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What form can an atonement take?

Pauliina Feodoroff (skolt sámi)

Like a small pulse. That was what my body felt before I saw what I was sensing.

In the summer of 2012, equipped with newly bought digital cameras Snowchange Cooperative had sponsored for our small group of skolt sámi fishermen, as we had wished, for monitoring the changes in our land, I was walking with my father to our family's fishing cabin by the River Njáuddam.¹

The small hut was the very first of many houses my father built as an 18-year-old boy – every skolt sámi woman was expected to be able at least to knit a pair of socks and mittens to keep her family warm, and a basic requirement for manhood was the ability to build a house with a stove – for a place chosen by his step-grandfather,

who also decided the places for all of his family line: a sign of vitality too few possessed at that time. It was his wife, my great-grandmother, who spent all her summers fishing there, being born to the shores of Barents Sea and always longing to be by water, while he was serving as a guide and cook for groups of geologists, who were prospecting the very same nickel vein that had brought our people here by force.

First summers by the River Njáuddam my great-grandmother lived in a turf hut, then in the houses her husband and her sons and grandsons started to build, little by little introducing ourselves to the river our tribe has always lived with, but not our family.

The hut has become the center for us to fish, to berry-pick, to tell stories, to reroot.

¹ Näätamöjoki in Finnish, Neiden elva in Norwegian.

It was only in 1949 our people were settled here, to the Njâuddam siida winter pasture areas, being forcibly evacuated from our traditional territories that Finland lost to the Soviet Union, Norway having taken her share already almost 100 years earlier.

My father's life, as well as my own, has been a long line of careful steps, trying to form a new relationship to an area where our ancestors were not born, nor died, while still being a part of the people that have been here since the end of the last ice age.

I walk with him, because he is the one who teaches us to fish in the family. It is most of the times a journey with his brothers, uncles, male friends. Being with the land is being with the men.

I've brought this UN university project (Arctic Council 2016; Mustonen 2013; Mustonen & Feodoroff 2018) – local observations of climate change – to our community, due to my small asset of academic connections, but also constantly hearing short stories, sentences from my relatives about the thunder storm in the middle of winter, strangely behaving ice, new winds rising in the darkest time of the year when it should be still. Not being a reindeer herder, a hunter or a fisher myself but a theater director of all trades, it is the men, and my father, that I go to ask for permission and guidance for the work I have started without having any expertise for it, only the need for acting.

The men discuss my proposal, take their time.

"Stock us with cameras," they say, "and we will show you what we see happening when going around, instead of trying to explain. But what do you do with that what we will show you?", they ask.

"I show the evidence to the scientists," I reply.

"But they cannot stop the change, can they?", they challenge.

"I don't think so," I answer.

"So, what is the use for this work then, other than us getting new cameras?", they comment wryly. "Then that is the use," I conclude, and try to keep the spirits up for both sides.

Our team, being uncertain what is expected from us, and the scientists, who I try to convince that we all are on the same page and things are rolling, fearing them leaving us for a more aware sámí community, and starting the collaboration there. Who would then pay for the cameras I've already promised?

So we walk, and I start interviewing my father. I ask questions, the kind of questions I would presume climate scientists would be interested in the hearing answers to:

Have you monitored changes in the river flow? Do you see changes in snow? Are there changes in animal stocks? I know I irritate him talking too much in the forest, speaking in a way that makes him uncertain about his own knowledge. The language is wrong, but I do not have a better one in stock either.

I ask about the river, the lake, the forest and the weather at the same time, in the same sentence, without really comprehending or documenting what he tries to answer.

In later years, he has these talks on his own with scientists and both sides end up being happy. I am both relieved and envious about the straight-forwardness he seems to reach with outsiders.

We are crossing the last lake in our journey to our cabin, when I feel a small change in temperature and, before the reason gets in the way, I let my body locate the source of something vibrating. At the bow of our boat where my rucksack is sits a big, shining bug that I have never seen before. I ask my father about it and he says he doesn't know. I take a photo with our brand-new camera and my whole body is filled with uncertainty, the source of which I do not recognize.

The bug was identified by Snowchange to be a scarabaeid beetle (*Potosia cuprea*), verifying that southern species are indeed on the move to the north, and both the observation (Pecl et al 2017) and the methodology-visual histories (Mustonen 2015) were later represented in different scientific publications, gaining more credibility inside and outside of our team. We started to be referred to as *co-researchers* and the work shifted from monitoring to restoring. Science is being written, traditional knowledge is mentioned often, photos of our team are nowadays taken, and I am said to be leading the work. Still, why is my every

step so shaky and doubt in my body endless, when the men around me seem to just do their work?

What do the women—?

I read.

Whether

this world was born out of the egg of a bluebill, the magnificent waterfowl, or the Big Bang, it was the name Skäävsuåll, or Skäädsuåll, my people's ancestors gave her.

Skääv or skääd, depending on which school of thought of the skolt sámí language you prefer, even though, we do not know any longer the meaning of the word, but suåll means an island: the logical question that follows, is what then surrounds the island, and what is the shore we are looking at the sky from?

My people's ancestors perceived the genders of different waters, based on the ability – or inability – to act as cradles of life, to spawn. In this skääv or skääd island, always paying special attention to water, it is the element connecting us to the spheres above us, identifying the male and the female lakes, rivers and ponds. And the name of the foremother, the grandmother of all waters, was given to the sea, where all life has been created.

Till this day, I have not heard,
or read from any written materials, studying the heritage of my people, a creation story for a human being.
Obviously, this doesn't necessarily mean that there is no such thing.

But it could also mean that there is no separate creation story for a human being.

And maybe so, in our endemic world, there is no separate human being, yet.

The creation stories that my ancestors told are all about the alliances between places, animals and families – how those commitments were born.

How time, animals and families began to interact, collaborate, how every now and then something usually went wrong, and after the erratic behavior, mostly from the side of the man, the interaction continued, the wrongdoer transformed into a steep or a cape and the harmony hereby restored. The erratic, or dangerous behavior that could interfere with the dynamics of the interaction, petrified. It froze the unwanted motion into stone.

Our ancestors left their marks on the land by turning into soil, generation after generation.

We do not have a creation story for the following term either: land rights.

But we do have a myriad of different practices, policies, systems of how the alliances between the families, animals and places were governed and managed and living, understanding how those unwritten, physical conventions that lasted for millennia are manifested, for example, in place names our ancestors left behind, covering all of the area where our cultural inhabitancy has taken place. That is what I conclude by listening to the men of my family and I try to make it visible for others to see.

All the work that I do is basically concentrating on documenting, verifying and promoting witness statements, or testimonies from the people – my people – who still got to live within the fully functioning siida: the endemic self-governing system of the sámi. And it has been the skolt sámi that were the last of all sámi siidas to lose their sovereignty in 1944. And even after the forced evacuation the Second World War set upon us, rudiments of that traditional law are still in practice, especially in the systems governing fishing. I learn.

Where does following the fishing lead you then?

To the alliances between spawning waters – fish that will come back to spawn only if the water is nurtured and respected by not interfering with her life – and the families, who each have a duty as a guardian of their own lake or river.

The Act of telling a world to be

The Act of saying aloud

The world is spoken out to be

So say it.

If I say aloud my family is a guardian of this river, will we become one?
 And whose voice it is the land reacts to?
 What voice does the land listen to?
 What words or way of speaking makes her want to throw me out?
 With what words will she pull me closer and let me be with her, let me stay?

I listen to the men and filter through years of discussions something I *feel* to be most relevant:

The grandfather lake Sevetti that does not tolerate any noise and hardly stands humans at all.

The Sei'ttjäu'rr that does not want to have anything to do with a certain family.
 The Äjjsuáll that is only for the men.

And the similar, less phallic small islands, that are only for women.

Not mixing this knowledge was the source of good and balanced living. *Was?*

Is this documentation following a romantic dream, an idea about life of harmony,
 or a path away from the ecological destruction we all are living in now? When
 our physical reality is being altered,
 modified
 or destroyed every day,

our perceptions and knowledges about the world start to
 alter, modify
 and destruct.

It is not certain anymore do I exist.

If I exist,
 do you share the same reality with me?
 Is there a reality?

Is that just a conceptual relic, as any kind of absolute, whether it would be a law
 or a Truth? Have these alterations altered the ecosystems so much that what used
 to be the natural law or nature's law that does not exist anymore, and therefore
 my conscience doesn't exist as a part of nature either?

Is there a reason to ask about fishing when our relationship with the salmon has
 changed so much during the last 40 years and our traditional practices being

overrun? Would that be just an imitation of a cultural practice, now empty for us, or is there still a relevance that can be turned back to?

I am documenting. “For what?”, asks our team and I avoid answering.

I come from a culture in which there is no traditional word for Art per se, but rather a central, essentialist concept of Beauty, which pierces every spheres of life as a guideline, and a law system: everything must be done beautifully. Beauty is what you do and how you do it, your whole life and existence as an expression of beauty and balance, the imperative of beauty in your everyday life.

Balance in co-existing and not wasting anything are the central elements of what is beautiful.

One of the most beautiful objects that I have ever seen is a vase, sewn from four tiny legs of a reindeer calf, her nails still attached, forming the base of the vase and the upper part from the tibia, still under the incredibly thin skin. The reindeer doe had a miscarriage and the calf was born dead: way too early but still nearly fully developed. Just in a miniature scale.

It was Tsetseg’s reindeer, who had such a difficult time having her does breed, since for some unknown reason, practically all of the calves died inside of their mothers’ bellies in north-Mongolia. Tsetseg is living in a fully nomadic society, a dukkha herself, and we met her in her summer lands.

She had found the small one dead, mourned her and admired the red color of the undeveloped fur, which starts to darken immediately after the calf is born. Tsetseg wanted to make something out of it. Since everything else was so petite and soft, she used hard parts: the legs, sewing the vase. Surreal, balanced design: exposing to the human eye something that is not yours to be seen – a shadow of the calf before she got to be a calf in Tsetseg’s tent, in which the vase was the only object that was served solely by existing.

“Maybe someday I will collect some flowers to it,” Tsetseg explained. “Otherwise I remember the calf this way.”

To her I had traveled to see with my own eyes if it was true what my father told about his childhood. If such alliances existed and can still exist. Between families, areas and animals. Since I never witnessed that. Just ruins.

And I needed a place to hide while trying to figure it out. I disappeared into Art, the Western haven for freedom.

The habit of using euphemisms "I'm from theater," "I make documentaries," "I mess with many things," when someone asks "what do you do?," I have abandoned during the last years: I have started to call myself an artist too.

In the hierarchy of Knowledges, the Art Knowledge does not have a particularly high status compared to, for example, natural sciences, but it is characteristic for Art Knowledge not to give a damn about statuses, or hierarchies. Rather it might deny their existence and imagine a new world order instead.

Originating also from a culture of people that has been for centuries in the very bottom of all hierarchies, including our knowledge. The superior comes from the source that also trained and recognized me to be an artist. I have more influence as a *sámi* on my own issues that way. And I take the space where I can find it. But where is the land in ideas? My work is my tool to spend time with the river, to defend our people's right to be with her, to protect her. I end up writing and talking about her, looking through a lens. Is this really the way to come closer?

Since a worldview that cannot be rooted into practices, into living bodies, hanging in air, and is a cause of distraction and unclear focus.

And it is meaningless, or to be more precise, unsafe, to speak about the endemic qualities of communicating with the nature, the land, if we don't address the mechanisms that have for a long period of time interfered with that communication, to the point of extinction.

In this time of ecological and existential crisis, you cannot cherry-pick Indigenous cosmological practices in a philosophical, artistic or theoretical way: if we are to go there, we have to undo the damage as well that has been made to those practices, and mostly, the lands that are the source of all knowledge. But who do I do it with then, and how?

I read.

We are still facing and living with the consequences of the state foundation masoned in 1648, as the brilliant south sámi lawyer, Doctor of Law, Mattias Åhrén (2016, p. 10) eloquently writes:

The Peace of Westphalia cemented the realm of the kingdoms in Europe, and offered the idea of certain stability in the relations between the “nations” of the region. At Westphalia, European sovereigns agreed that order was to be guaranteed by the sovereigns themselves. Implicit in this notion was that the right of the sovereigns to provide order was inherent.

Another powerful sámi man that I listen to, the mastermind of the *Girjás versus Sweden* case (Hofverberg 2020) who won in court rights to hunt and fish, knew his sovereignty.

To what extent our endemic ways of organizing, our traditional laws, thus, the alliances between places, animals and families are legal subjects? And legal subjects they must become, if they wish to have a say.

The eradication of the alliances between families, animals and areas is deeply rooted in our current juridical system, the Finnish constitution, and, what eventually is a quality in sensitivity perceiving all around you – the past and the current happenings, but also what is about to come – will be a marginal curiosity reserved only for art and research, rather than being the central principle guiding the everyday life of a society, or a civilization.

I listen, I read, I try to understand.

I am so really tired all the time.

I turn down jobs and halt projects, but it doesn't help. Finally, I am not capable of doing anything. At this point it is not a matter of choice. I can't function even if I try.

My body starts to fall apart. I've always had asthma, but now I can't breathe anywhere. Then my back breaks so I can't walk. When laying in a hospital bed, pumped with morphine and the room literally spinning around, unable to control any parts of my body, I realize I have not been feeling basically anything for a long, long time. Finally, the doctor I speak to diagnoses me with a severe depression, and some weeks later I am in a hospital, constantly monitored due to high risk for suicide.

My lust for living is all gone, and I have no capacity to find it again on my own. What has happened to me to get me this down – or have I been here all along, without realizing it earlier?

I sit with Finnish therapists who are asking me questions about my childhood, family and things that had happened recently. "Nothing special has happened to me," I say, "it has happened to us," in the middle of giving long lectures about my people's history in order to be understood at least a bit.

Why is the only thing circling in my mind death?

I sit with my therapists; they ask something about me, and I speak about my people. Because my people's history is my family's history. We are so few, so everyone is linked by blood. My therapists are asking what I am avoiding when I am not talking about myself, I only speak about the *sámi*.

I try to reflect if I am a person. Is there such a "me", a living creature, capable of happiness and continuation, without my collective? Without capable family, clan, which is my people? If I am the only one jumping out from the sinking boat and surviving, who am I then? An individual without her own people? That cannot exist?

You have chosen not to kill yourself; you have chosen not to drink; something is driving you, say my therapists. What?

I ran away from death, I answer.

Do you want to discuss death?

In my family, in my tribe: death of sisters and a brother, death of healthy genes, death of a generation of young men who killed themselves after the massive land losses. All family, all kin. Death of my own family areas, now all waste lands of nickel smelter – an area of total destruction – death of those structures that connected us with our lands. No more going to summer places in Holmengrå, as Norwegians call it now. No more passing our sacred sites. Death of all my elders. Death of traditional law.

The forests stay silent. The ancestors stay silent.

It is thought that people would be more noble in the time of crisis. I disagree. The people who have lost everything will be lowest of the low among the others. Until they manage to sustain a stable footing again. As individuals, and if lucky enough, as a collective as well. And if the latter is successful, the culture will continue.

“Why is it so painful for you to pass your culture – which you hold so dear – to your own daughters?”, ask my therapists. Because it is not enough if I alone decide that this language, this culture will continue. If no-one else shares that determination with me.

My mother is a Finn, coming from a culture that assimilates my people. Both worlds are within me. And I am demanding my father to raise me up to be a sámí woman, whether he likes it or not.

My siblings didn't have *määccuĳ*, our traditional costumes, when we were kids. I started to sew my own as a teenager. And when I got parts of sámí costume for my father, he answered that he never wanted them in the first place, never wanted to be a part of these people and everything, that I just had to bury the whole idea of cultural resurrection and survival. Cultural survival is not only deciding that we will speak the languages and maintain the livelihoods. It is about reversing, undoing a process. Almost like going back in time and changing the future. And when doing so, you will end up dealing with much pain and untold, unwitnessed acts of violence both in personal and collective levels that are still being denied. Instead of sharing those experiences with their families and children, my father's generation chose – unknowingly or knowingly – to deny us, who were trying to go back to our very own, not to go there at all. And

even when being angry and hurt, a part of me understood, all along, that he chose that because he wanted us to be safe.

The biggest obstacles not only to language revitalization but also to land rights recognition, voicing our histories and being an active political participator are psychological, we conclude with my friends.

I learn the word *decolonize* from Jenni, who had read this incredible book written by a Māori woman named Linda (Smith 1999). “You should check this out,” she says, her eyes burning.

To get my father to speak *sámi* to me I have to become a detective and create a “profile” about his “case” – to find out what had happened. To his parents, to reconstruct their lives, their parents’ lives, as long back as I could go, and similar time, reconstruct the society they were living in. Inspecting its changes. Its deaths. Its losses.

And telling all this back to my father.

And only after that, during long years of difficult conversations, he opens his mouth and tells about his childhood. In residential school. So many of our relatives died in there. Mostly mentally. Some also physically.

That is still not an acknowledged part of Finland’s history. People are still saying it did not happen. As the confiscation of all my grandmother’s family’s property by the Finnish state did not happen. Neither the hunting nor killing of her family members by the Finnish army.

My people have written land rights documents from the sixteenth century. My people have the last existing and partly functioning *siida* council, which is included in the Finnish constitution. But the survival of those two is referred to as an example of Finnish tolerance and good will towards us, rather than an expression of potency of our own.

I remember and forget all this, depending on the day. Remember and forget. And try to keep going.

If there is such thing as a general *sámi* world, I would dare to suggest that it is characteristically permeable, flexible. It bends. I am not aware of that many historical or current forms of open, hostile resistance against the sovereignty of national states.

The great-grandmother of my friend Tiina refused to recognize the new borderline drawn through Suo'nn'jel in 1922,² and despite the protests of her alarmed son, declared that the lake the border penetrated belonged to her family and she had every right to do as she has always done: fish for her family. So, the son needed to get his head straight and listen to what his mother says, instead of believing the foolishness of people that don't know the area at all and sit on the boat and row so she could set her nets as usual. That boat trip ended with border patrol opening fire, the grandmother being hit by the bullet and the profound understanding that times and borderlines had changed, and what she thought to be her world was no longer to be approached and lived in.

Skolt *sámi* borderlines were living, flexible, constantly renegotiated.

And new governing structures that were cemented in a short period of time, functioning from a top-down principle, drove people who considered themselves as self-governing, into despair and madness.

The massive land theft, and the replacement of a fully functioning system that included the whole sphere of life into the decision-making, was justified with a skolt *sámi* Settlement Act (NOR) that frames us as objects of charity. Writing our people's existence out of the Finnish history. This catapulted a rough cycle of violence in skolt *sámi* communities, where the aggression has turned totally inwards. One ran into a lake to drown, another shot himself, another hanged herself, who threw her baby into a fireplace and ran away. Blows were given but not to the conqueror, instead to ourselves.

The cultural continuation of *siidas*, that is rooted in the creation stories from a time when the balance of land, animals and families was obviously imperative for survival. What is the mind, from whose context we are making decisions about the water and land use management, about the last pockets of ecosystems that are not yet fully exploited? It seems that quite many of the *sámi* women of

² Treaty of Tartu, signed between the Soviet Union and Finland.

my generation – born at the junction of collapsing traditions and approaching modernity – have ended up working with defending our waters and lands, everyone at their own scale, guided by the pain we feel in our bodies.

In other words, our bodies are the indicators for environmental changes, first ones to alarm something is going on.

The restoration work in River Njâuddam is based on the observations made by traditional fishermen and reindeer herders about man-made changes to the river basin. Those findings, combined with research, provide us concepts and a shared language for articulating something that the waters of our bodies have known and pointed out long before that: changes in temperature, pain and its passing, different forms of waves and thermal penetrations are uneasily communicated knowledge that women in particular seem to be more likely to receive from their environments. And the awareness rising from this realization is that the work done for land protection is no longer a choice, but a bodily commitment. This raises questions about what or who controls the body, especially in a time of broken traditions. Land and water want to prosper and bloom, just as peoples and its members do. The man-made natural damages that are unprocessed, both in thought and reality, cause pain both in body and mind, sickness, and eventually fading, withering, dying away.

The revolution of landing into your own body. Accepting the physical shape and tone you are in this physical world. Because it is your current form of existing.

I am convinced that the most profound and dominant force in us is our sexual energy. It is the receptor that ties us not only to other people but the places – lands, waters. Skies. It is the channel that allows the other forces to pass us, trespass us, connect us and reload and repair us. It is the channel of strong knowledge; you feel to know more. Maybe due to these qualities, it has always been an essential tool for colonization to restrict the colonized from their core power. By stigmatizing and denying most of the expressions of sexual energy.

I study death.

Finnish professor of ethnology, Nils Storå writes in 1971 about the *Burial Customs of the Skolt Lapps*. “We call ourselves sámmilaz,” I mutter while reading.

In attempting to obtain a picture of early burial customs among the Lapps and other northern hunting and fishing peoples, interesting parallels are provided by hunting rites. Taking care of and preserving the bones ensured the continuation of the species.

A new animal grew from the bones of the dead one.

—The skeleton was thrown back into the water so that a new fish would be born of it. From the bones of a human body a new person would be born the same way.

—It is natural that each family should have its own burial ground within the boundaries of its own lands.

—Islands, clearly demarcated and remote from human habitation or migration routes, offered special advantages as shrines, too.

The knowledge about my people's conceptions about death, resurrection, cycles of life and the customary law governing and ensuring the new arrival of the salmon,
the deer,
the reindeer,
the bear,
the trout,
the dipper,
the grayling,
the Domna,
the Fekla,
the Kiureli,
the Pimen,
the Vasko,
the Ee'led and the Vassi,
among others,

has been made accessible to other peoples (and finally, to me) by literally opening the graves – both above and under the ground, digging up the bones, making inventories of the bones, examining the bones

and interviewing the living relatives of the deceased, the relatives who were only having their other foot in the grave during the time of interviews.

Most of the interviews for the study have been made in the Njáuddam siida – the self-governing unit meaning both the people and the area – which in the 1970s was already totally taken over first by the Finns, the Kvens and then the Norwegians.

The relatives interviewed seem to be having consensus that their world does not resurrect and rebirth anymore, so it is all the same to share the information outside the kin and to stop the cycle there.

There are several different categories of ownership in (Indigenous) Traditional Knowledge, points out my friend Tero Mustonen from Snowchange. There are knowledges that are owned by the people, such as a language, for example.

Some knowledges are owned by a family, such as certain macro-vocabularies to family areas. And there are knowledges owned by individual persons, such as certain *events and responsibilities* concerning the family area. The latter category can be such that the transmission of that particular knowledge is done only once and to a certain family member – from a mother to an (eldest) daughter, from a father to an (eldest) son.

I am searching transmissions from the books and archives. It is not enough for me what the men in my family tell, when we discuss our basic concepts of what is a human being and what is a human being's place in the world.

Our cosmology has been successful in its main core until last century: protecting our lands and waters. The other cosmology that has overrun and replaced us has not done the same. I want the men *and* the women to have those discussions with us, their children.

“And why does it look like the cosmology does not matter?”, asks Asta Baltto, one of the most respected *sámi* scholars. She has spoken about the ways how the *sámi* decorated and dressed in especially bright and beautiful colors for moving to the summer lands from winter pastures so “that the reindeer would have more joy of watching us”.

And how do we integrate our cosmology to the management of natural resources?

“The land heals a human being/ I feel the joy of the land in my body/ she feels the joy of the land in her body while she collects the rubbish away,” speaks Baltto, and I shiver, listening to a sámí woman, giving a glimpse of something most hidden and precise in her words.

The term decolonization has been, rightfully, criticized because it sets the colonization in the middle of our focus.

It is self-evident that we must know our history and especially what has happened, but the focus needs to be shifted to the very question: what do we want now? What do we do now? With our damaged selves, I learn by listening to the discussions other Indigenous thinkers have among each other.

We live in the middle of highly human-altered environments and realities.

The atom has been split,
the DNA has been modified,
the Earth has been drilled almost to the core just to see what is in there,
geoengineering aka modification of the climate such as solar radiation management, which seek to reflect the sunlight by example, using stratospheric sulfate aerosols, have all already taken place,
among so many other processes.

Is there a reason to decorate ourselves for the reindeer anymore?

When the laws that ensure the eternal cycle – everything comes always back – is broken and the bones are not left to be reborn,
instead stored in research chambers, the solution is not to forget and abandon the knowledge *why* have we been doing it like this for millennia and *what is the reason* behind it (trying to unlearn seeing our ancestors as more childish and uneducated than us), bone by bone, letting everything go back to the continuation so that the deceased can be reborn, the damage is undone, I know. My mind starts to know. But my body doesn't follow the thought, yet.

And the very same way the reindeer have always been watching us, the colonized have always been watching the colonizer and asking, analyzing why this is happening.

This is where I am at:

my family is a second-generation immigrant on other skolt sámí group's lands.

And we are facing a real harsh reality: we have nowhere else to go. Mining both side of the borders, Norway and Russia, and nobody wants us, as a collective. So, we have no other choice than to try to form a living relationship with these old new lands as soon as possible – or perish. And gather the crucial bits and pieces for survival from all possible sources, including scientific texts. As a part of that process, we have started to re-establish the skolt siida self-governance in a practical manner: bringing back traditional water management practices to River Njâuddam as a climate change adaptation strategy.

Over the past seven years our team, consisting of reindeer herders, fishermen, scientists and, yes, artists, have gathered traditional knowledge and observations on how land is changing in a changing climate. Combined with weather diaries, catch diaries, interviews, temperature diaries and measurements of the heavy metals in water, we have focused on observations about the introduction of foreign species to the area, analyzing the status of known spawning sites and place names as a source of valuable information.

Special interest has been rested on site-specific macro-vocabularies and traditional law practices on the river. Based on the observations and analytical work, both from the traditional and scientific knowledges point of view, the first physical watershed restorations began two years ago.

We are currently restoring the watershed areas, where the past land use, such as logging and burning the land, man-made water flow alterations and construction of roads and bridges, has led to a loss of spawning sites for salmon, trout and other fishes. By reintroducing old spawning sites, we are giving the salmon and their relatives more possibilities for survival with extreme heat waves. In the years 2013, 2014 and 2019, parts of the river shed, in Vainosjoki, dried totally.

Especially this kind of record-high temperatures, such as we are witnessing now, that vaporizes the water way too high to be raining down far away from its natural cycle, drought that follows in autumn and introduction of new algae might be called the new normal.

Diatoms are a major group of algae, specifically microalgae, found in the oceans, waterways and soils of the world, and based on the samples taken from the River Vainos on 3 August 2018, now also covering the River Njâuddam watershed area.

The freshwater mussel has disappeared from the river nearly totally.

July, 2012, the picture taken in Lake Opukas (Figures 1 and 2), the Owl Lake, was then the northernmost observation on *Potosia cuprea*, the Scarabaeoid beetle. More newcomers are on the way.

The same summer this observation was made, we also gave back the bones to the river with my father. He told that he has learned that, among everything else he knows about fishing, from his grandmother. “It has always been the female that lead,” he says. “The reindeer, the people, always the older female.” I continue to listen to the men, and have started to try to speak with them too. I’ve noticed it interests my father what I share with him; it expands his knowledge too.

We can only undo the man-made damages. The river needs to find her own way to cope with changing climate. We just must not interfere with her in this extremely demanding process.

The collective memory on how the siida system really functioned is just a stone cast away with the skolt sámí. Few people, who were born to its absolute power, are still alive. The memory has not yet morphed into texts, recordings, archive materials. It is, yes, scattered, hidden, deep frozen when it had to, due to the active banning. But it is still a functioning work memory, too little used, but still functioning, when left to function.

So, what form can an atonement take?

Despite the continuous +22°C temperature of River Vainos in the Njâuddam rivershed, the almost year-old graylings come eagerly to greet us, the restoration workers,

who are hopelessly 20 years too late with our work. They nip my hands, swim on my lap in small groups, still seeking for a contact while I lay my camera under the water, wishing to hear more about their life.

The colonial processes imposed to those young graylings and their habitats are my kind's doing: humankind. Realizing that, my self-image bends, reshapes and at least the possibility for a new alliance, new continuation with balanced relationships with the grayling is born.

Figures 1 and 2 Rewilding efforts with graylings, collaboration with Risto Semenoff, Jouko Moshnikoff, Vladimir Feodoroff, Juha Feodoroff, Tero Mustonen, Janne Raassina, Pauliina Feodoroff, Stina Aletta Aikio, Petteri Feodoroff, Markku Porsanger and our forever remembered Teijo Feodoroff, Illep Jefremoff and Jouni Moshnikoff. (Photograph: Pauliina Feodoroff)