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JOHAN TURI'S ECOLOGY

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colonization of Sápmi
ecology
landscape painting
Johan Turi
Turi's artworks
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*This essay discusses Johan Turi's images (most of them undated) and his text published in 1910, recently translated by Thomas A. DuBois as *An Account of the Sámi*. It is the first book in Sámi in which the colonized talks back to their colonizers. Together, Turi's Account and his paintings and drawings, some of which are published here for the first time, provide detailed descriptions of the lives of Sámi herders in the mountain areas in northern Sweden, their seasonal migrations towards the coastal areas of northern Norway, and their knowledge, culture, and belief systems. Turi's main objective was to make the state administrations in Sweden and Norway understand Sámi culture and put an end to their detrimental colonial practices so that the Sámi could continue living in their traditional land. I compare his project to studies of the Sámi performed by Swedish authors and scientists, whose views, despite their thorough investigations and "scientific" approaches, gave support to ongoing processes of Swedish/Norwegian colonization and assimilation of Sápmi, i.e. the Sámi and their land. The imagery of Johan Turi adds to his text by demonstrating the hidden as well as the perceptible. As such, his artworks differ fundamentally from those of contemporaneous Swedish landscape painters. Turi's production insists on a holistic and relational acknowledgement of*

nature, animals, humans, and the spiritual. The need to understand, protect, live within, and respect their environment is fundamental for the Sámi. Together, Turi's artworks and text constitute profound and well-founded arguments for the preservation of Sápmi, in ecological as well as human terms.

In this essay, I present Johan Turi's fundamentally relational ways of portraying the lives of plants, animals, and humans within the Sápmi natural environment, and argue for the similarities between his understanding of the lives of the Sámi reindeer herders and recent ecological thinking. Turi's work is embedded in his deep knowledge of the people, nature, climate, and living conditions of his homeland, Sápmi. Accordingly, I propose that we characterize his aesthetics/aesthetic practices as a form of (sentient) ecology.

A North Sámi artist, writer, hunter, and tourist guide, Johan Turi (1854–1936) was born in Guovdageaidnu/Kautokeino, Norway, and died in Čohkkiras/Jukkasjärvi, Sweden. He is well known as the author of the first book in which the Sámi intentionally spoke back to their colonizers, the state administrations of Sweden and Norway.¹ Titled *Muitalus sámiid birra* in the North Sámi language (hereafter *Muitalus*) and published in Copenhagen in 1910, it included an atlas with 14 line drawings by the author.² The Danish ethnographer and artist Emilie Demant Hatt assisted Turi in writing the book.³ Financial support by Hjalmar Lundbohm, mining executive of Luossavaara-Kiirunavaara Aktiebolag (LKAB) in Giron/Kiruna, made the publication possible.

Turi aimed at protecting Sápmi, “the general concrete and abstract concept referring to [the] ... people, land and spirit” of the Sámi (Keskitalo 1994, 7), from the effects of colonization by settlers, mining companies, forestry, tourism, and so on. He focused specifically on the seasonally travelling reindeer herders in the historical region of Torne *lappmark*, spanning six Sámi *siidas*, among them Talma where he lived.⁴ A *siida* is the traditional social, economic, and geographical organization unit of a Sámi community. A premise on which Turi's work rests is that the Sámi is an Indigenous people: “One never hears about the Sámi's arrival, as if they had come from somewhere else. The Sámi have always lived in these parts, here in the Sámi homeland” (Turi 2012, 11).

Muitalus has been discussed quite extensively, recently also Turi's images (DuBois 2011; Gaski 2011; Svonni 2015; Aamold 2017; Sjöholm 2017; Manker 1944; Forsberg and Risberg 1968). It is my impression that Turi regarded his images to be as important as his writings. They represent his

1 Geographical names in Sápmi are given in North Sámi (the first time also in Swedish).

2 Originally published in Copenhagen in North Sámi and Danish. A German translation followed in 1912, Swedish 1917, English 1931, etc.

3 Johan Turi wrote the manuscript for the book in a workman's hut by Lake Torneträsk, aided by Emilie Demant, in August–September 1908. She had learnt North Sámi and also translated Turi's text to Danish. See Hanna Eglinger's essay on Emilie Demant Hatt

in this volume, and Sjöholm (2017). 4 Lappmark, a territorial area, may be translated as Sámi land. “Lapp” is a derogatory historical term for “Sámi”.



Figure 1 Johan Turi, *Untitled (Spring migration)*, date unknown. Mixed technique (pastel, watercolour, gouache, Indian ink and pencil, or similar) on paper, 24.8 × 31.9 cm (irregular). Various inscriptions, with signature and prize, lower left: “Johan Thuri 9 kr”. Nordiska Museet, Stockholm. The Johan Turi Archives, LA 659, No. 39, Box J1:1. Photo: Nordiska Museet, public domain.

tandem effort at explaining the truth about the Sámi while countering Swedish nationalism. In the following, I will discuss Turi’s artworks and compare them to images by Swedish artists with motifs from the same geographical area. Further, I want to compare Turi’s productions as an artist and writer to publications about the Sámi written, on the one hand, by Swedish “visitors” and scientists, especially the linguist Karl Bernhard Wiklund, and, on the other hand, by the Sámi author and activist Elsa Laula. What makes Turi’s texts and images stand out in such comparisons? What are his main objectives for the Sámi and for Sápmi? How does Turi invigorate, on the one hand, the Sámi’s rights to self-definition and, on the other, an understanding of the interrelatedness between humans, animals, and nature in ways that are, in an expression of our times, fundamentally ecological? As an introduction to Turi’s art and his unique visual narratives, let us consider an image which stands out as especially intriguing, [Figure 1](#) (untitled, hereafter “Spring migration”).⁵

5 The main collection of Johan Turi’s images belongs to

Seasonal movements

Nordiska Museet in Stockholm. I thank the museum for granting access to their archives and collections, and Mikael Svonni for the interpretation of Turi's handwritten inscription in his picture of Lahtteluokta (below).

Turi's "Spring migration" includes an inscription in the lower left area which refers to the Sámi herders' traditional route from the plateaus in northern Sweden over the mountain ridges to the areas near Áhkánjárga/Narvik, Norway (Figure 1). The herders' seasonal movements in these regions date to the time before the state borders were fixed in the mid-eighteenth century. Border negotiations created disputes on taxation between the Danish–Norwegian union on one side and Sweden on the other. In 1751, a codicil to the treaty which finally set the border between the two countries protected the Sámi herders' seasonal movements from double taxation. In 1883 a new law limited access to pasture in Norway for herders from the Swedish side. The states exercised control of the land in Sápmi within their borders. On the Swedish side, this meant control of forestry, land ownership, ore mining, and domestic industry. Grand-scale mining began after concessions were granted to the state-owned LKAB (1890) to haul ore in Giron and Jiellevárri/Gällivare. Transportation was modernized with the new Iron Ore Line railway from Jiellevárri to Luleju/Luleå in 1888, extended in 1903 to the ice-free port of Áhkánjárga. Another change in Turi's Sápmi was the opening of the Ábeskovu/Abisko tourist station in 1902. Situated by lake Duortnosjávri/Torneträsk and the Iron Ore Line, tourists could go there by train.

In "Spring migration", seven reindeer seemingly float in the air over the mountains, thus indicating their arrival on the Norwegian side. A people living in a parallel world in North Sámi referred to as *Ulda* (singular, pl. *Ulddat*) is represented by a giant (female?) humanoid, with a reindeer in the lower right (Gaski 2011; Aamold 2017). The *Ulda* points towards the mountain pass as if guiding the herders. Her monumental grandeur and serene presence represent, as it seems, superior powers. Her large eyes and steady gaze hint that she sees everything. Turi writes that the *Ulddat* have reindeer that are "mottled, and white-coated [...] in all sorts of ways" and thus "much more beautiful than those of the Sámi" (Turi 2012, 171). The *Ulda* will protect the Sámi and their animals if they behave respectfully. Noticeable are also nine green, pink, and lilac clouds floating in the upper blue, yellow, and white areas. A general feeling of movement permeates the composition. In Turi's understanding, the sky, the landscape, and its inhabitants, including those not visible to the human eye, are all active.

Muitalus and "Spring migration" describe and illustrate the lives of the Sámi herders, their seasonal migrations, customs, and nature's changing qualities from the harsh and dangerous to the bountiful, pleasant, and beautiful. There is hard work for access to water, food, and firewood, risky crossings of high mountains, rivers, deep crevasses, and so on. But, as Turi relates in his book, when the families and their animals are safe and sound, life is good, and

it is pleasant when there is a fire going in the *goabti* [tent]. And if it is not a place with water available, then snow must be melted, and they start to rummage through the bags for some food and start eating, and that is pleasant... And when it is an area with good grazing, one doesn't need to herd the reindeer, unless there are wolves in the vicinity. From a Sámi point of view, it is pleasant when there is good pasture and one has made it to a new place. (Turi 2012, 48, 49)

What is pleasant (*hávski*) is always so in a holistic sense (Gaski 2017, 188). Turi underlines the truthfulness of his narrative by adding that “[t]he writer has done all the things described [here] – everything which people [the Sámi] living today have done and worked at” (Turi 2012, 49).

There is, in Turi's thinking, a unique connection between the Sámi and their reindeer. Both are “sensitive” and thus “scared away from everywhere” to the extent that “the Sámi today have to live in places where no one else is living besides Sámi”. Further, “the Sámi know about the weather and have learned about it from the reindeer”; some Sámi are capable of finding “their way in the dark and the fog and the snowstorm” (Turi 2012, 52). Such knowledge and understanding have been called *sentient ecology*; it is “based in feeling” and consists “in the skills, sensitivities and orientations that have developed through long experience of conducting one's life in a particular environment” (Ingold 2000, 25), in our case the mountain and coastal areas of northern Sápmi. Animals and herders are steadily on the move (walking, running, skiing in a caravan). However, Turi explains, the present advance of settlers makes such a life problematic in a way that it was not before:

In bad years the reindeer would flee downwards and the Sámi would follow them out to Vuollemearra [the Gulf of Bothnia] and stay there for a while as well, until the settlers came and scared them up into the mountain districts, driving the Sámi off until the mountains stopped them. And the Sámi went over the mountains and even farther beyond them. (Turi 2012, 53)

The area in which the Sámi historically lived with their reindeer had diminished radically due to the invasion of the settlers. When reindeer belonging to Sámi herders ate the grass and hay produced on settler properties, the latter were protected by the state administration and the law. Why does Turi not mention other intruders, such as miners, forest workers, and industrial activity? He probably saw the conflicts between farmers and herders as being the most acute.

Turi wrote his text, as Thomas DuBois has pointed out, “negotiating with Demant” a focus on empirical and practical knowledge, “attentiveness to the behaviors of animals, other people, and (super)natural phenomena in the world”. In writing, he therefore downplayed his holistic understanding of

humans, animals, and landscape, as opposed to the Western episteme separating the three. To be understood by non-Sámi readers, Turi did not include “his considerable knowledge of magical procedures and incantations” (DuBois 2011, 531).

We may ask, then, if Turi’s adjustment as author towards a “Western episteme” has a somewhat different function in his images. For the latter, he concentrated on rendering what is visible, adjusting to his text and a Western understanding of representation. But the images differ from the text in their use of multiple places and points of time, as in “Spring migration”, where the animals are seen in the landscape on this side of the mountains as well as on the hidden far side. Further, the painting presents nature as both physically and spiritually present for those who know how to act and behave, take care and foresee any danger, and take advantage of favourable conditions. Thus, his images also deal with what is *hidden* from our eyes. To get a better grasp of Turi’s idiosyncratic creativity in presenting the transhumant lives of the Sámi reindeer herders, we also need to discuss a couple of presentations of the Sámi published in Swedish.

The colonizers’ views

The Swedish authorities wanted reliable information about the life, environs, and faith of the Sámi in order to exercise control of their land and secure their loyalty to the state and the church. One of the most influential early modern publications in this regard is *Lapponia* (1673) by the humanist Johannes Schefferus (Klein 2020, 291, 296, 297). As late as 1873 it figures as a principal source for the study *Om Lappland och Lapparne, företrädesvis de svenske: Ethnografiska Studier (About Lapland and the Lapps, preferably the Swedish: Ethnographic Studies)*, by the nobleman, physician, and ethnographer Gustav Vilhelm Johan von Düben, assisted by his wife, the photographer Lotten von Düben, and Captain H. A. Widmark. It is a modern, colonialist, and positivist account of northern Sweden, its mixed population and historical developments, referring, for instance, to archaeological and other finds of Sámi objects made of bone or antler as “further evidence of the Lapps’ low Stone Age culture” (Düben 1873, 31, 499).⁶ It also documents how the woodlands of Sápmi were subject to rising immigration by settlers, forest workers, and miners. However, the settler communities represent the best possibilities for future developments of agriculture and forestry in Sápmi, for education and “rising enlightenment among the [Sámi] people”, because, as Widmark argues, “the nomadic people must acquire the knowledge that puts them on a level with the farmer inhabitants” (Widmark quoted in Düben 1873, 462–463, 488, 492–493).

6 All translations from Swedish from here on are my own.

Scientist and linguist Karl Bernard Wiklund (1868–1934), professor of Finno-Ugric languages at the University of Uppsala from 1905 to 1933, held a more updated and extensive understanding of the nature and living conditions in Sápmi. The second edition of Wiklund's short, popular science pamphlet *Om lapparna i Sverige* (*On the Sámi in Sweden*) (1899) was published in 1910, the same year as Turi's *Muitalus*. An important difference between the two is Wiklund's hypothesis, based on archaeological discoveries and the study of languages and religion, that the Sámi were not Indigenous but had immigrated from the northeast through Finland to Sweden, where they met with an existing "Germanic" population (Wiklund 1910, 4, 48, 51). It is tempting to compare this theory to the assumption held in eighteenth-century Europe "that the New World was indeed younger than the Old World", thus creating "the colonial difference" by which "Nature was severed from Man/Human and existing knowledge in the great civilizations that Europe reduced to 'Indians' was ignored" (Mignolo and Walsh 2018, 185). Related to this is Wiklund's theory that the Sámi "some 2,000 years ago" had abandoned their own, "original" but in his view now lost language in favour of Finnish (Wiklund 1910, 47). He was wrong. Pekka Sammallahti has argued that "geographic isolation favors independent innovations" and dismissed the hypothesis that "migration is the only reason for language change" (Sammallahti 1989, 4).

Wiklund documents how the Sámi since the seventeenth century had been forced to choose between moving northwards or assimilating. In 1900, the population of Swedish Sápmi was 53,629, but only 4,736, around 9 per cent, were registered as Sámi. Very few Sámi were registered elsewhere in Sweden (Wiklund 1910, 5). The Sámi population was probably larger, but assimilation led many to register as Swedish. Officially, then, they had become a minority in their land. Wiklund praises the Sámi for their health and resilience, their demonstration of intelligence, "great knowledge" and "a clear view of things", and that "[n]o class difference can be detected among" them (40, 57). But, he claims, their "main shortcoming is a certain weakness in the character" regarding Swedish schooling and monetary issues (44, 45). He even asserts that the Sámi have "rather little sense of music" (50), that you "never see beautiful faces" (40) among them, and, based on racial biology, that their "skull is very short compared to its width (brachycephalic), and the neck looks almost flattened when looking at the head from the side" (40). Wiklund's prejudices can be seen as typical of the time, including his conclusion that the Sámi "are not yet cultural persons" (42). In line with von Düben, he believes assimilation will lead the Sámi to higher cultural and moral standards (Wiklund 1910, 42, 61; Düben 1873, 470, 473–475). Though Wiklund's views are more nuanced than those of his predecessors, they are firmly rooted in modern European colonialist, racist, ethical, and cultural values.

A reiterated catchphrase in the Swedish colonialist policy, “Lapp ska vara lapp” (Lapp must remain Lapp), probably from 1906, hints at romantic and conservative visions of the herders maintaining old customs in mountain regions separated from the settlers. In 1867 the government introduced a cultivation border near the mountain areas, above which settlers were not allowed to live (Düben 1873, 465; Lundmark 2007, 13). But the “pressure” on ownership and usufruct of Sámi land continued, partly because the relative growth of the population in the province of Norrland from 1750 to 1900 was higher than in the southern provinces. Political regulations were open to change. Settlements above the cultivation border were not uncommon after the turn of the century (Höglin 1998, 21, 29).

Wiklund maintained accordingly that if the Sámi are free to continue as herders “on our mountains and in our forests” they would “certainly retain their Sámi mother tongue and customs” because these traits are “so suitable and well adapted to a reindeer-herding people” (Wiklund 1910, 64). The Sámi herders, then, are not only “an ethnographic curiosity, but also ... factors in the economic life of our northern regions” (64). To a certain extent, the state agreed to this by requiring that the Sámi herders keep their animals all year round within these areas, thus securing the otherwise inhospitable mountains as profitable state property and preserving a part of the Sámi population. To the present day, however, in these regions, “there is almost no mention of Sámi rights in environmental codes or legislation” (Arora-Jonsson 2019, 84). Turi’s early *Muitalus* shows that this is not due to a lack of insight into Sámi culture and rights. Yet how did Turi achieve his insights? What do we know about his background and situation?

Turi’s objectives

Economically, Johan Turi strived to make a living as an artist and author. He sold some of his paintings and drawings to tourists, as indicated by modest inscribed prices. In photographic portraits (such as by Borg Mesch) he is sometimes shown as the “great bear hunter”. After failing to live as a reindeer herder in his younger years, he also sought an income as a guide for tourists, and took the occasional job for LKAB. Hjalmar Lundbohm, however, did not want to hire Sámi workers out of fear that this would lead to their integration into Swedish society (Persson 2015, 137), thus adhering to the slogan “Lapp must remain Lapp”.

In the early twentieth century there was, in Sweden as well as Norway, a growing tendency among Sámi writers, politicians, and activists to speak back to their colonizers. A general need was experienced by many Sámi to protect Sápmi in the four nation-states, and, further, from Western world-views expressed in colonialist or assimilationist and nationalist policies and

ideas about economic development, “science”, extractivism, industrialization, urbanization, technology, and so on. Turi’s *Muitalus* and works of art are prime examples of a growing Sámi self-confidence in speaking back to the colonizers.

There were other Sámi voices in public at the time, though their media and methods differed from Turi’s. An important example is the South Sámi reindeer owner, socialist, feminist, and activist Elsa Laula (1877–1931). In 1904 she published a pamphlet in Swedish titled *Inför lif eller död? Sanningsord i de lappska förhållandena* (*Do We Face Life or Death? Words of Truth about the Lappish Situation*), stating, among other things, that the Sámi are practically excluded from political power because the financial requirement for the right to vote is above what most can raise. Their education is mainly restricted to three years in missionary schools, which explains why they are often accused of being ignorant. Laula claims that the Sámi for centuries have “had to recede from the farmers of the Germanic race” who have occupied and privatized the grazing lands that the Sámi use. Based on statistics and socio-political reasoning, she demonstrates how Swedish accounts of the Sámi both ignore their “fierce struggle for existence” and present prejudiced views of the Sámi as lacking culture and civilization (Laula [1904] 2003, 3–4).

Laula’s position both adheres to and departs from that of Turi. In his foreword to *Muitalus*, Turi (2012, 11) made it clear that he aimed at presenting “everything ... about Sámi life and conditions, so that people wouldn’t ... misconstrue things, particularly those who ... claim that only the Sámi are at fault when disputes arise between settlers and Sámi in Norway and Sweden”. He wanted the colonizers to read and thus better understand the Sámi, based on his account of those living “in the Jukkasjärvi district” (11). His aim was to reach out to a readership belonging to/among the leading elites of the Swedish and Norwegian states. Laula’s pamphlet is highly polemical in confronting and criticizing her opponents and their positions, especially for Swedish assimilation and colonization policies.⁷ Turi’s text and imagery are more pedagogical but offer clear insider correctives to the reports by Swedish authors discussed above.

Turi’s “project”, then, was based on the need to correct and deepen the existing knowledge of the Sámi among the non-Sámi. In my view, Turi based his goal on the concept of mutual trust. An example of his confidence is, perhaps, his portrait drawing of Gustav V, King of Sweden (1907–1950), which probably never left Turi’s possession in his lifetime.⁸ The image is based on a photographic portrait by Anton Blomberg (Nordiska Museet, Stockholm) taken before 1925. Both versions adhere to genre conventions in the seated king’s dignified appearance and relaxed but attentive body language. Until 1914, the Swedish government depended substantially on the Crown’s support, though essentially for foreign, not domestic, affairs. Does the portrait indicate Turi’s hope for informing the king about the

7 Elsa Laula’s greatest achievement is her initiative and leadership of Sámi organizations such as co-founding the Lapland Central Union in 1904 and organizing the first pan-Sámi meeting in Trondheim (Tråante in South Sámi) in 1917.

8 Johan Turi, *Konung Gustav* (Portrait of King Gustav V of Sweden),

date unknown,
 pencil, black crayon
 and grey wash on
 paper, 32 × 24.7 cm.
 Nordiska Museet,
 Stockholm. Archive
 LA 659 nr. 43 recto,
 Box J1:1.
 9 A simple
 comparison: in 1929
 the average annual
 salary for workers
 (regardless of age and
 gender) was 2,528
 SEK, *Lönestatistik
 årsbok för Sverige
 1929*, Stockholm
 1931: 55.

conditions of the Sámi? In the 1920s Turi was awarded a modest writer’s pension of 600 SEK, secured by LKAB manager C. G. Granström and artist Albert Engström. In 1934, on Turi’s 80th birthday, the king awarded him the Swedish gold medal for his authorship (Manker 1944, 126, 131; Sjöholm 2017, 263, 275).⁹ Does Turi’s portrait of the king relate to this honour? I see the portrait as a metaphorical expression of Turi’s desire to reach out to his Swedish readers and be understood, or even as an enlightenment project related to the truth about Sámi life.

Nevertheless, Turi found himself trapped in the interstice between the reindeer-herding Sámi’s struggle to survive and Swedish society’s territorial expansions, modernization processes, and industrialization. However, the opening sentence of *Muitalus* counters this positioning: “I am a Sámi who has done all sorts of Sámi work and I know all about Sámi conditions” (Turi 2012, 11). It is a strong expression of belonging. As an author and artist, though, Turi differed from the herders of the Talma siida. In the mid-1920s, ethnographer Ernst Manker (1971, 123) described him as “the dreamer, poet, wilderness philosopher, but not without eyes for real events in nature and among humans – which would later appear”. Mary Louise Pratt (1991, 34) refers to contact zones as “social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power, such as colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths as they are lived out in many parts of the world today”. In Turi’s version, such relations involve, as I intend to demonstrate, not only social and cultural ones, but relationships within wider contexts of nature, landscape, climate, and life as such. The widened contact zone in which he operated is acutely visible in his art, and so we need to look at a few more of his images, four of which are hitherto unpublished (Figures 4, 5, 6, and 8).

Images of Sápmi

As mainly an autodidact artist, Turi’s images of Sápmi differ from Swedish landscape painting at the time, though he must have seen examples of it in Hjalmar Lundbohm’s collection and during trips to Stockholm (with Lundbohm) and Copenhagen (visiting Emilie Demant Hatt and Gudmund Hatt) in 1911, and possibly other travels in Sweden. Lundbohm was a patriarch with a large circle of contacts, the central player behind the cultural and political development of the mining community in Giron, including art exhibitions and the growing mountain tourism (Persson 2015, 111–114, 126–129).¹⁰ Through him, Turi met some of the academically trained Swedish painters who visited the area, such as Albert Engström, Prince Eugen, Helmer Osslund, Johan Tirén, John Bauer, Leander Engström, Karl Nordström,

10 Lundbohm’s
 collection is now part
 of Kiruna
 Konstsamling.

11 I do not intend a comprehensive analysis of appropriations here. Turi certainly also derived visual ideas from Sámi sources. His outlined shapes of humans and animals, for instance, hint at figures on the Sámi *meavrresgárrit* (drums).

12 Recently, Osslund's landscapes from Sápmi have been sold at substantial prices. In 2019 his painting *Lapporten i höstfärger* (Lapporten in Autumn Colours) (1923–1930) was sold at Uppsala Auktionskammare for 7,595,000 SEK (approx. US \$860,000).

and Carl Wilhelmson. Photography is also important in this context, especially the production of Borg Mesch, who settled in Giron in 1899. What might Turi have appropriated from them¹¹ – and how do his images differ from theirs? There is room here for just a couple of comparisons.

During his second visit to Ábeskovu, in August–September 1906, Helmer Osslund developed his successful style characterized by partly visible brushstrokes and strong hues representing the flora, a flaming autumn magnificence in the mountains. He was referred to as “the artistic discoverer of Norrland” (Persson 2015, 113), which may explain his return trips to Norrland over the years.¹² The spectacular motif of the U-shaped valley Čuonjávággi/Lapporten (North Sámi: “Goose Valley”; Swedish: “The Lapponian Gate”) was especially popular. From the 1890s, many Nordic painters turned their focus on colour in ways that have been interpreted as related to symbolist art, art nouveau, or Japanese prints. Consequently, the Swedish landscape paintings of Sápmi in the early twentieth century tend to go beyond naturalism in their synthesized shapes, heightened combinations of bright saturated hues, and powerful brushstrokes. Osslund based his landscape (Figure 2) on studies outdoors, but his image departs from a direct and detailed study of the landscape in its contrasting effects between simplified shapes and stabilizing compositional balance on the one hand, and its strong and lively colours inducing energy and motion on the other. The composition is primarily based on painterly and as such largely abstract qualities. I see it as representing an idea of a “pure”, uninhabited landscape, as if untouched by human beings, in which animals seem to reign.

In comparison, Borg Mesch's landscape photography of the same area (Figure 3) confronts us directly with human enterprises demonstrated by the tourist hotel, a few other buildings, and the railroad. The glittering strokes of sunlight hitting the foliage in the foreground hint at a beautiful morning. In such observations of the real, the photo differs from Osslund's imagined phantasy. But there is more. The photograph presents a view from an elevated position overlooking the buildings in the middle ground, the low trees and vegetation, leading towards distant haze beneath the mountain tops and the scattered clouds in a quite clear sky. This is, of course, consciously composed to heighten an atmosphere of gradual modifications in the range between stark white light and almost black shadowy zones.

Johan Turi's *Lap Luki* (Čuonjávággi/The Lapponian Gate) (Figure 4) presents an inhabited nature as he knew it, in a formally simplified, somewhat coarse style. He used wooden stamps which he had carved to represent multiple equal shapes, such as humans, reindeer, or trees, thus also saving the effort of drawing each of them individually. Also characteristic of his paintings, both here and elsewhere, are strong hues, clashing complementary colours, avoidance of traditional harmonies, and an overall “raw” and expressive visual quality. The surface qualities of opaque versus transparent,



Figure 2 Helmer Osslund, *Före stormen, motiv från Lappporten* (Before the storm, motif from Čuonjávaggi/The Lapponian Gate), c. 1907. Oil on canvas, 58 × 100 cm. Whereabouts unknown, sold at Bukowskis, Stockholm, 20 November 2006, lot 75. Photo: Bukowskis auctions, reproduced with permission.



Figure 3 Borg Mesch, *Ábeskovu with Čuonjávaggi/The Lapponian Gate behind*, 4 September 1911. Photograph. Kiruna MediaGallery. Archive No. 10000507. Reproduced with the permission of Kiruna kommun.



Figure 4 Johan Turi, *Lap Luki* (Čuonjávággi/The Lapponian Gate), date unknown. Mixed technique (pastel, gouache and Indian ink, or similar) on cardboard, approx. 20 × 21 cm (irregular). Inscription initials “J O T” (Johan Olsen Turi). Nordiska Museet, Stockholm. The Johan Turi Archives, LA 659, No. 10, Box J1:1. Photo: Svein Aamold, public domain.

broad outlines, and visible tracks of the executing movements of his hand are heightened by his changing use of mixed techniques, such as pastel, gouache, watercolour, Indian ink, and pencil. We know little about what Turi might have learned about drawing and painting. According to Ernst Manker (1971, 131), the Swedish artist Edith Maria von Knaffl-Granström (1884–1956) gave him lessons on watercolour techniques. When this happened is unknown; a guess is that they met in the 1920s when she began focusing on pastels and watercolours in her work. Further, Turi’s known artworks were made on whatever cheap paper cuts or pieces of carton he could get hold of. Their commercial value was insignificant if compared to many of the Swedish landscape painters’ success in the art market. Importantly, however, Turi did not quite adjust to the genre of landscape painting. *Lap Luki* shows simplified shapes of the sky, clouds, and terrain, with herders and their animals occupying much of its lower areas. The stark contrast between the green fertile areas and the hovering bare mountains is telling. For Turi, nature gives and takes; it is the home of the Sámi herders, but also delimits their lives. High up in the mountains conditions can be dangerous. The partly transparent white colour surrounding the summits refers, perhaps, to drifting haze, but in a very different way compared to Mesch’s

photograph with its fascinating interplay of light reflections and the way the haze separates the high mountains from houses, railroad, and vegetation. It seems to me that, in the photograph, the high, potentially dangerous peaks are pushed toward the far distance like shadows. Osslund’s image is different again. Here the divisions between the low forest, “rocky” mountains, and agitated clouds are highly accentuated by their formal differences (the contrasting tranquillity of a pair of grazing reindeer in the foreground and the violent movements of the clouds) but above all by their contrasting colours.

Osslund’s composition emphasizes the impression of a nearly deserted, uninhabited mountain landscape. His image adheres to neo-Romantic conceptions of the mountain areas of Sápmi as a wild and virginal terra nullius in which civilization has not (yet) made its mark. In Mesch’s photograph, the landscape appears as an inhabited, modernized part of Sweden. The effects of the clear light of a summer’s daybreak dominate the middle and foreground. The effect of haze makes it difficult to measure the distance to the summits in the background. They seem to be floating, so to speak, on air. The clear sky above adds to an atmosphere of peaceful beauty and dream-like visions. If we take into account the Swedish name of *Lappporten* (Čuonjávaggi/The Laponian Gate), the image indirectly hints at the idea that they are living somewhere beyond, in the high mountains, even beyond civilization.

The great difference from the Swedish artists, then, is Turi’s deep knowledge and understanding of the conditions of nature in this region, its changing seasons, its flora and fauna, and the lives, works, customs, knowledge, and belief systems of the Sámi. Despite its Swedish title, *Lap Luki* disregards the decorative, colourful visions I argue characterize the images of Osslund and Mesch. Turi’s interpretation stands as a necessary corrective on behalf of the Sámi. And again, in his view nature is the totality in which everything partakes. Here we are presented visually with his view of the interdependence of life, nature, and climate.

Dwelling with

Sometime between 1908 and 1916, Hjalmar Lundbohm presented Turi with a small log house in Lattilahti (*lahti*, bay) on the northeastern shore of Duortnosjávri, and a small motorized boat.¹³ Turi lived there the rest of his life. According to Lennart Lundmark (2007, 13), the Sámi herders were at the time “forbidden to live in wooden houses, which would weaken them and tempt them to abandon nomadism”. But log houses appear in quite a few of Turi’s images. In [Figure 5](#), almost hidden in the greenery in front of the bigger house to the left, two people shake hands, while a third man stands

13 Turi probably moved to the log house at Lattilahti between 1908 and 1916 (see Sjöholm 2017, 85, 210, 211,

263; Manker 1944, 125, 126, 139, ill.).



Figure 5 Johan Turi, Untitled (Landscape with houses, humans, reindeer, and a giant), date unknown. Mixed technique (watercolour or gouache, pastel and pencil, or similar) on cardboard, approx. 36 × 40 cm (irregular). Nordiska Museet, Stockholm. The Johan Turi Archives, LA 659, No. 12, recto, Box J1:1. Photo: Svein Aamold, public domain.

to the right, perhaps the artist with his characteristic clothing and tasselled hat. Next to them stand two reindeer. The surprisingly giant humanoid on the right might be a *Stallo/Stállu*, though its head is hidden from view. In Sámi tales, *Stállu* is a dangerous, evil, but simple-minded spiritual figure. The giant's arm and enormous hand hover over the smaller log house, potentially threatening the safety and comforts of the home.

The panoramic view in Figure 6 shows the village of Lahtteluokta located shortly east of Turi's home at Lattilahti. The log houses and other constructions are represented as if seen from multiple viewpoints, on a slope with forests and pastures below the naked, rounded mountain summits of Ribasvárri. The sky is filled with peculiarly rounded clouds painted with powerful strokes of brown to one side against the dominant blue. The result is a puzzling indication of movement contrasting the tranquil fields and woods below. Dark lines near the blue summit on the left and the sketchy renderings of forests and greenery threaten to subdivide the overall composition. But compositional unity is achieved by overall movements of vertically inclined vectors in the lower areas leading towards the horizontally ordered shapes of the sky. What we see, again, is a living nature in which the Sámis thrive.



Figure 6 Johan Turi, *Lahtteluokta gilli* (Lahtteluokta village), 1928. Mixed technique (pastel, gouache and pencil, or similar) on cardboard, approx. 41.8 × 52.3 cm. Signed and dated 1928, with inscription transcribed and translated by Mikael Svonni: “1928, 6. September/Dás lea Lahtteluovtta gilli/riitáduvvon Johan Thuri” (1928, 6 September/Here is Lahtteluokta village/Drawn by Johan Thuri). Nordiska Museet, Stockholm. The Johan Turi Archives, LA 659, No. 13, Box J1:1. Photo: Svein Aamold, public domain.

Two intriguing portraits probably also represent the ominous Stállu, now with his smaller wife, Luttak, behind. Stállu has in various Sámi stories been described as a giant “human” and as an “Other” feeding on human flesh, while Luttak “has artificial iron eyes and uses an iron tube to suck human blood” (Stokke 2020, 9). In Figure 7, a mask-like face with a triangular nose and a hint of red lips right below is partly surrounded by radiating lines. Its big, yellowish, and predator-like eyes seem to be staring inwards as well as outwards. The lack of surrounding details makes the couple appear as seated on a floating sleigh on snow. The giant face in Figure 8 is more humanly (feminine?) modelled, with enormous blue eyes. The powerful colouring enlivens the composition but also somehow divides it between the two faces, the sleigh (boat?), and surrounding green strokes with an abstract quality. These images are intriguing visions, a far step beyond what contemporary Swedish painters were doing, including John Bauer’s innocent and humorous fairy-tale illustrations of Stállu. The focus of Turi’s images is the penetrating gaze of a spiritual being, whether of a frightening demonical or supportive kind.



Figure 7 Johan Turi, Untitled (Stállu and his wife, Luttak, on a sleigh), date unknown. Mixed technique (pastel, gouache and pencil, or similar) on cardboard, 17.3 × 23.5 cm. Nordiska Museet, Stockholm. The Johan Turi Archives, LA 659, No. 5, Box J1:1. Photo: Nordiska Museet, public domain.

The visiting Swedish painters around Duortnosjávri in the early twentieth century adhered to the Western genre of landscape painting, which “served as a primary site for this reimagining and remaking of land by rendering it objectifiable, and therefore divisible, commodifiable, and possessable” (Phillips 2016, 36). This connects to the instrumental view of nature evident in Swedish publications on the Sámi and their culture. The ethos which lays the ground for Turi’s pictorial output as well as for *Muitalus* is a fundamentally different one. I want to go deeper into this to make some concluding remarks on the concept of Turi’s ecology.

Good, pleasant, and beautiful

Turi’s holistic understanding of nature in Sápmi encompasses humans, animals, and nature, the past as well as the present, and the living as well as the dead. Movement is central to his visual interpretations, supported by his sketchy technique and particular formal solutions. His artworks generate tensions through shapes, colours, and movements, but without loss of



Figure 8 Johan Turi, Untitled (Stállu and his wife, Luttak, on a sleigh), date unknown. Mixed technique (pastel, gouache and pencil, or similar) on cardboard, 17.9 × 24.6 cm (irregular). Nordiska Museet, Stockholm. The Johan Turi Archives, LA 659, No. 53, Box J1:1. Photo: Svein Aamold, public domain.

compositional equilibrium. It is as if they insist, in line with his texts, that if the Sámi live up to their traditional knowledge and behave cautiously and respectfully, it is possible to reach the higher goal of what is good and pleasant (*hávski*). At the same time, Turi's imagery also shows environs and situations that are challenging, even dangerous.

The experience of well-being as a common good is expressed in North Sámi as *luondu*, “a complex and valued state” relying “on the acquisition, maintenance, enactment, and transmission of a particular body of knowledge” necessary to sustain a particular way of life, such as reindeer husbandry (DuBois 2011, 520). Included here are also “the aesthetic perceptions and emotional predispositions that result from this valued way of life and its knowledge base” (520). For Turi, then, well-being is an individual (*hávski*) as well as communal (*luondu*) value grounded in experience, observation, participation, and knowledge.

In *Muitalus* Turi set out to present a holistic understanding of nature in a way that the colonizer, the Swedes, would understand – that is, as an auto-ethnographic, illustrated text with imagery that “involve[s] a selective collaboration with and appropriation of idioms of the metropolis or the conqueror [which] are merged or infiltrated to varying degrees with Indigenous idioms

14 See also the Introduction and Ingeborg Høvik's essay in this issue.

to create self-representations intended to intervene in metropolitan modes of understanding" (Pratt 1991, 35).¹⁴ In addition, Turi wanted *Muitalus* to be appreciated by the Sámi themselves. Perhaps one might say that his text and images represent transculturation in the sense that they "select and invent from materials transmitted by a dominant or metropolitan culture" (Pratt 1991, 36). His works contributed to a Sámi tradition of creating texts and images of their present as well as of their history and traditions. In this understanding, humans are not above nature, but *part of it*.

To the Swedish administration, assimilation meant, to put it bluntly, that the Sámi would not only integrate into the majority society but eventually erase the existing frictions between Sámi and non-Sámi regarding language, education, culture, economy, and fundamental questions of humanity and nature. In the eyes of liberalism, for instance, it was regarded as an advantage, on the one hand, to "turn" the Sámi living below the cultivation border into Swedes and, on the other, to protect the remaining few mountain Sámi herders because they were the best equipped to live off the land, create an income, and pay taxes in remote areas. The attachment to the land is fundamental to Indigenous peoples. The Sámi, like the Native Americans, "hold their lands – place – as having the highest possible meaning, and all their statements are made with this reference point in mind" (Vine Deloria Jr., quoted from Phillips 2016, 12). The Sámi below the cultivation border not only lost self-government but also communal access to land. Consequently, their Indigenous identity was transformed into that of "other minority groups that do not have a territorial/homeland attachment" (Isabel Altamirano-Jiménez, quoted from Kuokkanen 2006, 5).

The prevalent relationship between human beings, animals, and the land among Indigenous peoples in the Circumpolar North is, in Tim Ingold's interpretation, an "animic" understanding of "the powers that bring forth life" as "a complex network of reciprocal interdependence, based on the give and take of substance, care and vital force ... linking human, animal and all other forms of life" (Ingold 2000, 113). The relationship between the herder and the reindeer is based on mutual consent in which the Sámi provide access to food and protection all year round for the animals, whereas the latter present themselves, their whole bodies, for the subsistence and dwelling of the Sámi. A "methodological tool for obtaining knowledge", according to Vine Deloria Jr., is that "[w]e are all relatives", which means that

everything in the natural world has relationships with every other thing and the total set of relationships makes up the natural world as we experience it. This concept is simply the relativity concept as applied to a universe which people experience as alive and not as dead or inert. (Deloria 1992, 37)

This relational position is central in Johan Turi's accounts and imagery of the Sámi. His understanding of what is good, pleasant, and beautiful is based on how his people adapt to different environments, seasons, climates, and even spiritual powers. Yet Turi's work also tells us about the hard work, the challenges, and the dangers which threaten or undermine such harmony. Turi seems not to want to hide anything – good or bad – in his account and imagery of the Sámi herders.

Turi's premonitions – then and now

In his article “The Lapps in Sweden”, K. B. Wiklund argues that the Swedes were superior to the Sámi, based on his findings that “the Swedes [...] have been the givers” of “culture” and “modern civilization” (Wiklund 1923, 223). Over many centuries, he contends, the Sámi lived “near or partly in the middle of a culturally higher standing Scandinavia, and this environment must, of course, have exerted its influence even on them”.¹⁵

15 Wiklund (1948, 71; my translation from the original): “De bodde dessutom sedan århundraden i den omedelbara närheten av eller delvis mitt inne i ett kulturellt sett högre stående Skandinavien [...], och denna miljö har ju naturligtvis måst utöva inflytande även på dem.”

The terms development and civilization are not used in *Muitalus*. Turi takes for granted that the Sámi way of living can be explained according to the conditions of the area in which they live. We read, for example, that “in the old days”, that is, “in the days before Sámi came from the north and taught others how to herd reindeer”, reindeer herding was practised in ways Turi himself had not experienced; and that when the Swedes (or non-Sámi) “learned how, their herds started to grow” (Turi 2012, 34). The statement implies that the Sámi themselves were instrumental in the formation of reindeer herding and that they taught it to non-Sámi practitioners rather than learning it from them.

Although Turi did not write about some of the important emerging activities supported by the Swedish authorities in Sápmi, such as mining, increased travelling on roads and railroads, tourism and population growth, he commented on the relations between the Sámi and the majority society. Whereas Wiklund writes that the Sámi need to develop into a civilized people, for example through schooling, Turi shows that modern education is both good and bad for the Sámi. It is, Turi holds,

good that they learn to read and write and do math, so that they aren't always getting cheated by store owners and settlers [...]. But even so, schooling spoils Sámi children. [...] And what's more, they acquire a settler's nature, [...] and they learn only about the settlers' life and nothing at all about Sámi life. And [...] their Sámi nature is lost and they acquire a settler's nature instead. (Turi 2012, 30)

Contrary to Wiklund's view, Turi understands schooling in its present state as, in effect, an assimilation of the Sámi into the majority society. Sámi customs and knowledge, as Turi presents them, are thereby threatened.

The other important issue here concerns access, usufruct, and ownership of land. Johan Turi's fight for the rights of the Sámi, "the first people here", to live off their traditional land shows he is fully aware of the reciprocity between humans, flora, fauna, and spiritual values. Nature is vulnerable.

The Sámi now know their way of life well, and they would not want any other livelihood. But when the Crown has taken the Sámi's lands away and given them to the settlers, then these lands are no longer in the Crown's control at all. And so the Sámi have come to see that the reindeer can no longer survive where the Sámi are permitted to stay and graze their herds: there the lichens are all gone. (Turi 2012, 98)

Turi understands that "the Crown cannot simply take back the land which it has given to the settlers" (Turi 2012, 99). He nevertheless refutes the idea that the Sámi might thrive above the cultivation border, away from the settlers: "The Sámi would just live up in the high mountains permanently if it were possible to keep warm up there and provide for their animals, the reindeer" (Turi 2012, 52). Relocation to the mountains offers no way out of the reciprocity problem. Still, Turi hoped for a solution. In an interview in 1918, he was asked how he "came to write" his book, and "answered quietly, 'To save my people from death and destruction'" (Sjoholm 2017, 221).

Is Turi's hope still relevant? To answer, we would need to go far beyond the scope of this essay. Let me briefly mention one example. In terms of contemporary Scandinavian priorities of economic growth, extractivism and consumerism, we may ask whether Turi's holistic perspectives are downplayed in favour of Wiklund's thinking on civilization and development. The lives of Sámi herders are deeply tied to questions of human as well as natural resources.

In recent years, multinational companies around the world have been able to overrule or sidestep the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, adopted by the General Assembly in 2007, including Indigenous peoples' rights to protect their traditional territories.¹⁶ The battles over access to natural resources in Indigenous territories are wildly uneven between what is often an impoverished people and "some of the wealthiest and most powerful forces on the planet" (Klein 2015, 379). Further, it has been concluded about Indigenous reindeer herders in the Circumpolar North that the threats to "the sustainability of traditional family-based nomadic use of pastures ... are exacerbated by Indigenous peoples' lack of voice in governance strategies, management and adaptation responses" (Eira et al. 2018, 928). Naomi Klein also points to how Indigenous peoples, in some instances, have gained power as sovereign nations, which

16 See https://www.un.org/development/desa/indigenouspeoples/wp-content/uploads/sites/19/2018/11/UNDRIP_E_web.pdf. See also Naomi Klein's (2015, 293–387, *passim*) analysis and discussion of how the established rights of Indigenous

peoples have been violated due to extractivism based on powerful legal and political support.

is “something of a turnaround from the saviorism and pitying charity that have poisoned relationships between Indigenous peoples and well-meaning liberals for far too long” (Klein 2015, 381). Indigenous peoples would not get far in battles like those over the tar sands in the United States and Canada if they were treated as weak and in need of “charity”.

Parts of the mountain areas on the Swedish side of Sápmi are today under official protection by seven national parks. The oldest, Sarek National Park in Johkamohkki/Jokkmokk, was established in 1909. Still, the mining industry, forestry, tourism, and motorized traffic on roads, railways, and between airports are local sources of “wear and tear” on nature in Sápmi. In 1996, a mountainous wildlife zone of about 9,400 square kilometres in Swedish Sápmi was made a UNESCO World Heritage Site for natural and cultural reasons:

The site has been occupied continuously by the Saami people since prehistoric times and is one of the last and unquestionably largest and best preserved examples of an area of transhumance, involving summer grazing by large reindeer herds, a practice that was widespread at one time and which dates back to an early stage in human economic and social development. (Speer and Casier 2016, 117)

Here, finally, the Sámi is referred to as Indigenous and the area in which they traditionally live is their rightful home. What, then, about the concept of equality? The answer depends on the multilayered impact of the settlers, the politics of assimilation, the church and education, industrialization, extractivism, the politics of sovereignty and military security, and state administration. Johan Turi’s *Muitalus* and his images of the lives of the Sámi are not only powerful accounts of the dyadic relationship between humans and their environment. They represent an understanding of and relationship to humans, animals, landscape, and nature as interconnected, multidimensional, and holistic. There is, I want to conclude, no (romantic) longing back in time in Turi’s text and imagery, nor does he insist that the settlers, the Swedes, and other non-Sámi keep away from Sápmi. His works attempt to explain all aspects of the lives of the Sámi herders, the good as well as the bad. If there is a visionary hope, it is in insisting on mutual respect and equality between the Sámi and their neighbours. Taken together, Turi’s works urge us to better understand the interconnectedness of decolonization and sentient ecology.

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