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On intersections and differences between Finno-Ugric and Indigenous studies

Many Finno-Ugric peoples self-identify as Indigenous, and some have official Indigenous status in the respective countries or regions. Indigenous studies is an emergent field that focuses not only on the cultures, languages, and historical and contemporary experiences of Indigenous peoples, but, among other things, also aims to incorporate and represent Indigenous knowledge systems in research and academic settings. The Saami, whose traditional languages belong to the Uralic language family, have been particularly well-represented in Indigenous studies. This representation includes not only the coverage of Saami-related themes but also the presence and leadership of Saami researchers in the field.

Finno-Ugric studies have historically been dominated by linguistic, literary, folklore, religious, historical, and, to some extent, archeological research. These same disciplines are also well-represented in Indigenous studies. However, there are significant epistemological, methodological, and ethical differences between two fields. These differences include motivations for the choice of topics (what interests the researcher vs. what the community needs), varying onto-epistemological foundations of research (objectivity vs. relationality), researcher-community relations before, during, and after research projects, approaches to researcher's positionality, representation of researchers originated in the communities, and even differences in writing style.

The present contribution is inspired by my own personal and academic experiences. I was born in Syktyvkar, Komi Republic, into a Komi-Russian family. Throughout my childhood and youth, Finno-Ugric matters were in one way or another constantly present around me, primarily through my mother. Firstly, because of her being a lecturer and later the dean of the Finno-Ugric Faculty at the Syktyvkar State University, and later, through her participation in the activities of Komi Voityr, the Komi representative movement. Academically, in my own doctoral dissertation, I analyze experiences of urban Komi residents, their belonging and place-making in urban areas. Institutionally, I am affiliated with the research group in Indigenous studies at the University of Helsinki.

Somewhat ironically, at the University of Helsinki, Indigenous studies fall under the Department of Finnish, Finno-Ugric and Scandinavian studies. The reason behind it is that the pioneers of Indigenous studies group were Saami researchers. In 2015, the contemporary Global Indigenous

studies group was formalized, uniting Indigenous and non-Indigenous researchers, who are active in the variety of regional and national contexts.

In my contribution, I thus aim to address the following questions: 1) What can Finno-Ugric and Indigenous studies learn from each other? 2) How can scholars be more reflective and attentive to ethical and methodological choices when conducting research with Finno-Ugric groups?