‘Shared Remembering’ as a Relational Indigenous Method in Conceptualization of Sámi Women’s Leadership

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Abstract

This chapter looks at Sámi women’s leadership and what contributed to its success. Inspired by Indigenous methodologies worldwide and Sámi orality, we have developed a method of *muittašit ovttas* ‘shared remembering’, for gathering information and conceptualizing Sámi women’s leaderships. This method allows us to conceive and reason in a systematic manner, as well as to interpret the lived experiences and strategic choices of female leaders. Secondly, we scrutinized and structured our research material drawing from the symbolism represented in a *solju* ‘round breastpin’: its interconnected Circle of values and the Circle of actions. It worked both as a method and theoretical tool for our analysis. The presentation and analysis of our research material follows the structure of the circles of *solju*. In this chapter, we describe and operationalize these methods in a practice, bringing to the forefront the considerations about strategies, values, and actions of Sámi leadership from a Sámi perspective and by means of Sámi concepts. It opens up a space for further scholarly and public discussions about both Indigenous women’s leadership and the design of research methodologies from an Indigenous perspective. The proposed research methodology can be applied to other projects in Sámi research, but it can also inspire Indigenous research in other contexts.

Keywords

Sámi concepts – Sámi values – Sámi epistemology – shared remembering – storytelling – *solju* method – Sámi women’s leadership

1 Research Objectives, Processes and Theoretical Inspiration

*Duoddara girona
Girddáša nu jo*

Lei-lo-lo-lo
Buot viggabet váldit
Buot oažžubet váldit
Dan bivnnut gal vuoda
Dii ehpet gal váldde¹
 (From Joatkka Elle luohiti, yoik)

A Sámi *yoik* filled a crowded conference hall in the University of Helsinki one day in November 2017, a strong woman's song that reflected hope for the future. The *yoik* sung by Káre Sámmol Ristena Ragnhild, Ragnhild Lydia Nystad was a fitting end to the International Conference on Indigenous Peoples' Rights to Cultural Heritage (November 16–17, 2017). This conference and the *yoik* empowered the three of us, Sámi women who have known each other for 30 years, to write this chapter. This desire to write arose especially after discussions with the conference speaker, the leader of the Permanent Forum, Mariam Wallet Aboubakrine, a Tuareg woman from Mali, Africa, who told about the struggles, actions and rights of Indigenous women. All three of us have worked in political and academic leadership, higher education, research, health, in Sámi communities and Indigenous issues internationally. Although we originally come from Norwegian, Finnish and Russian parts of Sápmi, we are all affiliated to the same territory in between Kárášjohka (Karasjok) and Gáregasnjárga (Karigasniemi) either by birth or by family ties. This is a border inland area between Finland and Norway, where Sámi is the majority language. Sámi is our home language and is our working language. This is our story.

We reflected on our experiences as leaders, we noticed common challenges in the Sámi community and worldwide. We realized that there is a deficit of information and a lack of public discussions about the role of female leaders in international and Indigenous politics, although women have always been influential in Indigenous societies and politics. We felt togetherness, peace of mind, creativity and a strong spirit which led us to jointly ponder Sámi knowledge about leadership, and to work and write together in a collaborative way.

The main aim of this project is to develop, from a Sámi perspective, a research methodology which allows to explore the role of female leaders and specific features in their leadership. Our methodology allows us to conceptualize Sámi women leadership within Sámi theories of knowledge and value system and to base the analysis on our life and working experiences as Sámi women and as leaders in a holistic way. We introduce and apply two methods: a method of *muittašit ovttas* 'shared remembering' for collecting of information, and a '*solju*' both as a method and analytical tool, structuring and presenting in an interconnected way the experiences and strategic choices of

Sámi women in leadership positions. These methods are consistent with Sámi orality, value systems and epistemologies, and are grounded in experiences, memories, relationality and spirituality, allowing the establishment of logical connections between actions and values in a way that is peculiar to Sámi ways of thinking. The use of Indigenous epistemologies creates a foundation that allows us to select, recognize and understand something as Indigenous knowledge (e.g. Ahenakew 2016; Chilisa 2012; Denzin et al. 2008, Hokowhitu et al. 2020; Kovach 2009; Kuokkanen 2007; Lincoln, & Smith 2008; McKinley & Smith 2019; Porsanger 2004, 2007, 2014, 2018; Rigney 1999; G. H. Smith 2003; L. T. Smith 1999/2012; Wilson 2008).

Furthermore, the Sámi language offers a methodological and theoretical base that enables one to understand and reconstruct Indigenous knowledge (Seurujärvi-Kari 2012, 101–105). In research Indigenization takes place when Indigenous language is used in the construction of research tools. Hence, we used the Sámi language in our conversations, utilizing Sámi concepts as analytical tools in writing this chapter, which we later translated into English. This allowed us to link our memories to the cultural context, to discover connections between actions, values and events, and to see how, looking from a Sámi perspective, they can be determined by the social, political and cultural context. In addition to the instrumental value, Sámi as a language for research and analysis has an emotional impact that emerges from respect for our people and heritage. In our view, working, researching and writing in Sámi strengthens and develops our endangered language and cultural heritage (*ibid.*). We scrutinized numerous methodological and theoretical concepts as they appear in Indigenous research in English, such as sharing, naming, claiming, remembering, gendering, etc. (see 25 Indigenous projects in L. T. Smith 1999/2012, 143–164). We reflected on their applicability in the Sámi context, realizing that many of the concepts from other Indigenous contexts were not entirely suitable in our case. These considerations led us to the recognition of an interconnectedness of values and actions in women's leadership, and to theorizing about the ontology of relations, which resulted in the development of the *solju* method.

We worked together for more than a year, shared remembering, augmenting each other's stories, reflecting, connecting events to the Sámi and Indigenous societal life, history, politics, academic world and kinship relations. We shared stories, observations, contemplations, as well as traditional Sámi food. We recorded most of our structured conversations and transcribed more than the half of them, a total of twenty-nine pages.

In each meeting – in person or digitally – we made notes, altogether more than forty pages. All recordings, transliterations and notes were used for further conversations, in which we studied and elucidated our material from previous

cyclic, reciprocal and holistic, and can be compared to conceptualization of various issues in Indigenous research worldwide (e.g. Battiste 2000, 2001, 2008; Bishop & Glynn 1999, 55; Keskitalo 1974/1994; Keskitalo, Määttä & Uusiautti 2013, 91; Østmo 2013; Porsanger 2004; G. Smith 2003; see also Chapter 3).

Figure 6.2 displays our methodological and theoretical base, the interconnectedness of all relations, which is needed for the analysis and for the understanding of Sámi collectivity (*searvevuohhta*), in which it is not possible to set any element or any relationship apart from the whole (all relations). This way of thinking is closely related to Shawn Wilson's (2008, 97–125) considerations about relational accountability, which means being accountable to all your relations.

Gaskavuohhta indicates bilateral and reciprocal ties between two things/issues/persons/groups, etc., implying that there is a distance, *gaska*, between them, but these two sides are still mutually interdependent. *Oktavuohhta* implies relationships in which there are more than two sides, which are interconnected and make a whole, a one, *okta*. The term *gaskavuohhta* clarifies both the mutual and bilateral interdependence, and the interactive character of this relationship. The term *oktavuohhta* brings to the fore an interconnectedness and a relatedness of diversity and communality in a holistic way. Many Indigenous scholars note the need to consider this interconnectedness and relationality in a holistic way, thus bringing academic work closer to traditional ways of knowing (Porsanger 2007, 36; see also Bishop 1996; Crazy Bull 1997; Deloria

FIGURE 6.2
Ontology of relations
according to Porsanger
(2007, 35–37) (Graphic
design by Attila Paksi)

et al. 1999, 32–39; Lowe & Struthers 2001, 126). According to Dale Stover (2002, 191) (Dakota Sioux), experience of relatedness “fosters the decolonising of knowledge since relatedness rather than knowledge becomes privileged; consequently, knowledge is no longer a matter of power relations between ‘self’ and ‘other’ but of kinship relations in which knowledge of each other extends freely in both cultural directions as a process of relational reciprocity”.

Based on the theorizing of all relationships in a holistic way, we have developed a method inspired by the Sámi *solju* (‘round breastpin’). From the early start of our project, we were looking for a symbol (an item, an object, a place, an action) which would structure the analysis. The symbol should be connected to femininity in a traditional Sámi way, and should display holistic integrity, and non-linear and multi-dimensional ways of thinking.

A *solju* is part of Sámi women’s dress (*gákti*). It is a decorative jewellery which fastens the silk shawl and the dress in an aesthetic unity. If a breastpin is not fastened correctly, it affects the whole appearance, called *fárda*, which means how a dress fits a person. When a brooch is attached to a silk shawl correctly, one can say that a woman is wearing the dress charmingly with style (*nisu guoddá gávtti hámálaččat*) or she has a nice *fárda* (meaning that her dress suits her well). When a person moves, the leaves on the breastpin are in motion, clinking and jingling, revealing the mood of the person. A *solju* can be a safeguard, given as a gift with the special purpose of protection, which is named in North Sámi *štella*, an ‘amulet’, aimed at keeping bad spirits away. In the present, men have also begun to wear breastpins as jewellery. Hence, although being initially a female object, a *solju* can now be a representation of gender equality. A *solju* also represents beautiful silver forging. It is part of Sámi art expressions which are often about how we maintain not only a sense of coherence but also our resilience and, ultimately, confidence and strength, and communicate the principle of relationality (Kenny 2012, 7).

A *solju* is part of non-verbal communication in many ways, but in a traditional wedding it has a special value. In the western parts of *Sápmi*, a bride wears a wedding shawl decorated with dozens of brooches (Figure 6.3). They can be purchased, but traditionally they have been gathered from among the kin of both the bride and the groom. This is an indication of close family ties within the extended family, and for the purpose of our chapter, this is a representation of relationality.

Solju is a symbol of relationality, therefore our analysis is organized as a form of *solju* connecting Sámi concepts, values, and actions. The round silver plate of a *solju* – in the technical terms of the production – is a foundation² to which all leaves and other decorative patterns are attached. Likewise, for our methodology, a *solju* represents a foundation for our contemplations in a

FIGURE 6.3 Wedding picture of Inger Elisabeth Utsi, who married Petter Jovnna Utsi in Kárášjohka/Karasjok (Photograph by Jelena Porsanger, 2018, reproduced with permission)

holistic manner and visualizes the holistic interconnectedness of values and actions. The analysis is therefore structured into two circles (Figure 6.4): the internal circle represents values, and the external one represents actions. In a circle, as in Sámi *yoik*, there is no beginning and no end.³ In Figure 6.4, one can see that a circle of values and a circle of actions influence each other and make one. The concepts inside our methodological *solju* we identify as meaningful for women in leadership.

The inner circle of the *solju* is a Circle of values which demonstrates the fundamental values for choice of actions by women in leadership:

1. Sámevuohhta, giella ja árbi/Sáminess, Language and Heritage
2. Vuoigŋa/Spirit
3. Searvevuohhta/Collectivity

FIGURE 6.4 Conceptualization of Sámi women's leadership according to our experiences (Design by Attila Paksi, based on the *solju* design by Petteri Laiti; reproduced with permission)

4. Hutkaivuohhta/Creativity
5. Sitkatvuohhta/Resiliency

The outer circle of the *solju* is a Circle of actions:

1. Árvvusatnit ja Gudnejahttit/Appreciate and Respect
2. Sámáidahttit ja Ovddosfievriddit/Sáminize and Transfer
3. Oassálastit ja Juogádallat/Participate and Share
4. Fámuidahhtit ja Friijandahkat/Empower and Liberate
5. Ráddádallat ja Šiehtadallat/Negotiate and Conciliate
6. Birget ja Birgehallat/Manage and Be resilient

The first and the second pair of actions – appreciate and respect, and Sáminize and transfer – go through all processes of Sámi female leadership because for us Sámi leadership is based on an appreciation and respect for Sámi tradition, language and social interconnectedness. This implies the duty to base

decisions and to implement them through actions to promote and transfer what is characteristic of Sáminess.

3 *Muittašit ovttas* – Shared Remembering as a Method

The method of *muittašit ovttas* – shared remembering – is developed to collect research material and to conceptualize Sámi women's leadership. This method emerges from Sámi oral tradition and is applicable both for the gathering of information and analysis, and for the writing process. It is a non-linear and collective way of collecting information both retrospectively and with reference to the present and to reflections about the future in a holistic way. It is both a commemoration and a reflection from a present standpoint and position, when everyone complements and ponders about all matters taken in the course of shared remembering and later during the writing process.

The development of the method of shared remembering is inspired by many Indigenous scholarly contributions in which storytelling and Indigenous languages can be seen as a source and as a method (see also Chapters 2, 3 & 5). It is worth mentioning a storytelling or narrative by Margaret Kovach (2009, 56–58) and Sean Wilson (2008, 137), talking circles that represent a traditional way for Native Americans to solve problems, to remove barriers and allow people to express themselves with complete freedom by Bagele Chilisa (2012, 112–116). Through storytelling, Indigenous peoples are engaging in research that is developed by and for their communities, empowering them (storytelling as an Indigenous project, see L. Smith 1999/2012, 144–145; see Datta 2017a, 3–4, 2017b) on making a connection to a “relational way of knowing”). In the Cree context, conversation is “a cumulative analysis of the topic”:

A normal conversation between us all would naturally start off a lot of “small talk”, as that is a key to getting everyone into mutually respectful relations. It allowed us to see how the others were feeling, to express whatever was on our minds that might be distracting us and to get ourselves thinking on the same wavelength. (Wilson 2008, 99)

We got a powerful inspiration to our work from the *yarning* method, based on the Nyoongah Aboriginal tradition in Western Australia (Bessarab & Ng'andu 2010). Yarning is an Indigenous cultural form of collaborative conversation. The *yarn* is about the sharing and exchange of information between two or more people socially, or more formally as a dialogical process that is reciprocal, inclusive and mutual (Bessarab & Ng'andu 2010, 38). Yarning has been

widely applied as a research method which can be used both by Indigenous and non-Indigenous scholars (Bessarab & Ng'andu 2010; Moreton-Robinson & Walter 2009). The method of yarning circles has also been developed as a teaching and learning strategy for schoolchildren and students in Australia, to build respectful relationships, to learn together from a collective group, and to preserve and pass on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge. Dawn Bessarab and Bridget Ng'andu (2010) used yarning as a data gathering tool with one Australian Aboriginal and one Botswanian Indigenous group, thus demonstrating that yarning as a means of obtaining information has a global applicability in Indigenous contexts. The method was applied to conduct research interviews by establishing a relationship with Indigenous participants prior to gathering their stories through storytelling. Research findings demonstrate that yarning can be applied as a rigorous tool in the research process for a collaborative generating of information with a focus on the role and influence of gender during the research interview (ibid.).

Narration is a traditional Indigenous methodology globally applied to reflect experiences and strengthen community ties and togetherness (collectivity, *searvevuolta*). By means of storytelling, the Sámi made their reality comprehensible to themselves and to others in a culturally appropriate way (Hirvonen 2011, 16). Stories can serve as bridges that connect, bring alive and make memorable the experiences of the people (Chilisa 2012, 139).

The verb *muittašit* is derived from the noun *muitu* 'memory'. Memory does not appear from emptiness but from everything we have experienced (Saarenheimo 2012, 58–59), from an individual and a societal context, and from all our relations. By shared remembering we give meanings to our memories, we build specificity and construct a continuously moving "web" of events and reflections which contain single moments, experiences, feelings or knowledge which could be tied to a larger network (ibid.).

Initially and traditionally, *muittašepmi* is always a narration, it is a process that evolves and expands collectively: a person is never alone, but memorizes together with others, human and non-human beings, contemplating and envisioning issues, persons or happenings, complementing, enriching and reminding. Our method can be called "shared remembering between friends", where we could add and complement in a free, undisturbed, and respectful way each other's stories and memories (cf. Wilson 2008).

The process of remembering involves storytellers who are simultaneously also listeners with a common interest in an issue. For a productive shared remembering, relationship between participants should be safe, trustworthy, peaceful, friendly, well-intended and supportive, so that even controversies can be handled with good spirit and in a productive way. All participants

should have good background knowledge, and their own experiences or insight into others' stories and happenings. This process can be compared with autoethnography, which means that the researcher makes use of her own lived experiences. According to Seurujärvi-Kari (2012, 118–119), the researcher finds answers to the research questions that arise from her lived experiences. However, this means an interpretation of a truth rather than a quest for a truth, since truth is subjective and ambiguous, and truth is formed by the way that agents experience it (*ibid.*).

Muittašeapmi covers many time spans and levels, relations and relationships in a holistic way. The participants can connect several issues together or see an interconnectedness between issues, following a kind of a collective logics. They are in a multidimensional relationship, influencing each other and sharing the position of the “leader” of the conversation. One can start and others continue and complement a story, often relating the happening to kin, family ties, local history and Sámi history in general. This involves the above-mentioned “experience of relatedness”. *Muittašeapmi* is a product of socialization, learnt from forerunners and ancestors (Hirvonen 2011, 16, with reference to Saastamoinen 2000). The Sámi writer and a traditional knowledge-holder Johan Turi used this method in his famous book (1910/2010). *Muittašeapmi* can be compared to *yoik* – *luohti* – which for the Sámi has been a means of communication, remembering and transmission of knowledge, and at the same an attribute of identity and belonging. By the means of a *yoik* one recalls and represents something or somebody, but not talking “about” something or somebody. Thus, a *yoik* is a representation that brings memories, happenings, characters, issues, natural phenomena, and human and non-human beings alive: it is a way to remember and to commemorate (Ruong 1969/1982, 153–158). Both *muittašeapmi* and *yoik* have a powerful spiritual dimension allowing to reflect and feel a sense of breaking free from the linear concept of time. A cyclic concept of time can be explained as a constant movement from the past to the present and back again (Saarenheimo 2012, 58–59). In *muittašeapmi*, however, it is not a movement in a circle, rather it is a movement along the turns (or levels) of a spiral, thus reflecting a multidimensional understanding of the world that is peculiar to many Indigenous cultures (see Porsanger 2007, 22–23).

When memories are chosen, they shape a story; thus, forgetting is also part of remembering, both for individuals and for a people (Saarenheimo 2012, 58–59; also Ruong 1969/1982, 153–155). *Muittašeapmi* for Sámi women in leadership, is a product of collective efforts: shared remembering combines singular events into a general cultural and historical consciousness and context. This method allows to identify and to fill the gaps in presentations of Sámi

history, which are – despite the importance of Sámi women – mostly written about men and by men.

Our methodology of shared remembering (*muittašeammi*) and a holistic interconnection of values and actions in Sámi women's leadership (*solju*) is implemented in the following chapters. The material collected through the process of shared remembering is analysed and structured by the *solju* method. This allows us to enhance knowledge about Sámi women's contribution to Indigenous politics, education and academic work. References to the records of our conversations are made with the help of abbreviations of names: ISK – Irja Seurujärvi-Kari (Sofe-Ånne Irja), RLN – Ragnhild Lydia Nystad (Káre-Sámmol-Ristena Ragnhild), and JP – Jelena Porsanger (Skolt Sámi kin of the Osipovs).

4 The Circle of Values in the Methodological *solju*

Women's leadership is closely connected to the protection and promotion of language, heritage and Sáminess, which is founded on the following questions: *Geat mii leat? Gos mii leat eret?* ‘Who are we?’ ‘Where do we come from?’ *Gosa mii gullat?* ‘To which family/kin/group do we belong?’ We have experienced and learned since birth belonging and love to *sohka* ‘family and kin’ and *ruoktu* ‘place of birth’. Our Sámi names such as, for example, Káre-Sámmol-Ristena Ragnhild, having the names of several ancestors of Ragnhild, reflects the family connections and gives a strong family identity. Such interconnectedness usually differentiates Indigenous peoples from settler societies: place (both physical, environmental and social) provides identity, links the present with the past, and personal self with kinship. Indigenous knowledge often emerges from such an intertwined relation with a place, as Kovach points out: “it is a located and situated knowledge – a knowledge that is unique to a given culture or society and deeply ingrained in the Indigenous language and non-verbal communication” (Kovach 2009, 61).

In our leadership experiences, we consider our ancestors and families as leaders who guide us and assist us in carrying on the knowledge that we need for continuity and life maintenance. A detailed Sámi terminology of family relationships indicates the importance of kin and collectivity. In addition to terms based on gender, age and the succession of generations, there are also collective nouns for reciprocal relations, such as *fulkkežat* (extended family), *oappážat* (sisters), *vieljažat* (brothers), *verddežat* – persons who are not necessarily relatives but who cooperate (for example, our writing team of three women).

Family and collectivity create a sense of togetherness and strengthens the feeling of safety, security and care (Seurujärvi-Kari 2010, 85–90, 2018). *Searve-vuohta* (collectivity) has been the robust foundation of Sámi society from time immemorial, from the old *siida* society⁴ until today. In our view, the concept of *searvevuohta* corresponds with the idea of relational accountability (see Wilson 2008). In our conversations, we often had the feeling of an emerging collective spirit. This made possible the exchange of ideas, stories and memories and in-depth analysis from a Sámi perspective. The collective spirit strengthens and gives confidence, inspires collective creativity and creates the basis for generating new knowledge and launching new actions (cf. G. H. Smith 2003).

Collectivity plays an important role in politics, meaning a strong partnership with those whose way of thinking meets yours. This is especially relevant when female leaders build their networks:

ISK: ... *dovddan dan kollektiivavuodas nu ahte buot nannoseamos kollektiivavuohhta mus lei dalle Oslo rájes. Doppe lei dat sámesearvi ja de go johten Ohcejohkii lei Sámi Siida ja de lei Sámiráddi mas ledjen miellahttun. Dalle diet searvvit eai doaibman ruđa fámuin dat doibme kollektiivan daningo olbmot, ovttaskas olbmot barge oktasas barggu ... das ii oktage smiehttan lešgo das munnje ekonomalaš ávkin, smiehtai ahte mun ferten bargat, ii lean fertemisge dat bođi lunddolaččat go mii gávnnadeimmet.*

[... I think that I felt the strongest feeling of collectivity when I was in Oslo (studying) where there was a (local) Sámi association and after moving (from there) to Ohcejohka there was Sámi Siida (a local association) and after that I was elected as a member of Sámiráddi. It wasn't the power of money that ran these associations, they functioned on the basis of collectivity that is that individuals, cooperate and worked for a common cause ... nobody was thinking of their own benefits or that they must do something, but it was natural to act and meet each other (and promote Sámi issues).]

In Sámi politics, “results can be reached if you use your resources for the common collective good” as RLN said when The Norwegian Sámi Association – Norgga Sámiid Riikasearvi – was celebrating its 40-year anniversary in 2008. She continued: *Rávven nuoraid ahte unnitálbmot politihkas galgá leat kollektiiva jurdda vuodđun, muđui ii ceavzze álbmot*, “I advise young people that minority peoples” politics must be based on the idea of collectivity, otherwise people will not succeed (literally “the people will not survive”, see Helander 2008).

A spiritual core and relationality are at the heart of Indigenous leadership, “so that all of creation co-evolved in a symbiotic spiritual exchange” (Spiller,

Barclay-Kerr, & Panoho 2017; Wilson 2008, 82–96). The feeling of a collective spirit is striking when Indigenous peoples meet, both in political arenas and in Indigenous research and education (Seurujärvi-Kari 1994a). Indigenous values become visible and operative through ceremonies, prayers, yoik or other traditional actions and rituals. For the Sámi, meetings with other Indigenous nations connect us to a larger context, focusing our attention to ideas and actions which might be forgotten or have vanished in Sápmi. Sámi spirit is liberating because it awakes creativity, launches new actions and opens connections between the past and the present (Seurujärvi-Kari 1994b).

In the process of shared remembering, several challenging political and academic situations in which we acted as leaders were discussed. Leaders often face a variety of unexpected situations and are obliged to find solutions to issues and challenges they are not prepared for (see further about *birget* and *birgehallat*). For women's leadership, creativity, improvisation and resiliency are extremely important, because unequal internal power relations connected to gender influence the working environment of female leaders.

Creativity in leadership is the capacity to find solutions and involves resourcefulness, which is formed and based on the Sámi cultural heritage, social competence and the cultural, social and natural environment. Creativity in this sense differs from creative inventiveness, such as, for example, explained in the context of *duodji*, traditional Sámi handicrafts (cf. Guttorm 2011, 4–5). Woman's leadership skills come from the family in the same way as the learning of traditional activities, and in this reciprocal learning process one's learning triggers learning in others. Creativity is closely related to success and management.

Leadership includes a lot of knowledge on local histories and sustainable development, land management practices and language and – for leaders in research and education – on academic work. Long-lasting academic and political work and cooperation with other Indigenous institutions, organizations and individuals have broadened our worldview and got us to reflect and compare different points of views when finding solutions to complicated issues. A creative woman is required to have visionary skills to make decisions which are meant to strengthen not weaken the situation.

In the Indigenous context resiliency and creativity are values with which Indigenous people have managed and survived in the processes of colonization, assimilation, and discrimination. The term resiliency involves “encompassing processes of risk and vulnerability, growth and transformation, culture and community, social structure and personality, and power and agency” (Kirmayer & Bhugra 2009, 2). The notion is part of conceptual thinking about the ecosystem and is especially applicable to Indigenous communities (*ibid.*).

The concept and term resilience usually refer to the capacity to recover from, or adapt to, difficulties (Akearok et al. 2019, 1). Resiliency in our view is a characteristic of Sámi women's value and the ability to perform her leadership actions.

For the Sámi and many other Indigenous peoples, individual resiliency is linked to the resiliency of the community. It might be for that reason that this value appears in the Sámi national anthem as resilient Sámi kin – who resist oppressors without giving up, in a resilient and strong way, *sitkatvuodain* (Sámi *Soga Lávlá* by Isak Saba, 1906).

5 The Circle of Actions in the Methodological solju

5.1 *Oassálastit ja juogádallat, 'Participate and Share'*

Gender equality issues have not been publicly visible in Sámi politics until Sámi women's organizations and commissions were founded in the middle of the 1980s. In the background, one can see the emerging of the international women's movement starting from the middle of the 19th century, getting stronger as late as in the 1960s and 1970s at the same time as Indigenous and other ethnic movements. These international and national processes and especially the United Nations International Women's Year (1975) revealed that Indigenous women can experience multiple subjugation in society, first because of gender and secondly on account of ethnicity.

Particularly since the mid-80s the Sámi movement has focused primarily on nation building, identity and collectivity (Ledman 2012, 100), aiming to assemble and promote the whole nation and not to differentiate into classes or groups according to gender or any other criteria. The main objective was to get the Sámi recognized as a people with a right to self-determination and the right to form their own institutions to maintain and promote their culture and language. In this process gender equality issues were left outside the agenda. Although women were actively involved in politics and in institutional building, men mainly acted as leaders of the Sámi organizations, e.g. in Norway in 1986 only three of the sixteen leaders in the Sámi leadership positions were women (Eikjok 2007; Kuokkanen 2007; Stordahl 1990, 7). Even in reports from the first decade of the 21st century (e.g. Lehtola 2005; Rantala 2004), Sámi political history is dealt with mostly from a masculine point of view and through men's actions, whereas women's rights, actions and influence in political decision-making are almost totally ignored (Hirvonen 2006, 55). These representations reflect inequality not only in politics but also in the whole society. In Sámi decision-making, women's issues have often been rejected

since gender has been regarded as an issue which causes splits and slows down the process of Sámi self-determination (see Eikjok 2007; Ottar 1990). According to our discussion material, it is obvious that in Sámi organizations women have been under-represented until today.

In the 1970s and 1980s there was not much talk about feminism among the Sámi, although worldwide gender equality became institutionalized and evolved into its own domain. As a result, women began to gain greater influence in society; the focus of the women's rights movement was on legal and social equality (Hirvonen 2006, 57–60; Ledman 2012, 82). National laws on equality (e.g. in Norway in 1979) have contributed to the increasing participation of women in politics. Also, the international cooperation of Indigenous women has offered new political and cultural resources to strengthen Indigenous women's identity, and to recognize the many-sided oppressions experienced by women (Greene 2007, 30).

The 1980s mark the start of the empowering and emancipation of Sámi women from colonial and patriarchal practices and unequal gender positions (Eikjok 2007, 117; 1990, 15–21; Ottar 1990). One of the reasons for women to join politics was their concern about the transmission of the cultural heritage to the coming generations. In the Sámi political discourse of that time, these issues were defined as soft rights (*dipma vuoigatvuodat*) in contrast to so-called hard rights (*garra vuoigatvuodat*), which included the economy, the means of traditional livelihood, land and water rights.⁵ Through the establishment of women's associations, Sámi women gained support from other Indigenous women and also from the majority women's rights movement. Sámi artist organizations also emerged at that time actively entering the Sámi political discussions by means of the arts; it is significant that in the Sámi artist organizations women and men were equally represented (Hansen 2007, 45–72; Hirvonen 1995, 1998/2010).

In Sámi politics, Elsa Laula Renberg (1877–1931) is regarded as the pioneer of the Sámi movement. She was ahead of her time by founding the first Sámi women's organization *Brurskanken Sámske Kvindeforening* as early as in 1910 (see Laula 1904). However, our discussion material reveals that her role and significance was little known before the 1980s, when the Sámi Council began to design the Sámi national symbols, such as a flag and flag days, and inaugurated the celebration of the Sámi national day and the national anthem in the 1980s and 1990s. After Elsa Laula's time, the progress of Sámi women's issues and gender equality was slow up until the 1970s and 1980s. Then, Sámi women started to address gender issues by organizing large-scale seminars on women's current position: in Kiruna, Sweden in 1975, in Kárášjohka, Norway in 1978, and in 1982 and 1985, organized by the Sámi Council (Seurujärvi-Kari 2005,

434–436). These events promoted the position of Sámi women in traditional occupations and the general job market (Eikjok 1990; Kuokkanen 2009, 2011a).

In 1986, the first Sámi Women's Commission of the Sámi Council was founded; this Commission together with Sáráhkka, the Sámi women's organization founded in 1988 and Sámi Nisson Forum (Sámi Women's Forum, 1993) started to promote women's political and cultural rights and gender equality in Sámi society. The aims of the organizations were to focus on the position and role of Sámi women in society, and to promote women's awareness of their current and future position to change social conditions so that women would be legally guaranteed equal rights with men. Women's visibility was to be increased, and it was considered important to promote cooperation with other Indigenous peoples and women's organizations (Sará 1990, 47–55). Sámi women from Russia joined the association in large numbers. Compared with the Sámi in the Nordic countries, the Sámi in Russia⁶ have been in a much more difficult political situation, and hence Sámi women in Russia have actively sought support and cooperation with Scandinavian Sámi. However, it is worth mentioning, that Sámi women were leading the process of establishment of two Sámi organizations in Russia (in 1989 and 1998), and since then have dominated the leadership positions (Porsanger 1995; Rantala 2005, 164–165).

Sámi women's efforts have resulted in today's situation, where female leadership is recognized in Sámi organizations, institutions and politics, although gender equality is still seldom discussed (Kuokkanen 2011b; Seurujärvi-Kari 1995, 85–87).

5.2 *Fámuidahhtit ja friijandahkat, 'Empower and Emancipate'*

By establishing their own organizations, and sharing their concerns and visions, the Sámi women have been empowered and emancipated. In doing this, Sámi female leaders were empowered by their close kinship relations. A woman's relations and connectedness within her family includes a common history and a joint understanding of the issues and challenges of leadership. Our families passed on leadership knowledge through cyclical learning processes. Women in our families used their life-experiences and stories as an active channel for learning from each other. The concept of experience enhanced our understanding of the relationship between experience and learning to engage in self-directed transformation and change.

RLN remembers that she learned about her rights as a woman from her family:

De lei mannan máyga historjjá Norggas ja birra máilmmi muhto dat gii mu oahpahii dan nisson friijavuhtii ja fápmui, dat leat eadni ja áhčči dat

FIGURE 6.5
The Sámi representatives at the First Summit of Indigenous peoples, organized by Rigoberta Menchú Tum in Chimaltenango, Guatemala in 1993: Lars-Anders Bær, Pekka Aikio, Ole Henrik Magga, and Jelena Porsanger (Personal archive of Jelena Porsanger)

lei sáhka das ahte ferte oahpu váldit daningo oahppu addá buoret juolggi boahhteáigái ja friddjavuhtii.

[There have been many histories in Norway and in the world, but it was my father and mother who taught us woman's emancipation and power.]

In our conversations, it was emphasized that meetings with other Indigenous women had been the most empowering and emancipating experiences. JP reflects on her collaboration with the Maori in Aotearoa:

Sis lea kollektiivavuohtha hui nanus. Sis ii leat individulisma mii mis sámiiin lea dál hui garas ... mo sii jurddasit bearraša, iežaset gaskavuodas sii eai jurddaš ovttaskas olmmožin, álo hállat ovttas ja dan sii leat álo hállan ahte muitte, nanavuoda oažžu iežas olbmuid luhtte. Ja dat lea nu duohta go sáhhtá.

[They have a strong sense of collectivity. They don't have the individualism that we Sámi today have come to adhere to too much. That's how Maori think about the family and relationships, they don't think of

individual persons, they always talk as a group. They always said to me: you find strength only with your own people. It's as true as it can be.]

The worldwide women's struggle for gender equality and women's status have empowered Sámi female leaders and opened up venues to participate in international politics. It took decades, even a century, to make more precise provisions on gender equality such as *The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women* (1981). Finally, women's rights were recognized as human rights. Indigenous women took part in many UN World Conferences during 1975–1995, for example, the UN World Conference on Human Rights in 1993 in Vienna, which led to one of the major achievements of the establishment of a High Commissioner for Human Rights to coordinate and supervise the Centre for Human Rights (Pietilä & Vickers 1994, 117–131). Sámi women were also actively involved in planning and implementing, for example, the UN Indigenous Year (1993) and Decade (1994–2004), the UN Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro (1992), the UN World Conference on Women in Beijing (1995), the Permanent Forum for Indigenous Peoples (2002) and the UN Declaration on Indigenous Rights (2007). The WCIP Women's General Conference (1993) in Guatemala was one of the worldwide series of meetings that were held prior to the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing (1995). ISK memorizes that the practical organization of the WCIP Women's General Conference was carried out by the female members of the WCIP Board. The conference adopted a plan of action with the aim of enhancing the opportunities for women to participate in decision-making. The main achievements of this Conference were, first, that for the first time a woman, Noeli Pocater, a representative of the Wayuu people from Venezuela, was elected Vice-President of the WCIP. Secondly, the women's commission and network were founded.

The Beijing Conference adopted the *Declaration of Indigenous Women*, which demanded the national states to promote and reinforce the rights of Indigenous women, including the right to participate in decision-making at different levels of society.

Women as leaders have played an important role in Indigenous Sámi higher education, for example more than half of the leaders of *Sámi allaskuvla* (now the Sámi University of Applied Science) since 1989 have been women. Joining the World Indigenous Higher Education Consortium (WINHEC) at the beginning of the 2000s, was one of the most empowering and liberating actions *Sámi allaskuvla* has taken since its establishment (see Porsanger 2018). This was one of the strategies of securing knowledge guardianship and creating Indigenous academic space, reclaiming equity definitions and changing the

status quo in favour of a small Sámi language tertiary institution in the context of Norwegian higher education (ibid.). Close connections and collaboration with other Indigenous institutions allowed all parts to focus on issues important in a collective sense, seen from an Indigenous point of view. In this process, both women and men were equally involved, but it has been obvious that especially the Indigenous and Sámi women in WINHEC were the keepers of the good spirit.

5.3 *Ráddádallat ja šiehtadallat, ‘Negotiate and Conciliate’*

Since the beginning of the Sámi movement, negotiation and conciliation have been important parts of the political strategy to promote Sámi rights and positions especially with authorities (Seurujärvi-Kari & Virtanen 2019). Negotiations imply the ability to make compromises, as JP says:

Fertet leat čeahpit kompromissaid váldit ja de viimmát beassat dasa ahte kollektiivavuhta, searvevuhta lea okta sámi árvu.

[We must be smart to make compromises and to get to that situation where collectivity, interconnectedness is one Sámi value.]

Collectivity and good spirit have been important for the formation of Sámi political, cultural and academic institutions and organizations. However, reflecting on her experiences as the Rector of Sámi University College, JP pondered about a need to be resilient and strong under collective political pressure. Finding solutions to educational and academic challenges and controversies might get difficult especially for female academic leaders, who are most likely to be left alone, if a part of the academic circles collectively sets a political agenda to control and dismiss research results, as was the case in 2013. According to JP, in these controversies she needs to build her actions on a different set of values, balancing between collective pressure and academic integrity, called *fágalaš integritehta* by RLN in this case in our conversations. In this matter, political and academic leadership are not entirely compatible.

RLN also deepens the ability to make compromises and negotiate:

Lei dárbu leat idealista ja de sáhtá leat nu ahte gávnnat dan barggus dan mii lea realisma ja dat lea justa dat ahte soabadit ja gávdnat čovdosiid, fertet dalle geahččát maid mun, gokko mun sáhtán miehtat ja gokko in dárbbas miehtat ... don fertet ovttó miehtat ja ovttó figgat gávdnat dakkár oktasas čovdosiid. Ja diekko bokte mii oruimet čeahpit dasa mo geahččalit gávdnat čovdosiid veikk’al ii lean álo dat buoremus oppalohkai muhto don fertejit gávdnat juoidá kompromissaid.

[I had a big need to be an idealist. Then it could be that you might find some practical issue in your work, then you have to compromise and find a solution, and you have to look at where you can give up and where you don't have to retreat. When no common solutions are found, you should always assent and try to find satisfactory solutions. On that point, we seemed to be much better, although the solutions were not always the best, but you had to find something which helped you reach a compromise.]

When we were talking about negotiation and conciliation issues, we wondered whether *fámostallan*, 'the exercise of power' is specific to men only. According to RLN, women in leadership do exercise power to achieve equality:

Diet lea dat dásseárvu ahte fertet ovtto muitit dan ahte dat ii ollašuvva ovt-tatmánu, ja dan fertet don čádat rahčat bealuštit dan dásseárvvu ...

FIGURE 6.6 Establishment of the Sámi Parliamentary Council, the co-operational body for Sámi Parliaments in Finland (F), Norway (N) and Sweden (S), the Sami from the Kola Peninsula, Russia (R), as observers, March 2, 2000 in Kárášjohka/Karasjok, Norway (Personal archive of Irja Seurujärvi-Kari)⁷

[This is what equality is about, that you have to always remember that it doesn't happen at once, but you need to struggle all the time to defend equality between people.

5.4 *Birget ja birgehallat, 'Manage and Be Resilient'*

There are many challenges to leadership, and female leaders are obliged to use all possible resources, but it is important to succeed without losing integrity and confidence. The actions of managing and being resilient are closely related to the Sámi concept of *birgejupmi* ('maintaining a livelihood'), which relates to values, to the sustainable use of resources, and to the social network; it binds people and communities, the landscape and the natural environment, social and spiritual development, and identity (Porsanger & Guttorm 2011, 21–22). In leadership, as in traditional livelihoods know-how skills, resourcefulness, reflexivity and professional and social competence are needed.

Leadership includes considerable knowledge about local histories, land management practices and language in addition to academic work. In our experiences, female leaders often have to cope alone when faced with difficult situations, often without almost any political or any other support. It is often the case that female leaders are left alone when contradictions become increasingly demanding. In these situations, resiliency and creativity are needed. During their political and private lives female leaders must learn to act fairly both with respect to collective and individual integrities, including their own.

We shared memories about negotiations that were successful and about those which failed. RLN remembers an important meeting in the establishment of the Barents Region in 1993, when the nation states and the representatives of the provinces in the Barents region were signing The Kirkenes Declaration. Unfortunately, there was nothing in the Declaration text about Indigenous peoples. RLN was sent to the meeting by the Sámi Council, which, however, was not knowledgeable about the whole process of negotiations and signing the treaty. It was unclear at that time what Sámi institutions were eligible representatives of the Sámi people in this signing process. She was required to sign the Declaration on behalf of all the Sámi, given contradictory advice by some of the Sámi politicians in the meeting “to find a solution by herself” or not sign at all:

RLN: *Ja de ledje nu ollu olbmot doppe'... Mun gávdnen čovdosa go ledjen smiehttan sáhttago Sámiráddi vuolláičállit traktáhta Norgga Sámedikki ja Suoma Sámi Parlamentta ovddas ja mearridin: ii sáhte. Danin čállen gaskaboddosaš vuolláičállin. Stoltenberg (Norgga stáhtaminister) rábmui mu ja dajai dokumenta lea mannan miehtá máilmmi. Ledjen čállán*

golmma gillii dan ahte dat lea gaskaboddosaš vuolláičállin. Dien láhkai čovden dan ášši. Goal dat lei juo issoras dat.

[There were a lot of people there ... I had time to think, and then an idea came to my mind that I couldn't sign on behalf of the Sámi Parliaments of Norway and The Sámi delegation of Finland. Then I decided to put an interim signature. Stoltenberg (the Prime Minister of Norway) was pleased and said the Declaration has already been published all over the world. I had written in three languages that this is an interim signature. This was the way I found the solution. I felt a sense of excitement.]

We shared memories about negotiations that failed. For the World Council of Indigenous Peoples (WCIP) conference in Tromsø in 1990, the Sámi Council nominated a Sámi candidate as President of WCIP. The Sámi were members of the WCIP under the auspices of the Sámi Council. RLN (as the leader of the biggest Sámi national organization, *Norgga Sámiid Riikkasearvi* in Norway, the third author) and ISK (as the leader of the Finnish Sámi delegation, the member of the organizing committee of WCIP General Assembly and the Indigenous women's seminar, which was a parallel event in Tromsø, the second author) were keeping the decision. For them, a significant question in politics relates to confidence, in particular keeping to decisions that were jointly approved earlier. However, a small group of Sámi representatives did not keep the decision of the Sámi Council, and made a new nomination directly in the meeting. The result of this contradiction was that no Sámi was elected as President although the Sámi had played a central role in the activities of the organization throughout its existence. This failure of the Sámi was widely reported, including in the Sámi media (see ČSV 1990 – Sámiš mánedsmagasín).

In Sámi political struggles for participation in international politics Indigenous women's networks were often a success factor for Sámi women in leadership. ISK tells about an annual meeting of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous issues that she attended in the late 2000s, which had Indigenous languages as the main topic. As Vice-president of the Sámi Parliament of Finland, she was officially representing the Finnish Sámi. Although she did not get a seat at the official delegation table, the female leader of the Permanent Forum Victoria Tauli-Corpuz was knowledgeable about ISK's political position and gave her the floor to present as an accredited conference participant. ISK proposed a new international instrument on linguistic human rights to protect and promote Indigenous languages. This proposal was accepted by the Permanent Forum:

ISK: Bergen guokte evttohusa vuosttas álgoálbmogiid gielaide soahpamušas ja dan várás moniterenortnega ceggemis ja nubbin riikkaidgaskasaš álgoál-

bmogiid giellajagis. Gielalaš diversitehta dovddasteami dihte dárbbášuvvo oddá gaskariikkalaš instrumenta suodjalit ja ovddidit álgoálbmotgielaid. Dát oddá gaskariikkalaš instrumenta, mii guoská álgoálbmotgielaid, galgá sisttisdoallat nana čuovvunmekanismma. Erenoamáš bargojovku dán odda instrumentta ollašuhttima várás galgá maid vuodduduvvot Permanent Foruma vuollái.

[I made two recommendations, first about a new international instrument on Indigenous languages that should include a strong monitoring mechanism. Second about the international year of Indigenous languages. In recognition of the linguistic diversity, a new international instrument on linguistic human rights is needed to protect and promote Indigenous languages. A special working group on monitoring should be established under the Permanent Forum.]

This example shows the significance of the Indigenous women’ network, which supports its members to manage and to be resilient – *birgehalla* – within the unequal power relations. This also shows that in Indigenous women’s networks emancipation and mutual support, relationality, creativity, trust, and keeping to collectively agreed decisions put forward crucial Indigenous issues related to the life maintenance of Indigenous peoples, *birgejumi*.

6 Conclusion

A research methodology proposed in this chapter is applied to explore and analyse the role of female leaders and specific features in their leadership from the perspective of Sámi women. Our methodology acknowledges research based on the Sámi way of thinking and language, our shared philosophies, close relationships between collective and individual level, actions and meanings. The methodology consists of a method of shared remembering (*muittašit ovttas*) for gathering of information, and a relational *solju* method for analysis, structuring and presentation of the research material. Collecting of information by the method of shared remembering has revealed the interconnections between values and actions of Sámi women in leadership. The *solju* method allows to present and scrutinize the material collected by our shared remembering in a relational and holistic manner based on Sámi epistemology, ontology and value system. The process of shared remembering and the holistic analysis are two integral parts of a transforming and empowering research practice that connects the physical, emotional, historical and cultural dimensions together. This methodology makes “theory talk”: theory becomes part of the conversation.

Shared remembering is used as an inspirational and productive social act. An understanding of memory requires sharing stories in a way that avoids essentializing the problems and issues of cultural conceptions, including issues related to women's leadership in Sámi society. For those involved in a research project, the method of shared remembering is reflexive, responsible and respectful. It allows researchers to produce knowledge in a collective research journey in which the participants together visit places and topics of interest that are relevant to them. The *solju* method utilizes an Indigenous language both as a tool of communication, and as a theoretical starting point for understanding and representing Indigenous knowledge. The use of Sámi in the discussion and writing process resulted in identifying many Sámi concepts used as analytical tools. One of the most crucial concepts is *searvevuohhta*, which we identified as a Sámi equivalent to Wilson's (2008) concept of relational accountability. In our opinion, the methodology of *solju* and shared remembering can be applied to other research projects for collection and analysis of empirical material, regardless of gendering, in various Sámi and other Indigenous contexts.

Our methodology aims at involving Indigenous people in the research process as experts in their tradition and sources of knowledge, especially by means of Indigenous languages and conceptual worlds that are largely inaccessible from an outside perspective. This chapter is a contribution to Indigenous methods of collaborative writing. This method articulates that our stories are our theories and methods. Stories inspire us to overcome imagined barriers. They can act as bridges that connect our histories, our senses, our practices and values. For research purposes, they connect us to Indigenous theories of knowledge.

Notes

- 1 "The tundra ptarmigan – Is flying – Lei-lo-lo – You try to take (from me) everything – You can take everything – But the dignity though – You are not able to take". Joatikka Elle is a Sámi woman, whose yoik is well known and often performed.
- 2 Oral communication with Sámi silversmith Petteri Laiti, Ásllat Mihku Petter, December 2018.
- 3 Compare to Graham Smith (2003), who discusses the conceptualization of transformative processes as a circle which can be entered at any point in the circle.
- 4 Siida is the central concept of traditional Sámi social structure, a term for a social grouping consisting of interrelated families with common livelihoods and territories (Joona 2005, 187–189, Porsanger 2007, 109; Sara 2009, 157–158). *Siida* society was guided by commonly held values of shared responsibility, equality and support for disadvantaged members.

- 5 Here one can see a parallel to gender relations peculiar to the same historical period in the field of duodji 'handicrafts', where 'soft' handicraft (sewing, decoration, skin work, etc.) were defined as woman's work, whereas 'hard' handicraft (wood, bone, horn, metal, etc.) were men's domain. Furthermore, hard handicraft was often designated as albma duodji 'real handicraft' (Hansen 2007, 90, see also Guttorm 2005, 74–77).
- 6 In this chapter, we deliberately avoid the use of the designation "Russian Sámi", because it is only meaningful as a generalized political term referring to the Sámi people living in Russia, whereas there are in actuality four minority Sámi groups with their distinctive language varieties.
- 7 From the 1st row from the front from the left to the right: Pekka Aikio (F), Svein Roald Nystø (N), Lars Anders Baer (S), Irja Seurujärvi-Kari (F), Juhani Magga (F). From the 2nd row from the left to the right: Jørn Are Gaski (N), Nina Afanasjeva (R), Sigrid Stångberg (S), Valborg Niia (S), Ilmari Tapiola (F). From the 3rd row from the left to the right: Steinar Pedersen (N), Eva Jejlid (S), Ragnhild Lydia Nystad (N), Lars Wilhem Svonni (S), Bengt Sevå (S), Per Mikael Utsi (S), Per Solli (N), The back row, from the left to the right: Ann Mari Thomasson (N), Aleksander Kobelev (R), Jon Erland Balto (N), Petteri Laiti (F).

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