discussion or of the project under way. For example, Sami storytelling is often characterized by digressions, indirect hints, and narrative meandering. That also applies to unrevealed aspects of

the Sami "method." My purpose is to apply that approach according to the situation as a kind of scientific starting point, which should allow the values and underlying scientific assumptions of the other participant in the dialogue to be exposed and brought out. Thanks to that kind of a dynamic dialogue, non-Sami researchers may end up in a nomadic circle, to which Sami reality gives rise, and where they will be scrutinized by themselves or by others. If the researchers are thus shaken up a little bit, they may become more open to understanding the viewpoints of the other side. They have to rethink their cultural background and scientific conceptions. Also, the Sami member of a dialogue ends up revising his or her stance. Both participants in the dialogue have therefore a better chance to free themselves from whatever constraints and limits demarcated their process of interaction and which previously they have internalized.

KK: If I understand correctly, Sami knowledge has been objectified, approached as if it were static, frozen in time, and it has at the same time become a tool of control and power abuse during the colonial process. Have there not been any changes regarding the status of Sami knowledge? At least in North America there is a growing awareness of asymmetrical power relations within the scientific world, and I find more and more researchers are listening to Aboriginal people who address those kinds of issues. It doesn't guarantee that the end results will be much different from what has been happening in the past, but still, we are headed in a better direction. Maybe a new, more self-conscious, self-reflexive, and constructive scientific attitude (resulting, for example, from postmodern epistemology) is that scholars must not be so afraid of making and admitting mistakes, that one should be more willing to take responsibility for one's biased methods and culturally idiosyncratic projections. No scientist is free of them. The old patriarchal university was much less willing to accept the reality of projections and misconceptions. Mind you, many still cling naively to the fallacy about the objectivity of science, because they will not see the importance of the socio-political context that frames all research and lends it a particular ideological slant. Politicized postmodernism has brought about important changes in this regard. I am thinking particularly of feminist post-modernist interventions (Nicholson 1990; Mirth-ha 1989; Harding 1987).

EH: That is an ongoing debate. Maybe we are on our way out of the methods of objectification and ethnic and ecological stereotypes to which all parties seem to be given. It is an example of the sort of cross-cultural dialogue through which we might rid ourselves of mutual stereotypes and excessive prejudice. Through that kind of dialogue, one can develop the model of cross-cultural communication that would allow us to gain a deeper understanding of culturally diverse issues and their order of importance. We ought to have a dialogue across cultural borders, in which the voice of minorities can be heard. Usually when a discussion takes place, the only voice that has been heard and given validity--once everything is over--is the mainstream voice. An asymmetrical situation continues to exist within the scientific world. The Sami are not going to be heard unless they adopt convenient strategies within the Western scientific system and ordering of reality. On the other hand, the so-called verdde system of the Sami leaves room for a dialogue. However, for some odd reason, the mainstream society is not yet ready for a partnership.

KK: There have been all kinds of intriguing, stimulating, and challenging developments within Western academe; the concept of an expert has, for example, come under fire.

In connection with native studies and issues, it is continuously pointed out that it is the native elders who are the experts in native matters, not necessarily or exclusively outside researchers, who may have spent a lifetime studying native cultures. Also, serious ethical research guidelines have been developed in North America. That involves ongoing discussions on a very practical level, for example, of what a researcher should take into consideration in collaborative projects when one of the collaborators is a representative of a minority group, and even more important, what the ethical implications are when a total outsider studies a particular culture. I wonder if Nordic attitudes have changed. Has there been any attempt at consciousness-raising regarding those problems, or does the attitude still prevail according to which there are, for example, universal aesthetic norms, structures, and values that one can detect in all cultural expressions?

EH: In my view, the expert is a person who knows and understands an issue in question. Northern areas have been consciously used as research laboratories, and that is one of the reasons why it is so important to develop ethical rules for research. Sami villages are getting full of students and researchers. Outside researchers can easily knock you down with their own theories and discussions if you are not one of them. To establish symmetrical relationships, indigenous people should educate their own researchers, who know both their own culture and the systems of Western, mainstream culture. They would then be in a position to engage in dialogue on a deeper level and create a more solid foundation for their scientific work. The outsiders should be put to a test every now and then, as I stated earlier. The value of indigenous knowledge should also be strengthened.

KK: That would then provide a better foundation from which one might engage in a cross-cultural dialogue based on a more tangibly equal standpoint reflecting the value systems of both participants.

EH: It is not really a form of scientific dialogue if there are no Sami researchers or if Sami research is cornered, e.g., when Sami research is branded beforehand as a given, ethnic, subjective activity. In a real dialogue both sides have to be able to accept the perspective that the other one represents. To be quite exact, that presupposes inner, mental, mutual understanding. If we are dealing with great cultural differences, it may be hard to arrive at such an understanding.

KK: The same problems exist across women's studies. Collaborative projects involving women of color, white women, native women, lesbian women, etc., are fraught with difficulties that have to do with the women's different access to authority, resources, power, and so on. As an example of the politics of difference in the area of aesthetics and literary studies, what do you see as the difference between the dominant Western attitude towards the arts, and the Sami approach? The very term aesthetics does not seem to exist in tine Sami language'? What words cover the areas that the West designates as fine arts, literature, and music, for example?

EH: Here a specific problem springs up, namely that your statement is saturated with such words as aesthetics, art, and literature. Those are relatively new phenomena in Sami culture, or maybe they are old as phenomena but new as concepts. For example, art has existed from the beginning, but the Sami did not consciously isolate artistic qualities from the rest of culture. As an example, I could mention that one could grow and form

a reindeer herd for oneself on the grounds that it would represent a beautiful unit (Sami cappa eallu). In order to create a beautiful herd, one has to take many things into account, and in that way it is not a question of aesthetics in the Western sense. One does not separate a sense of the aesthetic from other components of a human being's experience and action.

KK: That is very provocative. I think that that concept is a real challenge to Western notions of beauty. What about the political dimension of Sami "art"?

EH: Modern Sami art and literature that developed in the 1970s are really not forms of neutral, value-free self-exploration. On the contrary, because of political circumstances, they are much more consciously ideological than the activities of the mainstream representatives. The question about the foundation and status of one's own identity forces one to reflect on broader political questions. Radicalism (the act of going to the very roots of things and tracing them) may manifest itself in a spirit of extreme reforms until the social conditions free a person from that kind of an ideological direction.

KK: It seems to me that Sami aesthetics for lack of a more appropriate term--is also more practically oriented than is the case with the somewhat more normative view on art by the Western mainstream. Of course, Western art and ideas about art are not a homogenous set of beliefs and practices.

EH: The usefulness and the use of an object may be a much greater part of its aesthetic quality than its colors and such things. The form of an object is expected and even required to be practical. When sitting among a pile of rocks or on the roots of a shrub, those kinds of objects do not fall over. That means that the purpose and aesthetics of a single object can be best understood by understanding the culture in its entirety.

KK: What would you give as an example? The objects used for milking reindeer?

EH: One could give many examples. The old Sami objects have a kind of round or oval form. The vessel used in milking reindeer has precisely the kind of form that ensures that the milk does not get easily spilled if the vessel is tipped a little. It is the practical use of an object that is important. The fact that the object is well-made and practical in the changing conditions of nature makes it beautiful and desirable. The traditional artists did not need to think about the buyer's or consumer's taste, but could instead free themselves for playful artistry. For us, the various definitions and compartmentalizations come from the dominant society. There you find some segments of art, which become objectified and which are regarded in isolation from the rest of the social scene. Aesthetics is studied on such grounds. That kind of art tends to have only a fleeting appeal. Sami life has not been fragmented into separate, disconnected pieces. For a modern person, traditional Sami culture is too multidimensional, too difficult to understand.

KK: So everything is ideally contained by the Sami circle you previously discussed--the cyclical, nomadic circle where human, animal, and natural things exist, so to speak, on a balanced and nonhierarchical continuum?

EH: Yes, they are a part of a greater whole and that involves many factors. Also the magical qualities of objects are part of the whole.

KK: Could defining yoiking as music be an example of the limitations that one faces when translating concepts into the Sami worldview? Yoiking is music but it is also

connected to something else, to nontransitive states?

EH: The Sami yoik has developed into a form of music. But as soon as you define yoiking as nothing other than music, you are off your rocker. For instance, yoiking is a means of communication. When two people yoik with each other they don't perceive themselves as singing entertaining songs to each other. Instead they are engaging in a form of communication, whatever the topic of the yoiking may be. It may deal with news, it may be a description of a thing, of reminiscences, or of love. That is communication at its best because the yoiker understands the whole perspective of the other's message and responds to it, and the other person continues with it. Or sometimes people yoik together without words. The traditional yoik also takes a person to another reality and it can be used to scare away wolves or as a visiting card.

KK: So it doesn't necessarily have a beginning, middle, and end?

EH: A yoik does not have a beginning or an end. Westerners love to read words of beginning and words of ending. Modernization tends towards the establishment of limitations, categorizations, and with modern instruments that kind of gestalt formation is very easy.

KK: I have some questions about literature. What do you think about the differences between Finnish and Sami authors? On a gut level, if you have read Finnish and Sami writers, have you found differences in their use of language, their choice of topics and themes, other than what you have already said about the political underpinnings? After all, the Finns and the Sami have shared ethnic, maybe cultural roots in the Finno-Ugric past. Do you prefer reading books by Sami to reading books by Finns? I suppose you probably would prefer the Sami books? An assumption I am making.

EH: For sure that is an assumption. I do not really care whether the book is by a Sami or a non-Sami. I want to add that in my childhood home I was not taught to use my leisure time for reading. We were allowed to read spiritual literature but never merely as a pastime. When it comes to Sami literature I am most attracted to yoik poetry and creation stories. Modern Sami literature is relatively young. Literary production got going as late as the 1970s. The classics, such as the texts by Johan Turi, depict the society and worldview of those days (around the turn of the century). Part of the older literature is very nationalistic-romantic, emphasizing the importance of the Sami language. In the novels they analyze the modern, cultural contacts and the identity formations that are formed in the crosscurrents. Both in Finnish and in Sami literature you find a period of nationalism, a period focused on forging and consolidating one's own national identity. From the Finnish literature that I had to read, I recall the war, the description of male action. Sami literature is now trying to rid itself of the effects of different forms of colonialism.

KK: What kinds of difficulties do Sami writers experience? What caught your attention when you worked as the director of the Nordic Sami Institute?

EH: Of course, I cannot answer that on behalf of the authors. However, I got the overall impression that they are not used to expressing themselves in the Sami language, because they were taught at school, mainly or exclusively, in the language of the mainstream society. They have to work hard with the Sami language. The other difficulty is that the Sami are not used to reading literature in Sami. The Sami language readership is missing.

The older population is used to reading religious literature such as the sermons of part-Sami revivalist preacher Laestadius. But that is not the same as reading modern literature that has been written using a relatively new orthography. There might also be very difficult texts among the published books. The Sami are also not used to visiting book stores or to spending money on books.

KK: And the critics tend to analyze Sami literature by applying mainstream aesthetic criteria--even though they will, of course, be themselves heterogenous and in no way necessarily expressions of a coherent, predictable value system?

EH: Yes, that is it. That is the problem. They do not look at things from the Sami point of view, because they do not want to or because they have trouble getting at the core of Sami culture. Very often they review the books by Sami writers on the basis of a non-Sami world view.

KK: What about the differences or similarities between Finns and the Sami, both of whom are grounded in a shamanistic/animistic culture and world view? Because we share in a common ethnic, cultural history, one that may go as far back as 6000 B.C., what do you see as our affinities?

EH: The Nordic people, including Finns, are close to nature. That is true. Finns enjoy sitting in their cottages by a lake. Some make their way up north to go fishing. They pick cloudberries, roots and all. Some come to Lapland to admire nature from inside their cars, the same way that they admire curtain fabrics in shop windows.

KK: Are you not stereotyping the Finns? Should we not avoid any forms of essentialism, like the idea of natives having a "nature gene."

EH: been to be sarcastic to expose how ridiculous stereotypes are. They can end up having a harmful impact when systematically disseminated and published in books, particularly in a scientific form.

KK: What do you think is the gift and unique contribution of Sami literature or Sami culture to the world? What sets it apart? Or is that the wrong kind of a question?

EH: That is a really difficult question. What might be the gift of the Sami culture or literature to the world? In Sami culture there are many things that are worth a lot to the world. But what might be the greatest of all, that is difficult to answer. Note, also, that here we are again running after superlatives--a very Western phenomenon. I would like to emphasize in that context that a specific feature of Sami culture has been that it has not left many visible traces. We do not have Eiffel Towers, Statues of Liberty, nuclear plants, etc. The cyclical, nomadic Sami circle of life has not made room for the self-centered exhibition of one's own power by leaving behind monuments. The nomadic life style and mythical-ecological thinking has prevented the Sami from accumulating material belongings. The quantity and quality of materials have become nature preserving. Many items match easily the natural surroundings or are part of them.

KK: Yes, that is its unique beauty. Maybe the Sami contribution is also of a less-material nature?

EH: Another contribution, even though it is not characteristic in the strict sense of the word, is the custom of sitting around a campfire. That kind of closeness to nature

takes away the feeling of alienation and makes people conscious of their connections to the Earth and to other human beings who might or might not be present. Maybe that makes at person receptive to holistic knowledge, where knowledge can be acquired in a flash. I would like to repeat the core elements of Sami knowledge. In the traditional system, the knowledge is not an end in itself but has use value. People participate directly in knowledge production and in its dissemination. The cottages, tents, concrete working situations, and campfires are used as scientific seminars or laboratories where knowledge is discussed and negotiated. That is where a lot of knowledge gets delivered. In other words, the epistemological truth is brought out through storytelling, discussions, evaluation of previous activities, and through memorized and remembered experiences and phenomena, etc. And then the knowledge is tested pragmatically in concrete life and work situations, often immediately. No formal scientific activity, academic hierarchy, or scientific writing is needed for the collection of information, for its conceptualization, for its accumulation, and for the process of learning it.

KK: You have talked to me previously about the Western concept of time. which involves categories, hierarchical orderings, and a predominantly linear conception of time that is bent on measurement. A second is less than a minute, a minute less than an hour, and all our lives we run after deadlines, killing time to work ourselves to death? I was very stimulated by those insights. and they provoked me to rethink the very idea of lite as a sort of chronological journey. I came to realize that in fact my interest in Sami issues has sort of repeated itself in cycles. I wrote lots of stories about Samiland as a child, then in my twenties I came to work here as a tourist guide, and now. finally, I am doing collaborative research on and interacting with Sami culture. It was not a master plan I followed, it was a cyclical return of my repressed interest in Samiland.

EH: In my understanding, you are referring to some linear sequences of your personal life. I wonder if you have not in fact repressed interest in your own culture.

KK: For some time, I have been rethinking, for example, the Freudian mold through which I have been taught to approach desire, including the phenomenon of the exotic as it relates to cultures. I am concerned about the extent to which I have, no doubt, internalized such fiat and common representations of Samiland as the references to "Lapland magic," etc., but on the other hand, it would be dualistic to assume that my interest in one Finno-Ugric culture, the Sami, has meant repression of the Finnish side. My interests in both have manifested themselves side by side (see Kailo 1996b). I have been focused in my research, for example, on Finnish mythology and spirituality for a very long time. But I do think of the Sami culture as more exotic, intriguing and so on, so your point is no doubt worth thinking about. I think scholars have a responsibility to and benefit personally from exploring the full extent of their projections on other cultures.

EH: Previously I said something about seasonal, cosmological, and other cycles of time. I was also talking about the fact that time is a very relative concept. It has been measured in the mainstream by a short classroom ruler. Every hour has its own price. People live in fear that they will lose time and their money with it. Focusing too much on time brings with it too many limitations. It allows people to be easily manipulated and managed.

KK: In my understanding, time has been given the association of death, and it has been objectified. "Losing time" is connected with "deficit thinking," which many believe is the

root of patriarchal thought.

EH: It is important for a modern person to rethink whether the existing philosophy of time serves a purpose. The Western concept of time is connected with rushing, the great hurry. One has to achieve a lot in a limited span of time, because one fears wasting time, and one can lose it and never get it back. On the production side. the linear concept of time is associated with the maximal exploitation of natural resources. Human beings, too, are exploited as resources. Life in the Sami circle gives them more room and opens up more possibilities. In the traditional culture, time was and still is partially "sun-centered." It is tied with observing the stars, nature, and animals. Existing in the circle makes it possible to make a living on one's own. For instance, if things don't work out so well in one respect, for example, if one does not have success with fishing for some reason, then one can do something else meanwhile to make one's living. In the circle of action, one reaches again, at some later point in time, a point during which new possibilities present themselves to take up fishing again. But as soon as the circle of action becomes one-dimensional, the concept of time also is altered and becomes more determining and limiting for action. For example, I could mention that attempts have been made to transform the circle of action of reindeer herding into a one-sided meat producing activity. In order to maintain the cyclical Sami circle of action, one needs, as a precondition, to practice sustainable development and a flexible way of thinking, and one needs to minimize outside disturbances (Helander 1993).

KK: To move on to another topic, what can you say about Sami feminism. Is it similar to the Western feminist movement?

EH: The conscious Sami women's movement started to take shape in the 1970s. Oppression was the descriptive word that the women adopted, for without that kind of rhetoric it would not have been possible to form a Sami women's organization. However, it seems to me that that strategy has scared many Sami women away from the politically organized Sami women's movement. The idea of women as victims-even when true--has prevented some women from identifying with the movement. The women's movement was labeled and stereotyped as being radical, a threat to family structure, social organization, and institutions. The family, for example, has traditionally been the most important social and economic unit in Sami society. Those are some of the reasons why the Sami women's movement has been misunderstood even by Sami women themselves.

KK: What have been the key issues in the Sami women's movement?

EH: The demand for equality has been a central theme within the Sami women's movement. It was the traditional, conservative, reindeer-herding women who were the first to bring up the issue of inequality. Those women have long been regarded as the keepers of Sami traditions, namely, reindeer breeding. From descriptions given by the older generation of Sami women, it appears that they experienced equality in the past but that modernization, overprotective national policies, and non-Sami legislation have meant that Sami women are now oppressed within society. Studies carried out on the position of Sami women in politics and the rest of public life, show that in the seventies and eighties there were few women in high positions as managers or top politicians. The reasons for that were said to be poor self-confidence and a lack of motivation. In the 1990s it appears to me that we are back to square one. Men have grabbed the leadership positions

once again. Other themes women have been discussing include general, international, indigenous political issues. When we discuss the Sami women's movement and attempt to characterize it, we must bear in mind that the Sami are an ethnic minority and an indigenous people. Sami rights to land and water are not recognized, and they have no real right of self-determination. The Sami, like other indigenous peoples, are still subject to colonization and racism. In that respect, Sami feminism cannot be separated from the broader indigenous political framework. The philosophy of indigenous peoples, in which Mother Earth is central, has been passed on to us from our forebears. Our task, which we have received from Mother Earth, is to look after our lands for future generations. That philosophy is grounded in its own power and right.

KK: Those sound very much like the comments made by North American indigenous women. Many feel unmotivated and untouched by white feminism because of divergent priorities and the reality of racism in many mainstream, feminist circles. On the other hand, there is a lot of stereotyping of nonnative women as all being collaborators in the materialistic, capitalistic, exploitative white world. While it is true that there are, once again, asymmetrical power relations within the feminist movement and certainly divergent agendas, we could collaborate more effectively if we joined our forces against a shared enemy: any earth-destroying system, mentality, paradigm, value system any system pitted against those with less power. The very same forces that are wreaking havoc with the planet are controlling women, children, animals, and the whole ecosystem. Are there any issues that you feel should be included in Sami women's political agenda, where consciousness-raising is valid and desirable?

EH: There are a number of issues that have not been discussed by Sami women. One of them is whether the female value system should be abstracted and incorporated into social procedures. Power is based on certain assumptions and value systems which are not gender neutral. The issue is whether women will try to organize society on a different basis, grounding it in alternative, woman-friendly structures (Helander 1994).

KK: Is there anything you would like to add in conclusion? Or can one have concluding words in this kind of an ongoing dialogue?

EH: There is no need for concluding remarks. However. I would like to encourage the Sami students, researchers, and others to explore and act according to their own cultural concepts and knowledge instead of blindly imitating the prevailing Western paradigms. This self-transcendence leads hopefully to an interplay between the Western and non-Western paradigms so that change, emancipation, and innovation within the scientific world, as part of social reality, becomes possible.

NOTE

This edited dialogue is based on conversations that took place in Ohcejohka/Sapmi (Utsjoki/Finland) between 1993 and 1997. It is a slightly edited version of a chapter to be published in No Beginning, No End--The Sami (Lapps) Speak Up, edited by Kaarina Kailo and Elina Helander (Alberta: Canadian Circumpolar Institute, 1998). See Helander (1992) for further elaborations of her comments.

REFERENCES

Churchill, W. and A. Jaimes. 1992. Fantasies of the master race: Literature, cinema and the colonization of American Indians. Monroe, Maine: Common Courage Press.

Coltelli, L., ed. 1990. Winged words. American Indian writers speak. Lincoln, Nebr.: University of Nebraska Press.

Dandie, A. 1990. Native people must start telling their own stories. The LeaderPost (Regina), 19 April.

Dion-Buffalo, Y. and J. Mohawk. 1992. Thoughts from an autochtonous centre: postmodernism and cultural studies. Akwe: kon Journal 9.4 (winter): 16-22.

Harding, S. 1987. Feminism and methodology. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Helander, E. and K. Kailo, eds. 1998. No beginning, no end: The Sami (Lapps) speak up. Alberta: Canadian Circumpolar Institute.

-----. 1992. Sami knowledge--Subjective opinion or science? Diehtogiisa 1: 3-5.

-----. 1993. The role of Sami traditions in sustainable development. In Politics and sustainable growth in the Arctic, edited by J. Kakonen (67-81). Dartmouth: Dartmouth Publ. Co.

-----. 1994. Den Samiska kvinnororelsen. Naistutkimus/Kvinnoforskning 2:17-24.

-----. 1996. Development, knowledge and Sami reindeer herding. Cultural and Social Research in Greenland 95/96. Essays in Honour of Robert Petersen. Nuuk: Illisimatusarfik/Atuakkiorfik, 107-118.

Kailo, K. 1994. Trance-cultural travel: Indigenous women and mainstream feminisms. In Trans-cultural travels: Essays in Canadian literature and society, edited by M. Peepre, NACS/ANEC (Text series of the Nordic Association for Canadian Studies/L'association nordiques d'etudes canadiennes), 11: 19-36.

-----. 1996a. The She-bear--Circumpolar mother of spiritual feminism, Canadian Woman Studies 17(1): 48-52.

-----. 1996b. The representation of women and the Sami in the Finnish Kalevala: The problem with the "Overlap(p)." Simone de Beauvoir Institute Bulletin/Bulletin de l'Institut Simone de Beauvoir 16: 33-49.

-----. 1998. Return of the She-bear: Foremother of ecospirituality. In C. G. Trott, Appropriation and re-appropriation: The return of native Canadian voices. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, in press.

Keeshig, T. 1990. Stop stealing native stories. Globe and Mail. 26 Jan.

Keskitalo, A. I. 1976. Research as an inter-ethnic relation. Acta Borealia 13: 15-42.

Lutz, H. 1990. Cultural appropriation as a process of displacing peoples and history. The Canadian Journal of Native Studies 10(2): 167-182.

Maracle, L. 1989. Moving over. Trivia: a Journal of Ideas 14: 9-12.

Minh-ha, T. T. 1989. Woman, native, other. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Nicholson, L. J., ed. 1990. Feminism/Postmodernism. New York: Routledge.

Nielsen, K. 1962. Lappisk Ordbok (vol. III). Instituttet for Sammenlignende

Kulturforskning. Oslo: Universitetsforrlaget.