

“Everybody Knew Čuoppomáddu Stories”. On Human/Other-Than-Human Relations in Stuornjárga as Revealed Through the Márka-Sámi Toponyms

Erika De Vivo
Università degli Studi di Torino, Italia

Abstract The Sámi people share their ancestral homeland (Sápmi, sub/Arctic Europe) not only with animals, plants, trees, rocks, colonial-settlers and more recent immigrants but also with other-than-human beings. For centuries, the Sámi have co-constructed Sápmi’s landscape with these entities through respect and reciprocity. Despite enforced conversion, elements of Sámi Indigenous worldviews persisted. Enshrined in placenames, collective memory of interactions with other-than-human beings has been passed down through generations. The paper highlights the importance that toponyms have in transmitting cultural values, identity, and a sense of belonging.

Keywords Linguistic landscape. Indigenous Sámi worldviews. Indigenous Sámi values. Other-than-human entities. Márka-Sámi identity.

Summary 1 Introduction. – 2 Assimilation Through Enforced Conversion and Toponymic Colonisation. – 3 Toponyms and Stuornjárga’s Collective Sámi Memory. – 4 Čuoppomáddu. – 5 Conclusion.



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1 Introduction

Humans relate to the world through cultural-specific understanding of local environments. Thus, each culture has its own conceptualisation of relations with its surroundings and the other-than-human entities (i.e. animals, plants, rocks, spirits, and beings endowed with agency) dwelling there. Throughout the centuries and across the world, placenames have had the capacity of connecting people with their environment and thereby to all the beings they share the landscape with, developing what Kearney and Bradley consider an emotional engagement to the land (2009). Placenames often convey information about cosmographies and worldviews and human and non-human agents active in the area (see Basso 1996). Given their crucial role in symbolically organising both space and memory/history, placenames have become a site of conflict where power relations are evident. In colonial contexts, placenames – and the right to impose them – have emerged as powerful tools of domination alongside land-conquest and attacks on ways of knowing and understanding (Helander 2009). Given their cultural relevance and their connections with history, practices, and worldviews, placenames were a primary target of cultural eradication policies such as those implemented in Sápmi, the Sámi ancestral homeland, by the colonial authorities.

This essay aims to shed light upon relations between humans and other-than-humans in *Stuornjårga*, holding Indigenous toponyms as both references to past and present worldviews and as collective memories encapsulating such relations and contributing to the analysis of Indigenous Sámi placenames as repositories of meaning and historical documentation. Furthermore, it addresses toponyms as testimony of Sámi indigenous worldviews and verbal signs encapsulating Sámi Indigenous perspectives on the relations binding all entities in the world. By addressing the socio-cultural context of *Stuornjårga*, the essay contributes to diffusion of knowledge about the area and its hitherto little-studied specific cultural characteristics. Although the reflections advanced here, locally and temporally bounded, refer specifically to *Stuornjårga*, their implications hold true for the wider Sápmi context.

First I discuss Sápmi’s socio-cultural context briefly, touching upon its history of colonisation and concurrent oppression of Sámi Indigenous epistemologies, introducing some of the concepts informing my reflections: toponymic silencing and resistance. Secondly,

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I address toponymic colonisation as an expression of assimilation policies, in relation to enforced conversion, examining the epistemological violence intrinsic in such practices. Thirdly, I apply my considerations to the Stuornjárga Márka-Sámi, examining the linguistic landscape as a prism through which to view human/other-than-human relationships embedded in placenames. I then focus on Čuoppomáddu – the Great Mother of Frogs – and her role and significance in Márka-Sámi culture. The conclusion draws together the threads running through the essay, underlining how toponyms function as repositories of meaning.

The Sámi people have dwelt in Sápmi for centuries as did their ancestors long before Germanic tribes settled in the southern Scandinavian Peninsula. The Sámi are today a minoritised Indigenous¹ group in each of the states cutting across Sápmi. Sámi cultures have long been stigmatised at local and state levels (Minde 2003). The Sámi have always been heterogeneous groups of people with cultural and linguistic similarities and differences. They share a cultural substratum, but internal-external processes led to the development of a cultural-linguistic continuum ranging from the Eastern Kola Peninsula and north-central Finland to southern-Norwegian/central-Swedish areas, with different lifestyles, languages, worldviews, and subsistence activities. Transversal to Sámi cultural-linguistic areas, national borders contribute to the fragmentation of Sámi cultures (Lantto 2010). Despite centuries-long Christian colonisers’ conversion efforts, since around the fifteenth century (Rydving 1995; 2004), leading to the loss of Indigenous non-Christian Sámi worldviews and practices, elements of Indigenous epistemologies have persisted, shaping how Sámi relate to Sápmi’s natural environment. Many Sámi placenames epitomise such relations, incorporating them into local history through the landscape. Colonial action against Sámi communities was deeply intertwined with the naming of the sub-Arctic region. The centralised colonial power, located hundreds of kilometres south of Sápmi, inexorably

¹ In Norway, Sámi self-determination has been a complex process: preceded in 1987 by the Samelov (the Sámi Act) guaranteeing to the Sámi rights to protect and develop their cultures, languages, and lifestyles, in 1989 the consultative body Sámediggi (the Sámi Parliament) was established in Kárásjohka; the Norwegian parliament amended the constitution, including § 110^o paragraph, later modified in § 118^o. In 1990 Norway ratified the International Labour Organization (ILO) convention 169, recognising the Indigenous status of the Sámi. This political achievement came after decades of struggle epitomised by the Alta River controversy, a turning point in relations between Sámi communities and the Norwegian State which, for almost a century, had enforced a rigid policy of structuralised assimilation (*fornorsking*, ‘norwegianization’) and state-led stigmatisation.

The term Indigenous today refers to culturally/linguistically/geographically distinct groups. Although each Indigenous community has faced unique challenges in the colonial assault to their sovereignty, they all share the experience of colonisation. Therefore, the term ‘Indigenous’ refers to both all Indigenous communities collectively and to specific Indigenous communities. Here, I will use the term with reference to the Sápmi context.

imposed itself in the North, carving its own space in the local landscape by the use of colonial names, leading to a gradual erosion of Sámi placenames. Following colonial encroachments into Sápmi, Indigenous toponyms first coexisted with new colonial placenames and were then wiped off maps although continuing in oral traditions. This colonial strategy, known as “toponymic silencing” (Harley 2001), has often been implemented by dominant/hegemonic societies in the attempt to expunge from records – and erase from history – cultural practices and histories of minorit(ised) groups while invalidating Indigenous epistemologies. Toponyms – embedded in, and reflecting power relations – carry specific meanings; as an act of power, naming has important cultural implications. In Western Judeo-Christian frameworks, it is also a political act perceived as civilising: the conceptual premises of this perception assume that the newly-named places had no proper name before, being a sort of *terra nullius* (Mazzullo 2009; Nordin 2015) free for ‘civilised’ societies to conquer, rule and, ultimately ‘civilise’. Thus in contexts of settler-colonialism, place-naming is marked by colonial, paternalistic attitudes which, in Norwegian Sápmi, are epitomised by Norwegian physical and ideological appropriation of Sámi lands from around the fourteenth century. Sápmi though, as all Indigenous lands, was neither empty nor untouched. For centuries Sápmi had been the cradle of Sámi cultures. The ancestors of today’s Sámi have left profound traces in the landscape through material interaction with it and its inhabitants (visible and invisible, humans and other-than-humans) and through names and tales.

For decades Indigenous Sámi toponyms – and epistemologies – were excluded from the official public sphere although surviving in the oral memory of those who privately maintained Sámi customs, languages, and lifestyles. It was only through the strenuous work of political activists – often disapproved of by some of the community – that Sámi toponyms returned to public arenas. The recognition of Indigenous Sámi placenames through their use on official maps, road signs, and public documents is a significant expression of acknowledgement of Sámi identity and culture. The reclaiming of formerly “silenced” (Harley 2001) or “subjugated” toponyms and the conscious use of Indigenous placenames is an act of decolonisation considered a form of toponymic resistance (Helander 2009), recognising Sámi placenames’ emancipatory role as decolonial tools.

In the area known as Márku (Norwegian: Márka),² the inland territories of Stuernjårga between Skánik/Skånland-Dielddanuor-

² Originally derogative, this term has undergone a process of resemantisation, becoming a positively-charged endonym. Márku derives from *markebygd* (outlying fields), a term Norwegian-speaking coastal villages used to refer to rural settlements located in the inner areas of the peninsula (Storm 1993).

ri/Tjelsund (Troms-Finnmark) and Evenássi/Evenes (Nordland), decolonial processes have enjoyed privileged expression in toponymic resistance since the 1990s. Here, some 300 km north of the Arctic Circle, in October 2000, at a time of marked ethno-political tension about the presence/absence of placenames in the public/institutional spheres, a leaflet signed S.A.G. (Sámisk Aksjons Gruppe)³ and distributed to local households, read: “This is just a small reminder of the villages in Skånland’s actual placenames and identities” (Mathisen 2002, 81). In autumn 2001, a performative protest followed: Indigenous Sámi toponyms appeared overnight on handmade road signs in Skánik/Skånland, testifying to the important role Sámi toponyms play as sources of identity, being associated – and connecting people – with local stories, history/ies, and cultural values, while epitomising indigenous epistemologies long shunned by colonial authorities. Indigenous Sámi toponyms enshrine local understandings of relations between the environment and its inhabitants – humans and other-than-humans – offering an emic perspective of Indigenous conceptions of shared spaces regulated by relationships, reciprocity, and respect. Claiming their presence in the public sphere was an act of empowerment and a revindication of cultural affiliation.

The above makes Stuornjårga’s linguistic landscape particularly interesting to Environmental Humanities, allowing observation of how Indigenous Sámi worldviews⁴ and values are embedded in the landscape and evoked through placenames. Here, I have developed themes addressed in my PhD thesis on cultural efflorescence in Stuornjårga. This essay draws upon interviews with my interlocutors (local cultural workers and activists), bibliographical sources and analyses of written and visual materials collected during my 16-month-long fieldwork⁵ in Sápmi as a young, female Italian cultural anthropology PhD student.

3 S.A.G. stands for Sámi Action Group. This was an anonymous local Sámi activists’ group.

4 Konsta Kaikkonen, a Finnish researcher in Sámi religions, discusses the difficulties intrinsic in the identification of a culturally-sensitive terminology to account for Indigenous Sámi worldviews and practices coeval and intermingled with Christianity. Following Sámi scholar Rauna Kuokkanen, Kaikkonen proposes using Sámi terminology, rooted in Sámi indigenous worldviews. Sámi scholar Jelena Porsanger developed the expression *sámi eamioskkoldat* to describe Sámi indigenous religions, which expression emphasises “the continuity of Sámi lands and the Sámi people, the central meaning of elders and ancestors as bearers and teachers of Sámi traditions, and the inseparable reciprocity of people and the natural environment” (quoted in Kaikkonen 2021, 9). While acknowledging the importance of indigenous terminologies and their role in conveying culturally-specific values and notion, I shall here employ the expression ‘Indigenous Sámi worldviews’ when referring to Sámi worldviews and practices coeval/intermingled with Christianity.

5 During fieldwork, I employed qualitative methods: semi-structured in-depth interviews and participant observation at Sámi festivals.

2 Assimilation Through Enforced Conversion and Toponymic Colonisation

Until the mid-20th century, the Márku was characterised by substantial adhesion to Laestadianism (Gaski 2000), a branch of Lutheranism based on the teachings of the 19th-century pastor Lars Levi Laestadius, himself Sámi on his mother’s side. Nevertheless, elements of Indigenous non-Christian cosmologies permeated local worldviews. Filtered through missionaries’ Christian-centred accounts, knowledge of Sámi pre-Christian epistemologies is partial and inevitably biased. Missionaries-produced documentation aimed at understanding Sámi worldviews to eradicate them. Drawing their conclusions from available information, scholars agree that, albeit highly localised and differentiated, Sámi worldviews shared some important features. There was no individual creator, no codified authority or textual doctrine; instead, Sámi worldviews were fluid and adaptable to socio-cultural variations. Indigenous Sámi worldviews can be regarded as polytheistic and animistic: sacred authority was bestowed through dreams, individual revelations and states of altered consciousness (Rydving 1995), and humans share the world with other-than-human entities transcending the perception of most people with whom they enjoy relations of reciprocity and respect (Helander-Renvall 2010). As Helander-Renvall notes, relational epistemology as delineated by anthropologist Nurit Bird-David can also be used to describe Sámi indigenous worldviews according to which “humans are part of a dynamic cosmic network of mutual relations” (quoted in Boekraad 2016, 20), and such relations are grounded in interdependence and reciprocity. Sámi acknowledge the non-human personhood of spirits, animals and natural entities. Traditional Sámi ethical principles, defined by Helander-Renvall as the intrinsic equality of all creatures and their right to exist and live (2014), shape Sámi relations with nature, landscape, and the entities dwelling there (animals, spirits, beings, ancestors). Sámi share their space with other entities, interacting and negotiating with them (e.g. gaining permission to use a particular space for human activities) rather than imposing control. This shapes how land is experienced by the Sámi.

The profound Sámi understanding of nature is built upon experience-based knowledge of natural phenomena developed through centuries-old interaction with their sub/Arctic environment (considered harsh and inhospitable by colonial settlers) in which they thrived. The Sámi ritual specialist (*noaide*) was a culture-bearer with profound knowledge of Sámi cosmology and mastery of various skills and techniques (the cure of psycho-physical ailments, divination, the performing of collective rituals). *Noaide* held a central position in mediating between the visible and the invisible worlds, between perceptible and imperceptible dimensions. Rituals were performed in different

locations both in the open air and inside Sámi dwelling places such as the *goahti* (turf hut). *Sieidi* (sacrificial sites), usually prominent elements of the landscape, were not only central to Indigenous Sámi relations with the landscape and its invisible but perceptible dwellers, but they also constitute one of the few expressions of Sámi Indigenous worldviews that have left archaeological (i.e. tangible) traces.

Christianisation of the Sámi was a gradual process spreading from south to north and from east to west. A centuries-long pre-conversion phase, during which contact influenced Sámi worldviews (and vice-versa), was followed by a period of violently-enforced Christianisation. Formal missionary activity began in Sápmi in the 18th century. Although some people willingly embraced Christianity, historical evidence proves that children were sometimes taken from their communities to be educated in Christian environments so that, upon their return to their families, they could proselytise as cultural insiders (Lindmark 2013). Missionaries targeted Sámi worldviews and their visible concrete elements, working to locate holy sites to destroy them or force local Sámi to do so; ritual drums were seized, Sámi knowledge systems demonised, and witch trials led to the execution of Sámi ritual practitioners (Hagen 2014). Many Sámi refused to surrender their drums, often handed down from generation to generation, thereby connecting their owners with ancestors and descendants. Instead of yielding them to the authorities, some preferred to place their drums in local lakes or hide them in the woods. Upon favourable environmental conditions, such drums could be preserved to the extent that some of them were discovered in their original hiding places decades later, material proof of otherwise immaterial practices. The *goavddis* (drum) retrieved in Hilsá - Stuornjárga - is such a rare find.⁶ The covering membrane with its hanging objects had long since disintegrated. The pine-burl drum-frame most probably dates from between 1680-90 and 1730-70, when Nordic witch hunts had already ceased. Pre-witch-hunt drums, passed down from one generation to the next, were thought to be still in use in the 18th century; but the Hilsá drum was created after the persecution. It testifies that the knowledge and skills required not only to construct drums but also to use them were still alive and local Sámi were still engaged in non-Christian spiritual activities within a complex religious context (Storm, Fonneland 2022), bearing witness to the resilience and adaptability of Sámi cultures in Stuornjárga.

⁶ In the early 1990s, the drum-frame was found by chance by locals walking in the mountains. They did not immediately grasp the significance of the object they had stumbled across; it was only in 2016 that they presented the object to the attention of museologists based in Tromsø (Storm, Fonneland 2022).

By shattering sieidi and burning drums, missionaries were not only preventing the Sámi from performing rituals; they also ravaged sacred places and objects at the core of Sámi Indigenous relations with their environment while physically imposing Christianity by building churches and chapels across Sápmi. Missionaries hoped to annihilate Sámi spiritual connection with the entities populating Sámi Indigenous cosmologies by cutting the ties that, for generations, had connected people with the land. Not all sieidi though were destroyed and some still stand even if their original meaning is now lost to most.⁷

Enforced Christianisation eroded pre-Christian worldviews and ritual practices, many of which were often lost to time, while some elements survived within Sámi Christian frameworks. Once the destruction of physical manifestations of the sacred was completed, colonial authorities shifted their attention towards the annihilation of immaterial repositories of knowledge and meaning: placenames. Emerging from Indigenous-specific epistemologies, Sámi toponyms reveal Indigenous Sámi engagement and interaction with their landscape.

Anthropological interest in toponyms is as old as the discipline itself. Given their cultural relevance, toponyms have been at the core of anthropological enquiry from the dawn of the discipline when anthropology was closely interwoven with colonial agendas. In the early 20th century, many anthropologists studied native placenames; among them Franz Boas examined Indigenous North American placenames, publishing *Geographical Names of the Kwakiutl Indians* in 1934. According to Thornton, in recent decades research into Indigenous toponyms has regained a prominent role in Anthropology, with Keith Basso (1996) at the forefront of the study of Indigenous placenames’ cognitive and symbolic dimensions. In Thornton’s view, the fascination exerted by placenames as a privileged topic of anthropological interest derives from their intrinsic characteristic of intersecting “the three fundamental domains of cultural analysis: language, thought, and the environment” (Thornton 1997, 209). Placenames are gateways to cultural-specific engagements with/understandings of the environment. More than indicators of spatial locations, toponyms connote history and local realities (Ingold 2000). The study of placenames thus uncovers the cultural “hidden landscapes” (Cogos et al. 2019) they enshrine. Given their cultural and political

⁷ In the Márku, as many placenames testify, contact between humans and other-than-human entities was common. Also in this area colonial epistemological and physical violence against other-than-human entities was channelled against their physical manifestations. In 1722, missionary Jens Kildal destroyed forty sacrificial sites in Ofoten - were Stuornjárga is located - in less than a month (Hansen, Olsen 2014). Nevertheless, as Sámi scholar Marit Myrvoll demonstrates (2017), memories of sacred sites in the area lasted for centuries after the missionaries visited the area.

relevance, placenames have also been loci of confrontation as colonial elites transformed them into assimilation tools.

Through examination of colonial policies connected with placenames in Sápmi, Helander notices how the erasure of local placenames epitomises asymmetric power relations: by changing local names, imposing Norwegian toponyms, colonial authorities claimed cultural ownership of settlements, locations, and topographical formations. This was a slow process with long-lasting consequences. Formally initiated at the beginning of the 19th century, toponymic substitution through the imposition of Norwegian toponyms can be traced back to late 18th-century Norwegian authorities’ pursuit of an ideal uniformity of both language and practices. The Sámi cultural-linguistic autonomy was perceived as a hindrance to an idealised homogenous Norwegian national identity. Sámi placenames came to epitomise the intrinsic alterity of the Sámi regions and their inhabitants, challenging homogenising, colonial claims advanced by southern ruling elites. Marit Myrvoll highlights that

the eradication of Sámi placenames from official maps was a part of policy of Norwegianization of Sámi landscapes. (2017, 107)

Similarly, Helander notes that

[n]aming a place anew is a widely documented act of political possession in settlement history. Equally, the taking away of a name is an act of dispossession. (2014)

Borrowing from Harley, Helander employs the expression “toponymic colonialism” to define Norwegian colonial re-naming practices aiming at disowning indigenous epistemological autonomy and Sámi ownership over the land (2014). Not only is such a re-naming practice a violent act of silencing, but it also contains implications hindering intergenerational transmission of the Sámi cultural heritage. By implementing ‘toponymic silencing’, government officials often prevented knowledge, values, and history from being passed on to future generations. Deprived of its indigenous name, a place was deprived of a connected set of histories, memories, and meanings while the knowledge embedded in its Sámi placenames risked being lost forever.

3 Toponyms and Stuernjårga’s Collective Sámi Memory

Applying the above considerations to Stuernjårga – where the Márku is located – one can see that this area is emblematic of the way which placenames and their cultural implications have survived in local collective memory despite colonial attempts to eradicate them.

Rural Sámi settlements in Stuornjårga can be traced back to the 1700s, when Sámi who used those areas as summer grazing lands settled in the Márku, where they already had strong connections through family ties with local nearby Sea-Sámi communities. Until the 1950s, the subsistence strategies of the Stuornjårga peninsula followed the differentiation in the exploitation of local resources. Such variant models of exploitation were charged with ethnic features. Along the coast, communities – usually self-identifying as Norwegians – engaged primarily in fishing while, inland, small-scale farming constituted the bulk of local Márka-Sámi economics. During winter, Márka-Sámi men did paid work or went fishing in Lofoten and/or along Finnmark’s coast (Storm 1993; Hansen, Olsen 2014). Since the 1960s, Stuornjårga has witnessed migration flows from the countryside towards major cities both near and far. For many, the Márku is no longer the site of permanent residence but is connected with their roots, defining their identity. Since the 1980s, local cultural workers, private individuals, and institutions have embarked upon extensive collection of Sámi placenames. Their researches were based on interviews with local culture-bearers and on material retrieved from local archives, resulting in important publications documenting local Sámi toponymy while ensuring its preservation.

The general considerations about Sámi toponyms reported above held true also in the Márka, where Sámi toponyms often offer indications of local topography, flora, and fauna. Although reindeer-herding and -hunting are no longer widely practised in the area, toponyms connected with reindeer (*boážu*) still exist in the Márku: for instance Boážogárdik (the reindeer fence) and Bohččojeaggi (the reindeer mire, where a wolf is said to have eaten one of the last wild reindeer) (Skåden, Skåden 2013). Other animals such as the bear (*bienna*) are remembered in places such as Biennaráiggit. As Cogos et al. (2019) show, Sámi placenames may allude to events affecting the landscape, for instance forest fires and their consequences. Buollámdievvá/Brenthaugen can be traced back to such origins, *buollán* meaning ‘burnt’, bearing witness to a past forest fire (Skåden, Skåden 2013). Placenames may also evoke tasks, functioning as historical sources for past generations’ daily life; Galmadasrudni, ‘the cooling well’, used to refrigerate milk in summer. The toponym Dáktebákti (*dákti* ‘bone’ + *bákti* ‘rock’) has a similar documentary value, offering insights into the ancient Márka-Sámi spiritual landscape. According to Márka-Sámi authors and cultural workers Asbjørg and Sigbjørn Skåden (2013), in the past this was a sacrificial site.

The revelatory character of Sámi toponyms and the importance of stories connected with them emerged during an interview with Sigbjørn Skåden. He believes stories are deeply rooted in the territory, providing reference points for historical events and explanations of specific local landscape features:

SIGBJØRN Placenames are descriptive of the landscape, it's very common. But there are also some stories about “this is why” or “why that?” We have a small waterfall in the river, not so far from where I grew up, called the Six-Finger-Waterfall because one of the women who fell into it came from the Six-Finger Family, a family which had a tendency of getting children with six fingers so it was called the Six-Fingers-River. For instance, that's one story. (Sigbjørn Skåden, interview, 21 February 2019, Tromsø)⁸

As S. Skåden's account illustrates, placenames and tales are often interdependent - the tale explaining the placename and the placename evoking the tale - making the landscape a repository of meanings, charged through the etiological stories they evoke. As unusual episodes or peculiar physical characteristics of an individual may be the origin of a placename, so community members who left a mark in local memory are remembered through placenames, engaging people with their ancestors. While discussing Dundor Heikka - a famous 19th-century Márka-Sámi bear hunter - I asked Sigbjørn Skåden whether there were any traces of Dundor Heikka in local memory. Sigbjørn replied that some placenames are associated with him: local oral tradition reports boulders connected with Dundor Heikka and the bear hunt, and the river Dundorajohka bears Heikka's family name. This river flows from Husmaroggi/Husjorda, where Dundor Heikka's grandfather, Ole Nilsen Dundor settled as early as 1770 with over 1,000 reindeer (Skåden, Skåden 2013).

Sámi toponyms often encapsulate/provide information about a given location and its natural features. This is the case of an ancient farm now seat of a Márka-Sámi open-air museum: Gállogieddi, 'the meadow by the great stone'. *Gállu* alludes to the big rock dominating the area, whereas *gieddi* is North-Sámi for 'meadow'. This name reflects what Ligi (2016) defines the historical-emotional depth places can hold. An alternative toponym once used for Gállogieddi, still part of local oral knowledge, is Gállogoahti: the *goahti* (turf hut) by the boulder. Although the first element of the toponym is still *gállu*, the placename is modelled upon *goahti*, a semi-permanent Sámi dwelling-place which once stood where the farm was later built (Myrnes et al. 2006). Both Gállogieddi and Gállogoahti demonstrate that this boulder was a prominent element of the landscape: local stories relate that beneath it lives an *Ulda* (pl. *Ulddat*), a chthonic being who has often interacted with members of the local family, warning them of

⁸ The transcriptions reported in this contribution are not verbatim, as I omitted repetitions. As agreed during the interviews, held in English, I reported my interlocutor's real name.

dangers or sharing with them farm buildings such as the barn. These are only few of the numerous attestations of contact and collaboration between humans and the *Ulddat* dwelling in the area. Such stories connect the local landscape and its historical (farm) and topographical (boulder) elements with Sámi indigenous worldviews.

Often called “the little people” or “the (little) people from the underground” (fieldnotes, Skánik, 25 August 18), the *uldda(t)* – also known as *gufihtar*, and *háldi* – belong to the vast Indigenous non-Christian Sámi folklore. They populate the same places as the Sámi and, although humans-*ulddat* interaction is common, humans can hear but rarely see these subterranean/invisible beings and then only when the latter permit it. According to Turi (2010), *ulddat* dress similarly to, and own reindeer like, the Sámi. These guardian spirits, who can be dangerous or kind, demand respect to ensure their benevolence. *Uldatt* are considered civilising beings, having taught their essential skills to the Sámi. Turi explained that Sámi learned *Noaidevuohta* (the crafts of the *noaidi*) and to *joik* (chant) from the *ulddat*, tracing these practices to other-than-human origins (Cocq 2008). Such an approach towards the *ulddat* confirms the principle of reciprocity identified by many scholars as a cornerstone of Indigenous Sámi cultural values. Furthermore, albeit other-than-humans, the *ulddat* are not perceived as essentially different from the Sámi: in appearance they are similar to, but more handsome than the Sámi. *Ulddat* girls are beautiful, seductive, and irresistible, posing a threat to young Sámi men who fall in love with them as tales of intermarriage show. *Ulddat* have been integrated into Christian frameworks as Qvigstad’s 1928 collection shows. Ellen Utsi relates:

Adam and Eve had many children, and then God came to visit them, and Eve hurries washing the children, but did not get all finished. She hides the children she had not washed, and God punishes her by declaring that the children who are hidden will remain invisible. (Cocq 2008, 124)

Per Bær, as he told Qvigstad, heard a similar story from a man who said he had read it in the Bible: Adam and Eve were ashamed about having so many children and hid some of them. God commanded that the hidden ones should remain so. Both stories explain within a Christian framework the genesis of *ulddat*, tracing them to the very origins of humans, among them the Sámi to whom they are ultimately related since they are all descendants of Eve and Adam. Boulders/*gállu* are often associated with *ulddat*, as is apparent in Stuorgállu (the big rock). Skåden and Skåden report that local stories tell of *ulddat* living under the eponymous boulder, near which they have been seen (2013). Besides toponyms indirectly connected with *ulddat*, some placenames in the Márku openly indicate their presence: Ulddaráigi (the

hole of the *ulda*), Ulddabákti (the rock of the *ulda*), where blue goats have been seen grazing, blue signalling the *ulddat*'s ownership of the animals (Skåden, Skåden 2013).

While discussing placenames connected with the 19th-century bear hunter Dundor Heikka, Sigbjørn Skåden mentioned that:

- S Just close to that river, there is a story of something called... ah, what's the English...? Well, it's like: the “revisiting children's meadow”.
- E Revisiting?
- S Yes... unwanted children put out to die... because they're not... [they're] those born out of wedlock. In Sámi mythology they will be around. In Sámi tradition they may return because they are not baptised. They return and they cry so... in some places you would hear children crying. One of the fields close to that waterfall is called Eahpádusjalga, which means ‘the field of unwanted or... returning children’. It's just an example. I mean, most examples aren't that interesting, but it still gives you a connection. It connects you quite directly to the history of the whole old district.
- E These places got these names because there they [the local people] used to hear the children crying or because it was where they used to put out children?
- S That's a place where you can hear [them].
(Sigbjørn Skåden, interview, 21 February 2019, Tromsø)

Sigbjørn Skåden refers here to the *eahpádus* (pl. *eahpádusak*, standard Northern Sámi *eahpáraš*), a restless ghost of an unbaptised, murdered or abandoned child left to die in the woods, without receiving a proper burial. These liminal spirits haunted the place where they died, appearing regularly – usually every 7 years – at dawn or dusk. To bring them peace, one should give them a name upon hearing their cry because baptism will free their souls (Qvigstad, 1928, Pentikainen 1968; Skåden, Skåden 2013). The memory of encounters and interactions with *eahpáradusak* is passed down in placenames. Besides Eahpádusjalga, an *eahpádus* was heard in the Márku in Eahpádusrápma. A man who encountered an *eahpádus* there told Skåden and Skåden (2013) about hearing an *eahpádus* which his own father then baptised. To name an *eahpádus* is a form of interaction built not on fear alone, although encountering an *eahpádus* was frightening and naming was also an apotropaic action. Naming means observing the principles of respect and reciprocity which inspire Sámi values and underpin Sámi relations with other-than-human entities. As Sigbjørn Skåden explains:

- s They will come and you will have to be aware because they are dangerous to you if you don't treat them [properly].
(Sigbjørn Skåden, interview, 21 February 2019, Tromsø)

Behavioural rules have to be followed when dealing with the ghosts of murdered children to ensure that they will not hurt the living. Not only *ulddat* and *eahpádusak*, embedded in placenames, populate the Márku landscape: *Stállu* (Sámi folktales' ogre-like beings), for instance, also appear in numerous toponyms: Stálogorsa (the deep river-valley of the *stállu*); Stáloráigi (the *stállu* hole) was said to be the entrance to a Stállu's home. The hole gradually disappeared but children were warned not to approach it as the *stállu* might take them. In A. and S. Skåden's opinion, the story originated in the desire to keep children away from dangerous places (2013).

In addition to spiritual beings relevant for the Márka-Sámi, animals significant for the locals also populate Márka-Sámi toponyms. One significant such animal is the frog (*Čuoppu*) whose epithet is associated with numerous places: Čuoppoláddu (the frog pond) where these amphibians gather in early spring; Čuoppojeaggi (*jeaggi*, 'bog'); Čuopponjunnji (*njunnji*, 'nose, protruding feature'); Čuoppeorápmá (*rápmá*, 'forest slope'); Čuoppodievvá (*dievvá*, 'hill, round mound'), Čuoppojávri (*jávri*, 'water, lake'), where frogs have been seen clasping their hands together. One toponym indicates the presence of Čuoppomáddu, the great Mother of Frogs: Čuoppomáddojorbmi, a deep hollow in either a river or a bog. According to Asbjørg and Sigbjørn Skåden numerous stories about the Mother of Frogs are associated with Čuoppomáddojorbmi (2013) as I discuss in the section below.

4 Čuoppomáddu

Among the many beings dwelling in the Márka, Čuoppomáddu holds a special place in local memory; she is one of the numerous *Máddut* or 'Mothers', guardian spirits presiding over their species, protecting their offspring and environments. Offending a *Máddu* or harming her descendants brings consequences. According to late Márka-Sámi author and cultural activist Asbjørg Skåden,⁹ Čuoppomáddu likes

⁹ In 1994, Asbjørg Skåden published *Čuoppomáddu*, a short volume in the Duortnus/Torne dialect of North-Sámi - spoken in the Márku- for Skániid Girjje, the publishing house A. Skåden founded and whose logo is a frog, in honour of Čuoppomáddu. The stories - which can be traced back to Skánik, Evenášši, and Áravuopmi in Áhkkonjára - were collected through interviews carried out since 1987, when the editor was working as a co-educator in the community. As Asbjørg Skåden explains, the collection was enriched by memories from her own childhood. Local students were also involved in the project: they were to ask parents, grandparents and other members of their ex-

to live in peaceful seclusion in deep puddles, streams, creeks, riverbeds, bogs, marshes, and bottomless lakes. She resembles a large frog, appearing to humans only when disturbed or her offspring are threatened: then she jumps on the persecutor, killing, maiming or frightening her/him off. If she and her offspring are left in peace, she minds her own business.

Qvigstad collected numerous tales, still told today, traceable to *máddu* stories. A *máddu* may be known in some areas and unknown in others, and the presence of a Mother of a species in local folklore reveals a lot about the community acknowledging her. The species over which she presides was highly regarded, or was once prominent in the local environment. Examining the role of animals with a *máddu* in Sámi pre-industrial cultures, Boekraade notices that both animals constituting food sources – fish, birds, but not reindeer (or their predators) – and animals with no immediate material function and/or fragile populations – mosquitoes, frogs – historically had a *máddu*. Boekraade suggests that *máddu* may pertain to those small animals important in terms of diet, relevant to Sámi medical practices,¹⁰ or with important symbolic roles for species-local environment equilibrium (Boekraade 2016). Both Boekraad’s (2016) and Magga et al. (2001) consider Sámi indigenous values and practices as factors fostering intra/inter-species equilibrium. Boekraad examines these factors by analysing myths and rituals, preserved and transformed across generations, concerning animals. Closeness between humans and animal species – through the daily interaction humans have with individual animals – along with mutual respect and reciprocity are at the basis of Sámi understanding of relations. In Boekraad’s view, frogs help to keep water sources clear of plants and insects, a fact well-known to the Sámi given their intimate, experience-based knowledge of their natural environment (2016).

Considering that Čuoppomáddu was said to live in streams, rivers, ponds, bogs, and marshes, which often bore her name – see Čuoppomáddojorbmi – A. Skåden reports that those were dangerous places children should avoid. She explains that she used to wander

tended families what they knew about Čuoppomáddu. In a snowflake effect, numerous stories were collected and later converged in the book (2008, 7). The stories collected in the volume tell of the interaction (encounters but also accidents) between humans and Čuoppomáddu, in which the latter often played an active role. One story tells of when, in Áravuopmi/Vassdalen, Čuoppomáddu came ashore, took a cow, dragging it into the water. In the 2008 Norwegian translation – *Froskemora, Čuoppomáddu* – Asbjørg Skåden explains that Čuoppomáddu was usually translated into Norwegian as *Storfrosken* (Great Frog) or *Froskemora* (Mother Frog, The Mother of Frogs) but that she chose to employ the original North-Sámi term also in the Norwegian edition of the book. As it emerged during fieldwork, even when Čuoppomáddu stories were told in Norwegian, the name of the Mother of Frogs was not translated into the hegemonic language.

¹⁰ Among the Sámi, frogs were used to cure specific ailments (DuBois, Lang 2013).

freely in the Márku with her siblings and local children, walking confidently through local forests and fields, but does not remember being warned to avoid dangerous rivers, bogs, lakes or ponds. However, she does recall avoiding those places out of respect rather than fear, observing the spatial division between humans and other-than-humans because she understood where Čuoppomáddu dwelt. As a child, she had waded and splashed in the Storjohka/Storelva creek but never in the buck-leaf-covered pool below that bathing place, i.e. Čuoppomáddu territory, with whom she respectfully shared the river. Asbjørg Skåden explains that, in her own childhood, Čuoppomáddu was like a guide helping children to move confidently in nature (2008).

Boekraade draws attention to how children’s play and practical activities interact with the environment, dynamically perpetuating ethno-ecological beliefs and knowledge (2016). A connection between Čuoppomáddu and children’s upbringing was echoed in an interview with Sigbjørn, Asbjørg’s eldest son, then in his early 1940s:

SIGBJØRN I guess the most prominent story of that kind in my childhood was about the Big Frog. It’s just a common story that every child in the Márku was told. Even those who weren’t supposed to be Sámi. They too were told about this creature with a Sámi name, Čuoppomáddu, the Mother of Frogs, as she’s called in the Márka. We pronounce it like this, in our local dialect. In the Finnmark North-Sámi, [she] is called slightly differently.

E Did your mother tell you these stories in North-Sámi or in Norwegian?

S Well I normally heard them in Norwegian. But the name was always in Sámi in every family. Everybody knew Čuoppomáddu stories, even though they weren’t supposed to be Sámi. Now I don’t know if people tell Máddu stories anyway, any more...

E Are you telling these stories to your child?

S Of course I am! These stories... you start telling these stories, parents start when you’re old enough to be walking on your own and stuff like that. So they say Čuoppomáddu “lives in that... up here” and you start telling Čuoppomáddu stories because you do not want your child to go down to the river or the lake on its own of course, or down to the water where they can drown. Čuoppomáddu is like a big frog, between half a meter and a meter. She is huge. She chases people. If she gets to take you it can just strangle you because she’s got strong arms. She goes for your neck. And she also has poison. She can spit. So we used to be quite afraid of her.

(Sigbjørn Skåden, interview, 11 May 2020, Tromsø)

On another occasion, Sigbjørn Skåden told me: “I grew up being afraid of that great frog” (Private conversation). As emerges from

this extract, Asbjørg Skåden told his son Čuoppomáddu stories. Their intrinsic value was the enshrinement of the nature of human/other-than-human relations in Indigenous Sámi epistemologies. Furthermore, as A. Skåden highlights in her 2008 *Čuoppomáddu-Froskemora*, since such stories originated in the past, they constitute historical sources for the Márka-Sámi past and its values. She explains that modifications in the socio-economic context led to changes in the way people deal with their environment. No longer useful or necessary, old practices have been abandoned¹¹ and today people seldom travel to the places where Čuoppomáddu can be met because they no longer fish along the creeks presided over by the Mother of Frogs (2008). By evoking and transmitting Čuoppomáddu stories, orally or in writing, Sámi values reach younger generations, preserving knowledge about local culturally-specific practices. This knowledge falls within what Ingold and Kurttila define “traditional knowledge as generated in the practices of locality” (2000, 184), accurate knowledge rooted in the act of dwelling in an area and today understood as traditional by members of the local community.

During the interview with Sigbjørn Skåden, the conversation focused on the intergenerational transmission of folktales. When I asked him if he was telling Čuoppomáddu stories to his own child who, at the time was about 2 years old, he answered: “Of course I am!”. Not only did he tell Čuoppomáddu stories to his toddler son but also, given the fact that they live in Tromsø, he had adapted them to make them credible and instructive in an urban context: since there are no swamps or marshes in Tromsø, he said he could adopt the sewer system as his reference. He believes that Čuoppomáddu stories had a pervasive educational purpose and were designed to demotivate children from either upsetting animals - thus breaking the human-environment equilibrium - or preventing them from endangering themselves by playing close to water. By collocating Čuoppomáddu stories in the sewers rather than in the swamps, Sigbjørn hopes to prevent his child from playing near dangerous waters; simultaneously, he is transmitting to his son cultural knowledge embedded in stories about the Mother of Frogs to foster in him a sense of belonging to the Márku, from which both these stories and his family come. This is an important process of resemantisation where stories deeply entangled with the local landscape, guaranteeing equilibrium among different social actors (humans and other-than-humans), are now told not just for their original purposes, but also to keep alive

11 This is the case of Sennegrass (*Carex vesicaria*), a sedge growing in circumpolar regions once used by Sámi for insulating footwear. This grass - to be cut and harvested at a specific time of the year and dried before being used - is no longer used for insulating the *nuvttotlgállonat* (Sámi winter boots) or the *gápmagat* (Sámi summer shoes).

ties among members of a community, who now mostly live far from where these stories first arose. Through this form of adaptation, by absorbing change (epitomised by urban rather than village - previously semi-nomadic - life) as well as by connecting new generations with the Márku, these stories transform and yet maintain their core features while reinforcing the bond between younger generations and the cultural landscape of their ancestors.

5 Conclusion

Indigenous toponyms enshrine Sámi history, histories, and indigenous cosmologies, witnessing human/other-than-human encounters by evoking stories concerning their eponymous entities. They also function as conveyers of behavioural rules in specific places and relations with beings dwelling there, bearing witness to culture-specific relations with other-than-human entities.

The information enshrined in Sámi toponyms is multifaceted and may refer to local environments, topographic elements, specific events and/or activities connected with a given place, or it may encompass the sacrosanct dimension of locations such as sacred mountains (Myrvoll 2017). Sámi Indigenous toponyms emerge as expressions of “situated knowledge” interrelated with time, space, and culturally-situated practices (Pettersen 2011). As Cogos et al. demonstrate, Sámi placenames organise an “oral way of mapping, built around narratives and the designation of specific landmarks” and are “forged into specific ontologies and express Indigenous ways of interacting with the landscape” (2017, 43). Although for many Sámi the relationship with nature today has shifted from subsistence to leisure (Helander-Renvall 2014), traces of Sámi non-Christian practices are still present in local oral traditions, enshrined in placenames and expressed through practices and relations with natural elements.

As my discussion has shown, in Stuornjárga toponyms function as repositories of meaning, encapsulating elements of local Sámi cosmologies, testifying to non-Christian Sámi worldviews while documenting the relationship between the Márka-Sámi and their landscape. Such a relationship developed through centuries-long contact between their ancestors and their territory, a contact deeply rooted in local history and in Sámi non-Christian worldviews. Despite colonial attempts to eradicate them, Sámi toponyms has been brought back to the public sphere and with them all the histories, beliefs, cultural practices they epitomise and the stories they evoke. For this reason, the Márku cultural landscape is layered with meanings, history/histories, and stories. Ancestors and other-than-human beings populate the landscape, their existence being transmitted across the generations through oral stories and evocative placenames.

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