The Art of Change: Decolonization and Gendered Indigenous Environmental Artivism in Works by Elle-Máijá Tailfeathers and Ann-Helén Laestadius

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Abstract

Elle-Máijá Tailfeathers and Ann-Helén Laestadius define themselves neither as environmentalists nor activists, although their artworks critically reflect on and actively engage with the complex issues of Indigenous environmental justice and the gendered struggle against multiple forms of colonial and extractive violence. Using confrontational aesthetic strategies and building on human-place relations, they create transition discourses and counter the neoliberalism of Euro-Western politico-economic elites in post-democratic societies. They employ Indigenous worldviews and relational ontologies as creative forms of "imagining otherwise" for living well with Earth. This article proposes to apply the cross-genre category of artivist works to Tailfeathers's experimental adult short film *Bloodland* and Laestadius's young adult novels *Tio över ett* [Ten past one] and *Inte längre min* [No longer mine], and argues for understanding these works as artivism.

Keywords: Indigenous environmental justice, artivism, decolonization, Elle-Máijá Tailfeathers, Ann-Helén Laestadius.

Resumen

Elle-Máijá Tailfeathers y Ann-Helén Laestadius no se definen a sí mismas como ecologistas ni activistas pese a que sus obras de arte manifiestan una reflexión crítica y un activo compromiso con las complejas cuestiones de la justicia medioambiental indígena y la lucha de género contra múltiples formas de violencia colonial y extractiva. Utilizando estrategias estéticas de confrontación y partiendo de las relaciones entre humanos y lugares, crean discursos de transición y se posicionan contra el neoliberalismo de las élites político-económicas euroccidentales en las sociedades posdemocráticas. Emplean cosmovisiones indígenas y ontologías relacionales como formas creativas de "imaginar de otro modo" para vivir bien con la Tierra. Este artículo propone aplicar la categoría intergenérica de obras artivistas al cortometraje experimental para adultos *Bloodland*, de Tailfeathers, y a las novelas para jóvenes adultos *Tio över ett* [La una y diez] e *Inte längre min* [Ya no es mío], de Laestadius, y aboga por entender estas obras como artivismo.

Palabras clave: Justicia medioambiental indígena, artivismo, descolonización, Elle-Máijá Tailfeathers, Ann-Helén Laestadius.

Empowering Energies: Resource Conflicts and Indigenous Sovereignty

Indigenous environmental justice is an intersectional issue, shaped by multifaceted colonial, gendered, social, and political challenges. Examples from North America and Northern Europe illustrate how both extractive industries and their mitigation technologies—such as Carbon Capture and Storage (CCS)—as well as renewable energies such as wind turbines and hydroelectric facilities, continue to have devastating impacts on Indigenous cultures and livelihoods. These developments often prioritize extractive projects over Indigenous rights, marginalize Indigenous knowledges, and reveal the shortcomings of current practices to meaningfully include Indigenous communities in equal decision-making processes. Such systemic exclusions undermine Indigenous sovereignty, hinder just transformations, and ultimately underscore the need for decolonial approaches that address power imbalances and center Indigenous-led futures (see Westman; Alexander and Stanley; Raitio and Larsen; Skogvang).

The highly prominent Alta Dam Conflict, lasting in Norway from approximately 1970 to 1982 (Berg-Nordlie and Tvedt), illustrates—from Jensen's and Valaker's non-Indigenous, Euro-Western perspective—how social movement communication, as practiced by Indigenous Sámi and environmental activists, can function as a disruptive democratic innovation by enabling marginalized groups to mobilize resources and rhetoric that facilitate constitutional transformation and reshape power imbalances in democratic processes (Jensen and Valaker 87, 89, 92–93, 107–109). However, as, for instance, the case of the Fosen wind park shows (Skogvang), although democratic systems and disruptive interventions of democratic systems exist, cases like Alta repeat themselves, not only in Sápmi but all over the globe. Some Indigenous scholars regard Euro-Western liberal democracy as a colonial imposition that is incompatible with Indigenous governance systems and values (Alfred 45, 62–63). They even critique the assimilative dangers of certain deliberative democratic models, which uphold settler colonialism whose politics of recognition and accommodation undermine the "grounded normativity" of Indigenous sovereignty (Coulthard 13–14, 79–83, 102; Simpson 22–25). Regarding environmental justice, Dina Gilio-Whitaker (Colville confederated Tribes) criticizes "a form of democracy where justice is framed by principles embedded in a capitalist system" which means that "justice is presumed to follow a distributive model" (22).

The dynamics at play in the above-mentioned environmental justice issues and the critique of democracy through an Indigenous lens align to a certain degree with British political scientist and sociologist Colin Crouch's concept of post-democracy, particularly the idea that, while formal democratic structures remain intact, they are weakening as their effectiveness is increasingly undermined by economic globalization. This development diminishes public engagement and leads to policy decisions heavily influenced by elite interests rather than broad democratic participation (1–3, 6–7). While Crouch leaves out the role of art when implicitly supporting agonistic democracy's calls for revitalizing democratic conflict, pluralism, and contestation, Belgian political philosopher Chantal Mouffe explicitly focuses on "aesthetic resistance" (53) and "counter-hegemonic practices" (55), art's political and agonist democratic engagement, arguing that art can function as a form of activism

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while political activism can incorporate artistic methods. She highlights art's capacity to challenge prevailing narratives and promote democratic participation, advocating for a reciprocal interaction where art and politics mutually influence and strengthen each other (55–57). However, neither Crouch nor Mouffe engage with Indigenous artists, arts, and scholars and their roles in contesting the limitations of Euro-Western democracies.[1]

Indigenous feminism confronts colonial systems that obstruct Indigenous self-determination, exposing intersecting forms of oppression. It foregrounds Indigenous women's participation and leadership in decision-making. By advancing justice across gender, race, class, and sexuality, Indigenous feminism fosters more inclusive and equitable political practices (McGregor, "Indigenous Feminism" 113–16). Therefore, this analysis focuses on female Indigenous artists in articulating gendered critiques of Euro-Western political systems in the context of environmental justice, explored through the close examination of selected artistic works.

With this article, the author, a European, German, female scholar of Literary and Cultural Studies—with Scandinavian Studies being her discipline of origin—continues an ongoing series of contributions to global Trans-Indigenous Studies (Egerer "Afro-Swedish;" "Exploring;" "Facing;" "Reframing;" "Teasing"): Applying trans-Indigenous methodologies as introduced and practiced by Chickasaw scholar Chadwick Allen ("Decolonizing;" "Trans-Indigenous Lens;" "Trans-Indigenous Methodologies") encourages the juxtaposition and reciprocal illumination of diverse Indigenous works of art, including literary texts of various genres, oral narratives, sculptures, films, and paintings, as well as heterogeneous cultural expressions such as Indigenous philosophies and worldviews. Combined with Indigenous as well as non-Indigenous theoretical frameworks, these methodologies open up new perspectives on diverse works of art and enable the articulation and engagement of interdisciplinary Indigenous knowledges beyond the constraints of dominant Euro-Western academic frameworks, such as boundaries of disciplines and established genre classifications. Focusing on selected Indigenous works of art that engage complex discourses of gendered Indigenous environmental justice, this analysis turns toward concepts rooted in Indigenous cultures.

The creative works studied position themselves toward two extractive industries: fracking on Indigenous lands in Alberta, Canada, and iron ore as well as rare earth mining in the Swedish part of Sápmi. The analysis proceeds by first introducing the Indigenous artists, followed by a discussion of relevant conceptual and sociopolitical contexts before visiting the respective creative works and turning to their closer reading.[2] In alignment with an Indigenous mode of relational and circular understanding, the conclusion reflects on the teachings gifted by these

[1] With Mouffe's exception of stating her admiration for Indigenous peoples' environmental and climate change knowledges in a 2023 interview published by Universitetet i Agder, Norway. Mouffe is obviously not inspired through interaction and collaboration with Indigenous peoples but by reading French anthropologist's Philippe Descola's works (Machin).

[2] On the ethically engaged method of visiting Indigenous stories and the notion that "[v]isiting as a mode of reading is an antidote to the all-too-common practice of extractive criticism" see Métis scholar Warren Cariou (10).

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Indigenous works and, to engage in anticolonial environmental justice, respectfully outlines their implications for non-Indigenous contexts.

Artists' Responses to Extractive Industries: Fracking and Mining

"Write letters. Contact every level of government and exercise your democratic rights" (Chiu) Blackfoot and Sámi filmmaker Elle-Máijá Tailfeathers recommended when asked about how to deal with extractive industries. With *Bloodland* (2011), an experimental short film, Tailfeathers intended "to get people thinking of the impact of gas and oil extraction overall" (Chiu). *Bloodland* was accepted into several film festivals in North America and Northern Europe (Bonar) and featured at Berlinale Talents in 2013 (KBB). In a 2014 public lecture, Tailfeathers defined her position toward extractive industries in a self-identifying statement: "I am not an environmentalist, and that's because I'm a proud Blackfoot and Sámi woman who is fighting an Indigenous struggle which is inherently tied to struggles for the land. And that struggle for the land is gendered, too" ("Frack Off" 00:43–01:05). Rejecting any simplifying cliché, Tailfeathers refuses to analogize Indigenous women's relationality to the land with environmentalists' commitment. Indigenous relationality to the land is deeply connected to the respective Indigenous cultures, epistemologies, ontologies, and cosmologies of being in a place or even being a place: Unangax̂ (Aleut) scholar Eve Tuck and co-author K. Wayne Yang argue, that genuine decolonization requires the repatriation of Indigenous land. They critique settler colonialism's "moves to innocence," such as reconciliation, which render decolonization as a metaphor for social justice or human and civil rights-based approaches, which, however, are structurally incompatible and incommensurable with Indigenous sovereignty and worldviews. Rather, they favour recognizing the material, transformative, and unsettling demands of decolonization, rooted in Indigenous futures and land rights. They also point out that decolonization insists on a radical reordering of the world that exceeds rights-based frameworks like democracy and their elision with justice (3, 9–19, 25, 28, 35–36). Tailfeathers's statement evokes these entangled complexities of decolonization, Indigenous feminism, and environmental justice.

Swedish Sámi author and journalist Ann-Helén Laestadius, who also is of minority Tornedalian[3] descent, likewise touches on these complexities in her two award-winning young adult novels *Ten past one*[4] and its sequel *No longer mine*[5] about experiencing relocation to make way for extractive industries (*Augustpriset*, *Norrlands Litteraturpris*).[6] To Laestadius, writing books for young adults means creating spaces of empowerment and imagining different futures as well as coming to terms with her own history and life experience (Rydell). In an interview addressing environmental and social justice struggles in Sápmi, the traditional territory of the

[3] Tornedalians are a Meänkieli-speaking ethnic and linguistic minority group of Finns in northern Sweden, particularly in the Torne River region, officially recognized as a minority by the Swedish Government in 2000 (Lipott).
[4] *Tio över ett*, 2016.
[5] *Inte längre min*, 2018.
[6] Hitherto, neither *Tio över ett* nor *Inte längre min* have been translated into English. All translations from Swedish to English are provided by the author of this article.

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Sámi people that today includes northern parts of Norway, Sweden, Finland, and the Russian Kola Peninsula, Laestadius self-identifies as follows: "I am not an activist, I am a writer hoping to arouse emotions in others." She explains:

> I have a strong sense of what is right and wrong, and I am driven towards injustice and getting justice done. And often that doesn't work out and writing literature is then a good outlet for me. That is where I can let my frustrations loose and put a finger on what is unacceptable. (UNRIC and Laestadius)

By employing analogous and comparable aesthetic strategies—such as confronting audiences with the colonial, physical, psychic, gendered, and social harms of exploitative extraction and evoking transformative responses by engaging audiences on an affective level and holding them accountable as witnesses—Tailfeathers's and Laestadius's artistic works critically engage with the issues surrounding extractive industries on Indigenous lands. From a Trans-Indigenous perspective, this raises the question of whether a conceptual category beyond the ex-negative designations of "not an environmentalist" and "not an activist" might more adequately account for the positions, creative practices, and artistic works of both female Indigenous artists.

Indigenous and Minority Environmental Justice

Tailfeathers and Laestadius situate their artistic works in their respective fields of filmmaking and literature in an extended, relational community of humans and more-than-humans,[7] the land, and familiar places. They unveil the complicated context of Indigenous and minority environmental justice. Environmental justice can be seen as an important aspect of Environmental Studies, particularly within its social science and policy dimensions. While Environmental Studies addresses human-environment interactions, sustainability, and resource management, environmental justice analyzes the unequal distribution of environmental burdens—such as

[7] All terms denoting the 'nonhuman,' 'non-human,' 'more-than-human,' and 'other-than-human' are inherently anthropocentric, referencing humans as the central point of comparison or relation. Yet, their meanings might vary slightly with conceptual context: Tim Ingold, for instance, consistently employs 'non-human' to denote other species, specifically animals and plants (xii, 6–12 et passim). In contrast, David Abram's concept of 'more-than-human' encompasses an animate dimension that dissolves the boundary between material and immaterial realms, emphasizing the spirituality of matter and the materiality of spirit. This concept primarily concerns reciprocal ecological balances but also extends to human-made artifacts and structures arising from this fluid and dynamic, emerging and decaying matter-spirituality. At the same time, when referring to animals, plants, weather patterns, local geographies and landforms as ecological environments, Abram uses also 'nonhuman', though without a hyphen (11–26 et passim). The term 'other-than-human,' also sometimes written with spaces instead of hyphens, was coined by A. Irving Hallowell and refers to a category of persons in the context of an Ojibwe worldview (51–52 et passim). David Schlosberg uses 'nonhuman' (6) when referring to nonhuman participants in deliberation. Anishinaabe scholar Deborah McGregor et al. use 'non-human entities' and 'non-human beings,' both hyphenated ("Indigenous Environmental Justice" 35–37). Blackfoot scholar Betty Bastien employs "non-human relatives" ("Blackfoot Ways" 172). Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg scholar and activist Leanne Betasamosake Simpson (10) appears to use "nonhumans" in a sense similar to that employed by Abram. This list is illustrative rather than exhaustive. I do not have any preferences but rather use the variety of these terms, mostly following the respective scholars and scholarly works I engage with. When employed in this study and referring to an Indigenous context, any of these terms is meant to express kinship and relationality with beings beyond humans, including plants, animals, minerals, elements, landscapes, weather phenomena, skies and celestial bodies, built environment, spirit beings, ancestors, and other entities.

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pollution, extraction, and urban development—and interrogates issues of procedural justice, participation, and equitable access to resources. It is also central to the field of Environmental Humanities, which explore cultural, historical, philosophical, and ethical dimensions of human-nature relations. Here, environmental justice offers critical perspectives on power, representation, and marginalization, highlighting the intersections of colonialism, race, gender, and voice in environmental harm. Robert D. Bullard is considered the founder of environmental justice research ("Dumping," "Unequal Protection"). Academics such as Julian Agyeman, who has also been co-authoring with Robert D. Bullard and Bob Evans, as well as Rob Nixon and David Schlosberg followed, to name just a few.

Standing Rock Sioux Vine Deloria Jr. ("God is Red;" "Red Earth"), Anishinaabekwe and enrolled member of the Mississippi Band of Ashinaabeg Winona LaDuke, and Sámi multimedia artist and activist Nils-Aslak Valkeapää have been pivotal in highlighting the unique environmental challenges faced by Indigenous peoples, emphasizing the deep connection between Indigenous rights and environmental stewardship. It is therefore necessary to take a closer look at the implications of environmental justice and Indigenous environmental justice.

David Schlosberg's broad and pluralistic concept of environmental justice emphasizes "that a solely distributive notion of environmental justice fails Indigenous peoples" as Gilio-Whitaker notes (23). Schlosberg follows Rachel Carson and combines environmental *and* ecological justice, i.e., "concerns […] for the natural world […] and the concern for human health and industrial impacts on individuals and communities" (Schlosberg 7). In this comprehensive understanding, the umbrella term *environmental justice* comprises several components focusing on both human and nonhuman relationships: the ensuring of equitable *distribution* of goods and benefits to individuals and communities; individuals' and communities' *capability* of well-functioning and flourishing by transforming these goods and ecological benefits; the presence of individual and social respect and *recognition*; the meaningful engagement and equal *participation* in democratic procedures and decision-making processes; as well as *ecological justice* by including the natural world and ensuring justice in distribution, capability, recognition, and participation also to individuals and groups belonging to the nonhuman, i.e., animal, vegetal, mineral, and elemental world (3–41, 158–59). Applying the safeguarding of environmental justice, defined in this pluralistic way for individuals and groups in human and nonhuman realms, holds considerable potential for conflicts that need to be addressed (165–86). Tailfeathers and Laestadius face these conflicts by linking their cultural creations to real-world events:

Tailfeathers's homeland is the Kainai Blood Reserve in Alberta, Canada. On behalf of the Blood Tribe-owned Kainaiwa Resources Incorporated (KRI) natural resource development company, Blood-Tribe Chief and Council signed a 50-million-dollar land-leasing deal with United States-based Murphy Oil Corporation and Calgary-based Bowood Energy in 2010, lasting for five years, without consulting tribe members and without holding the required referendum. The deal granted a five-year permit for oil and gas exploration and extraction by hydraulic fracturing (fracking) on Blood Reserve land (Provencher). This resulted in small earthquakes and toxic fumes that led to the evacuation of an on-reserve school (Chiu). *Protect Blood Land*

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was created as a space on the Internet to oppose this development (Provencher). According to Schlosberg's criteria for environmental justice, the Blood Reserve case reveals serious threats or absences in its key components, as evidenced by *Protect Blood Land's* main arguments: "concern with environmental and health damages," threatening Aboriginal Land Title by resource exploitation, "lack of consultation and referendum by KRI in signing the lease and creating Kainai Energy," questioning the band council system and "the legitimacy of the Blood Tribe Chief and Council in negotiating on behalf of the Blood Tribe members" (Provencher). Fracking poses potential long-term risks to health, well-being, and land access for future generations, raising questions about whether such activities on reserve land might infringe on Aboriginal title. Canadian legislation—such as the Indian Oil and Gas Act and the First Nations Oil and Gas and Moneys Management Act—permits oil and gas extraction on reserve lands. Kainai Chief and Council, however, violated the First Nations Oil and Gas and Moneys Management Act, which requires a referendum within the Blood Tribe as the final step to transfer authority for oil and gas resource management to the tribe-owned company KRI (Provencher). In addition to the absence of Schlosberg's environmental justice criteria, in this case, democracy and the rule of law in Canada fail Indigenous peoples, causing Indigenous leaders to engage in lateral colonial violence, and deny full Indigenous sovereignty and relations to the land.

Laestadius calls Kiruna, in Sámi Giron,[8] her home, a town located in a part of Sápmi that today is a multi-ethnic Sámi-Tornedalian-Swedish region (Rabén och Sjögren), belonging to the province of *Norrbottens län* in Northern Sweden. Kiruna was built to the needs of the Swedish state-owned mining company Loussavaara Kiirunavaara Aktiebolag (LKAB) that in 1890 started operating what is today the world's largest underground iron ore mine (Ojala and Nordin 12). In 1867, Sweden established a law of cultivation limit, the *odlingsgräns*, to separate settler agriculture in the south from Sámi reindeer herding areas in the north, aiming to reduce conflict. In practice, the boundary failed to safeguard Sámi interests, as key herding areas lay south of it and were overtaken by settlers. Defining the North as an economic landscape by industrial expansion, prioritizing the profits of the land over Sámi reindeer herding, establishing mining, and building the town of Kiruna in 1890 were violences against this law of cultivation limit, and rendered the boundary largely ineffective. Sámi rights in Sweden remained informal until the 1886 Reindeer Herding Act, which legally recognized herding but restricted rights to active herders, sidelining non-herding Sámi and privileging settler land use (Forsell 199–200). The mining company LKAB also appropriated the two iron ore-containing mountains near Kiruna linguistically and iconographically by distorting their North Sámi as well as Meänkieli names Gíronvárri/Kierunavaara and Luossavárri/Luossavaara, meaning "mountain of the snow grouse" and "salmon mountain," and by creating a logotype showing two snow-covered peaks above black magnetite iron ore, encircled by the iron symbol (LKAB, "The World of Minerals"). The mine expansion is accompanied by ground subsidence and associated risks that result in a significant part of the town having to be moved three kilometers to the northeast in a process called "urban transformation" (LKAB, "This Is the Urban Transformation;" "We Are Moving a

[8] Giron is North Sámi and means 'ptarmigan', 'snow grouse.'

Town"). This "involves both demolition of existing buildings as well as the careful dismantling and rebuilding of a few selected buildings in new neighbourhoods on new ground" (Overud 107). A "memorial park will serve as a barrier against the mine as the ground cracks" but "even the parkland is a temporary space" "as the open pit approaches the city" (107–108). According to LKAB, the mine and the town have worked in close relation to one another and will continue to do so in the future (LKAB, "We Are Moving a Town"). Mine expansion and urban transformation affect areas relevant to Sámi reindeer herding and migration routes: Indigenous Sámi communities in the region experience exploitation of their reindeer grazing lands and forced adaption to industrial expansion (Overud 107). In the case of Kiruna, Schlosberg's criteria of environmental justice are again highly unbalanced or completely absent.

It is important to recognize significant differences between environmental justice and Indigenous environmental justice. Dina Gilio-Whitaker (Colville Confederated Tribes) clarifies:

> E[nvironmental] J[ustice] for Indigenous peoples [...] must be capable of a political scale beyond the homogenizing, assimilationist, capitalist State. It must conform to a model that can frame issues in terms of their colonial condition and can affirm decolonization as a potential framework within which environmental justice can be made available to them. [...] Indigenizing E[nvironmental] J[ustice] by centering Native issues means it should conform to principles outlined in decolonizing theories and Indigenous research methodologies [...]. [...] Indigenous modes of justice typically reflect a restorative orientation. [...] In essence, justice for Indigenous peoples is about restoring balance in relationships that are out of balance. (Gilio-Whitaker, 25–26)

Anishinaabe scholar Deborah McGregor, along with co-authors Steven Whitaker and Mahisha Sritharan, advocate for a "distinct formulation of Indigenous environmental justice" based on Indigenous "intellectual and legal traditions […] to generate a self-determined future that involves living well with the Earth" (35, 36). Such a "distinct framework and set of logics that recognizes the agency of non-human beings as well as the Earth itself" is especially important as colonialism and its dominant "global, national, and regional economic and political frameworks" are still in progress and "undermine Indigenous peoples, in particular Indigenous women, in systemic, ongoing, and violent ways" (36). "Indigenous understandings" counter the "dominant Western society's tendency to view the natural world as a commodity, property or a 'resource'" by "regarding the Earth as alive and imbued with spirit" (35), and go beyond Schlosberg's definition by recognizing different epistemologies and ontologies, animism, and various non-human and spirit beings.

> Indigenous peoples assert that a just path to a sustainable future must consider *all relations*, an approach best expressed through Indigenous knowledge systems, legal orders, governance and conceptions of justice. These systems offer a diagnosis and path forward that answers the call for the 'transformative change' needed to alter global society's current trajectory. Indigenous knowledge can play a key role in such transformation and has been recognized as such for decades. (36; emphasis in original)

McGregor et al. draw on the vision of *buen vivir* proposed by Indigenous peoples as a path to a more just, sustainable, and inclusive future (37). Considering the worldviews and the "epistemological disobedience" (Stephen 165) in Tailfeathers's and Laestadius's artistic works will provide insight into how they confront ongoing

exploitation and environmental injustice. Since Laestadius is concerned with both Sámi and Tornedalians, it is more accurate to speak of Indigenous *and* minority environmental justice.

Gendered Struggle Against Multiple Forms of Violence

An additional intersectional criterion emerges in the works of both artists: Female protagonists struggle for environmental justice or are exposed to environmental injustice, partly reflecting the artists' real-world experiences. Being involved in the gendered struggle for Indigenous and minority environmental justice as a woman means facing and resisting multiple forms of violence emanating from dominant cultures and capitalist societies (Stephen). The fraudulent consent between the Kainai Chief and Council and the companies managing the extraction directed against Blood Tribe members can be seen as a result of colonial violence: alluding to lateral violence and colonial domination, Tailfeathers states that the "root of this violence stems from deeply internalized oppression" which causes Indigenous people to turn against their own communities (Tailfeathers, "Fractured Land"). This lateral violence can easily combine with gendered violence: When peacefully protesting against the fracking in 2011, Tailfeathers and two other Indigenous women, Jill Crop Eared Wolf and Lois Frank, who were members of a group of people who called themselves the Kainai Earth Watch, were arrested by tribal police and charged with intimidation. Later, the charges were dismissed (Barlow 43–44; Blackburn and Wong; Tailfeathers, "Frack Off").

For the Swedish context in Kiruna, Bo Nilsson analyzes how official narratives construct an "ideological fantasy" that portrays Kiruna's relocation as necessary, positive, and inevitable ("Ideology" 434–35, 440–41). He shows how municipal and the mine's corporate discourse emphasize progress, sustainability, and democratic participation, while marginalizing social, cultural, and emotional impacts (436, 438, 439). LKAB presents the town's relocation in euphemistic rhetoric and with symbols of colonial pioneerism, advertising it as an exciting event of global significance (LKAB, "We Are Moving a Town"). While Kiruna municipality gives the impression that the relocation of the town is participatory and the most democratic urban transformation in the world (Overud 111), Nilsson exposes "this emphasis on the democratic process" as "an approach to imbue the process with legitimacy" and discloses the notion of a commonly shared consensus on Kiruna's relocation as "largely a rhetorical product" (Overud 111, with reference to Nilsson, "Kiruna: Staden" 25). Based on 20 interviews—two of them with self-identified Sámi—Nilsson found that, while no one questioned the mine's expansion and the relocation itself as necessary and without a long-term alternative, residents expressed indifference, fatalism, mistrust, and disempowerment in light of their dependence on LKAB (Nilsson, "Ideology" 434, 437–38, 441). Nilsson further identifies two key dynamics in Kiruna: a "small town mentality" that accepts subordination and the company's patriarchal role, and "accumulated masculinity" in a dominant working-class masculine miner culture (437, 441). From this perspective "it is a Catch 22 situation. You cannot criticize the hand that feeds you" (441). This, however, seems to be the dominant or perceptible mainstream opinion among residents because "marginalised communities, made

invisible by urban development, struggle to regain access to and influence over public space" and "open resistance to the ongoing transformation process is seldom found" in Kiruna (Overud 115). Lack of representation in media silences alternative voices. This is also reflected in a historically embedded process of shaping colonial socio-cultural memory in Kiruna: For this process, also historical and contemporary photography has been used in the service of settler-colonial knowledge production to create a narrative dominated by resource-exploiting socio-economic powers. Photographs served "to emphasize the message that modern Kiruna has evolved from extreme simplicity and poverty to prosperity" and—while "reminiscent of the early settlers' hard-working durability and abrasive resistance"—"to honour the memory of the navvies and pioneers," i.e., Swedish miners (Overud 113). Pictures effectively set the stage for the "imperialist message" that "colonial industrialisation is the progressive way" and "the only way" (115). Photographs depicted Sámi people as a lower social group and "representatives of a less progressive race" (114). Overud also analyzes a photograph from 1900 showing the first settler child born in the mining shantytown established by LKAB, a girl who was named "Kiruna" at the suggestion of the then LKAB's managing director, Hjalmar Lundbohm. A family tradition of giving this middle name to the first-born daughter was established and led to the sixth generation "Kiruna" being born at the beginning of the twenty-first century (105–6). Emphasizing a settler child as Kiruna's firstborn denies the presence of people not devoted to the mine and nullifies the fact that there are other firstborns on the territory. The colonization of Sámi Giron and its transformation into Swedish settler-miner Kiruna can be understood in analogy to the historical shift from perceiving Earth as a living organism to conceiving it in a mechanistic sense as an assemblage of resources that can be used for humans' purposes—a shift that, as Carolyn Merchant argues, facilitated and legitimized the domination of both nature and women ("The Death of Nature;" "The Scientific Revolution" 514–15). The appropriation of female bodies is a hitherto insufficiently reflected abusive practice that parallels the exploitative abuse of Earth for economic interests and serves to manifest male colonial dominance.

Feminist and gender-sensitive approaches can counter the colonial, hegemonic, patriarchal and male-dominated practices present in the Blood Reserve and Kiruna cases. Ojibway from Batchewana First Nation scholar Cheryl Suzack defines "Indigenous feminism" as

> a critical paradigm that analyses how gender injustice against Indigenous women emerges from colonial policies and patriarchal practices that inscribe gendered power dynamics to the detriment of Indigenous women. It focuses on the intersections between colonialism and patriarchy to examine how race and gender systems overlap to create conditions in which Indigenous women are subjected to forms of social disempowerment that arise out of historical and contemporary practices of colonialism, racism, sexism, and patriarchy. (Suzack 261)

The central points of this analytical paradigm call for consideration of the gendered struggle for Indigenous and minority environmental justice as represented in Tailfeathers's and Laestadius's works of art.

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Artworks as Critical Reflections

Condensed to utmost audio-visual compactness and less than 5 minutes long, the experimental short film *Bloodland* is multi-layered. On the visual level, it begins and ends with a black screen and text in white letters. On the audio level, there is an indifferent background noise similar to the traffic of a busy motorway in the distance that blends with the sound of an iambic rhythm played on a hand drum, reminiscent of a heartbeat. The indifferent noise stops when a female voice starts crooning soothingly to the drum rhythm, visually accompanied by an Indigenous woman (played by Tailfeathers) dressed in traditional clothes emerging from Earth. Two male figures (played by Cowboy Smithx and Byron Chief-Moon), dressed in settler colonial suits, are shown in sharp cuts that follow the drum rhythm. They seize the woman violently and strap her to a cot. A second female voice starts speaking calmly and confidently in the Blackfoot language. Using drilling machines, the two men, now dressed in workwear, drill into the Indigenous woman's body. She is writhing in agony, her face contorted with pain, her mouth wide open, as if she were screaming. But apart from the rhythm of the drum, the crooning, and the words spoken, nothing can be heard. Rapidly alternating images, moving with sharp cuts in the heartbeat rhythm, show the men's gloved hands digging both into the woman's body and into Earth's soil. After extracting what they wanted, the male figures turn away and leave her to die. A black-red liquid, reminiscent of blood and petroleum, runs on a white background into a black depth to which the camera swings to blackout. During the closing credits, the Women Warrior Song resounds, sung by female voices and accompanied by the steady rhythm of a hand drum.

The multiple forms of violence that Tailfeathers interweaves in *Bloodland* shed light on human-Earth relations, reinforce Suzack's points, and demonstrate that Indigenous feminism is inextricably intertwined with a gendered struggle for the land. The disturbing imagery reveals analogies between the disempowerment of Indigenous women and the disempowerment of Earth. *Bloodland* calls attention to the crisis of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls in Canada, in short MMIWG.[9] Tailfeathers depicts extraction as a patriarchal practice toward Earth and the female body, sanctioned by colonial policies and imposed by male-dominated power. Red River Métis Jennifer Hettinga and co-author Amber Dean highlight that colonialism and the establishment of resource extraction projects in Canada intensifies Indigenous women's vulnerability to violence through the emergence of so-called "man camps" that are characterized by sexism, social and geographical disconnection, homophobia, and "hypermasculinity similar to military organizations" (4). Also, shifts in local economic structures, and altered family dynamics contribute to Indigenous women's exposure to violence (5–6). When coupled with the systemic failures of the criminal justice system, the violence experienced by Indigenous women suggests three intersecting categories: "domestic violence, workplace violence, and sexual violence" (1, 5–8). Although the Blood Reserve region is not included in the economic map presented in Hettinga's and Dean's study (10), Tailfeathers's

[9] Meanwhile, the attention has been expanded on MMIWG 2SLGBTQQIA+ (Narratives Inc. 1).

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Bloodland powerfully reflects this multifaceted "man camp" violence through the medium of cinematographic art.

Laestadius's young adult novels *Ten past one* and *No longer mine* feature an internally focalized first-person narrator, the teenage protagonist Maja. She recounts her experiences in an intermittent but simultaneous, chronological mode with occasional analepses that reflect on the past. Living in contemporary Kiruna and coming from a Tornedalian mine worker family, her most challenging task is to deal with a stressful and complex socio-environmental dilemma (Ittner 1834; Six 426–27): While LKAB and the mine are the lifeblood of today's Kiruna, they are at the same time destroying the town (Laestadius, *Tio över ett* 7). Maja realizes that Kiruna and its inhabitants are at the mercy of LKAB's exploitative economic interests, patriarchal control, and colonial practices. Literally shaken by the regular nightly mine blasts, the fear of possible subsidence, and the relocation of her hometown, Maja faces her panic attacks and loneliness (52–59) in confrontation with LKAB executives, local politicians—in particular her grandmother, a municipal politician strongly advocating for the mine expansion and the relocation— peers, friends, and family who are either indifferent to or in favor of further resource extraction, or who simply do not see an alternative way of life. Laestadius's novels contrast Maja's critical and investigative attitude with the conformist stance of mainstream society. Kiruna is depicted as a masculine, culturally poor town, characterized by ice hockey, outdoor sports, snowmobiles, and the mine as the primary source of wealth and economic prosperity (9, 30, 32–33). To male youths from Maja's school, LKAB is a well-paying employer, the exploitation of resources a welcome path to consumerism and individual wealth, and Kiruna's transformation a means of attracting global attention (Laestatius, *Tio över ett* 78–85; *Inte längre min* 37–38). Maja dislikes LKAB's relocating the town and disapproves of the anti-Sámi racism and chauvinism many of her peers display (Laestadius, *Inte längre min* 31, 38, 50, 56–57, 79–83). She critically documents the destruction of cultural memory, social ties, and relationships to places, capturing her feelings and the town's transformation through mobile phone videos and text notes. Maja gradually understands that she is different and belongs to a minority not only in terms of her Tornedalian descent but also in terms of her attachment to places and her critical position, as she is convinced that LKAB "buys our silence. This is what happens when almost everyone works at LKAB. Everyone wants money and we sell out our soul. The soul of Kiruna" (Laestadius, *Tio över* ett 83).[10] She also observes that female stakeholders support LKAB by perpetuating objectification and asserting dominance in various aspects of their lives (Laestadius, *Inte längre min* 150–52, 272–76). Longing for reliable social and identity-constructing spatio-temporal relationships, Maja struggles to acquire self-confidence. A sincere and mutually supportive friendship and allyship is foreshadowed when Maja cautiously observes her classmate Alva, a teenage Sámi girl, winning a literary competition organized by the local Kiruna newspaper, in which both girls are recognized for expressing their feelings about Kiruna's relocation through skilled written and filmic artworks respectively (Laestadius, *Tio över ett* 242–46). This

[10] "köper vår tystnad. Så blir det när nästan alla jobbar i LKAB. Alla vill ha pengar och då säljer vi ut vår själ. Kirunas själ" (Laestadius, *Tio över ett* 83).

narrative strand unfolds in the sequel where Maja and Alva, encouraged by their former teacher Stina, a Swede, become close friends and allies as they both feel isolated and face similar forms of violence (Laestadius, *Inte längre min* 175, 270–72). Both teenage girls' resistance is grounded in shared experiences of marginalization based on gender, ethnic or Indigenous identity, and worldview. Here, Suzack's paradigm is extended from Indigenous feminism to minority feminism, encompassing the involvement and support of an allied non-Indigenous teenage feminist. The narrative expansion on Maja and Alva's friendship and allyship serves as an example of young Indigenous and non-Indigenous—specifically Tornedalian—women uniting against silencing in a male-dominated social environment. The narrative nexus to the Swedish teacher Stina parallels the alliance between Sámi and Nordic feminisms advocated for by Sámi sociologist Astri Dankertsen (137–44).

While Ann-Helén Laestadius narratively depicts an alliance that transcends the boundaries of Indigeneity, Tailfeathers actively demands such a coalition by evoking an experience to which, unfortunately, women—regardless of race, ethnicity, and Indigeneity—may be subjected: the degrading and abhorrent sexual discrimination enacted through male violence. Both Laestadius's and Tailfeathers's depictions strongly resonate with Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg scholar Leanne Betasamosake Simpson's "kwe," a term in the Nishnaabe language meaning "woman," yet also inclusive to "a spectrum of gender expressions" (29): "Kwe is not a commodity. Kwe is not capital. […] Kwe cannot be exploited" (29). "At its core, kwe as a method is about refusal. […] [i]t is about refusing colonial domination, refusing heteropatriarchy, and refusing to be tamed by whiteness or the academy" (33). In the novels *Ten Past One* and *No Longer Mine*, the teenage girls refuse mainstream Kiruna masculine views on resources, commodities, and capital. Similarly, in *Bloodland*, the calm voice speaking Blackfoot and the concluding Women Warrior Song collectively refuse the male extractive violence depicted visually throughout the short film.

Imagining Otherwise and Indigenous World-Making Practices

By depicting the threat of anthropogenic realities, Tailfeathers's audio-visual and Laestadius's textual stories inspire transformative change. According to Cherokee scholar Daniel Heath Justice, Indigenous stories "make space for meaningful engagements" (154) and for imagining other possible futures by contrasting "lives of accountability and honour with the world" with "a great resource-consuming mass of humanity" (39). By exposing the inadequacy of Euro-Western concepts of the "real" based on binary oppositions and dualities to the "imaginary," Justice draws attention to alternative, mature, experiential Indigenous realities that, for instance, also include spirit beings and various non-human beings (141–42). Instead of escapism, Indigenous stories offer a distinct form of escape that "presumes an ongoing engagement with the world, not a repudiation of or removal from it" (151). Justice defines Indigenous stories as "wonderworks" (153) because "wonder" "places unsolvable mystery, not fixed insistence, at the heart of engagement" (153). "Wonder" comprises "meaningful uncertainty, curiosity, humility", "astonishment, admiration, and [...] mindful fear" (153), and "wondrous things are *other* and *otherwise*, [...] outside the bounds of the everyday and mundane" (153). This "[i]magining

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otherwise" (142) unleashes transformative energies: It is not only an "act of […] resistance" but also a "moral imperative" as it counters problematic dominant Euro-Western standards (142).

Although Laestadius's texts can be defined as realistic within Euro-Western literary terms—they provide detailed representation of everyday life and individual experience in Kiruna, marked by social critique and a rejection of idealization—protagonist Maja experiences the above-mentioned elusive socio-environmental dilemma in both novels as a mysterious wonder. Through internal focalization, readers participate closely in the process of experiencing transformational power. The mysterious wonder takes the shape of the teenage girl Aurora, daughter of a female LKAB business economist. Aurora has lived in many different places, everywhere creating new identities. Her flamboyance quickly wins the attention of her peers. Maja, too, is fascinated by Aurora and seems to get on well with her. Set against the wondrous Sámi lore of the Northern Lights, the *Aurora borealis*, however, Maja's Sámi teenage friend Alva issues a warning:

> Speaking of Aurora, I was just thinking about the Northern Lights. When my grandmother was growing up, they said the Northern Lights could be dangerous and you should absolutely not call after them, hardly look at them, because there was a risk that they would take you [...] I do not believe in that, of course, but nevertheless, maybe one should be cautious of things that are a bit too blinding. (Laestadius, *Inte längre min* 205)[11]

Alva translates the lesson of a Sámi worldview into a topically relevant, figurative understanding: Aurora embodies and personifies a mysterious danger comparable to that which, according to Sámi traditional lore, could emanate from the Northern Lights. Thus, Aurora represents the mysterious wonder that Maja faces with admiration, meaningful uncertainty, and mindful fear. In Aurora, Maja encounters the wondrous that lies beyond the bounds of the everyday and mundane and is prepared to embrace its conflictual transformative powers. Aurora functions as a representative of the resource-consuming mass of humanity: she takes Maja's boyfriend, Albin; moves into the house Maja was forced to leave due to LKAB's relocation—subsequently relocated as well and granted to Aurora's family (Laestadius, *Inte längre min* 115, 153, 183, 207–37); and ultimately reveals that she chose to use her middle name upon moving to Kiruna, stating: "My name is Linnea Aurora. And now, when I was about to move here, I thought it was fitting to choose Aurora. Thinking of the Northern Lights. It is a bit like a social experiment to change one's name" (Laestadius, *Inte längre min* 191).[12] Aurora is utterly euphoric in response to her name: "But to bear the name of the Northern Lights when I moved to Kiruna was simply brilliant" (Laestadius, *Inte längre min* 274).[13] The name Linnea

[11] "[...] jag kom bara att tänka på norrsken apropå Aurora. När min mormor växte upp sa man att norrskenet kunde vara farligt och man fick absolut inte ropa på det, knappt titta på det, för det fanns en risk att det skulle ta en. [...] Jag tror inte på det där förstås, men ändå, man kanske ska akta sig för sånt som bländar lite för mycket." (Laestadius, *Inte längre min* 205)

[12] "Jag heter Linnea Aurora. Och nu när jag skulle flytta hit så tyckte jag att det passade att välja Aurora. Med tanke på norrskenet. Det är lite som ett socialt experiment att byta namn." (Laestadius, *Intet längre min* 191)

[13] "Men att heta som norrskenet när jag flyttade till Kiruna var ju genialiskt." (Laestadius, *Intet längre min* 274)

carries colonial resonance, as it derives from *Linnaea borealis*, the twinflower, which Swedish botanist Carl von Linné (1707–1778) named after himself and which appears in a well-known portrait of him by Swedish painter Alexander Roslin (1718–1793), where Linné is depicted wearing twinflowers on his lapel. Carl von Linné played a significant role in classifying Sámi nomads as subaltern subjects. Following his 1732 journey to what he called Lappland, he published *Systema Naturæ* in 1758, introducing not only the still well-known botanical and zoological nomenclature but also a hierarchical categorization of the human species (Volquardsen and Körber 228–29).

In contrast, Maja represents a struggle for relational sovereignty and a life of responsibility and honour with the world. Alva's vision of the deceptive *Aurora borealis*, the Northern Lights, and her encouragement inspire Maja to refuse and fiercely counter Aurora's and the dominant mainstream's way of life (Laestadius, *Inte längre min* 258–60, 262–65, 271–72). It helps Maja to imagine herself and Kiruna otherwise, not as victims of extractive violence but as beings of deepest insight who can look behind the façade of the resource-consuming mass of humanity. From this, Maja draws the energy to enact a different future: "Alva is right. Her family, the reindeer herders, have experienced what is now awaiting us all. Being forced to leave our place" (Laestadius, *Tio över ett* 245).[14]

While confronting the key mysterious wonder of the iron ore mine nourishing and destroying Kiruna, Maja gains insights that guide her further actions: She recognizes journalistic reporting as a mission, resistance (Laestadius, *Inte längre min* 10), and a moral imperative (Justice 142) she is ready to pursue. Targeting Sweden's defective democracy, Maja powerfully articulates:

> The mine is eating us both from without and from within. […] One day, I will write an article that will cause the whole of Sweden to wake up. [...] I […] do not want to be seen as a victim. I have to discuss this more with Alva. Sámi people are all too often portrayed as victims in the media when the perpetrators should be pointed out. Focus on who has done wrong instead. […] Everything leads back to the state. […] Beautiful Sweden, which prides itself on being an equal democratic country, but the state has done the Sámi great harm. And now those in power are blinded by money as the mine has to expand. […] It is Alva who makes me wiser. When she tells me about reindeer husbandry and everything they had to go through, she forces me to see the perpetrators. (Laestadius, *Inte längre min* 270)[15]

Maja begins to imagine otherwise and an otherwise world. Sámi scholars Sanna Valkonen, Saara Alakorva, Áile Aikio, and Sigga-Marja Magga describe the Sámi concept of "máilbmi," meaning "world." The word can take on different meanings depending on the speaker and "conveys the […] understanding that there are

[14] "Alva har rätt. Hennes släkt, rensköterna, har upplevd det där som nu väntar oss alla. Att trängas undan från sin plats" (Laestadius, *Tio över ett* 245).

[15] "Gruvan äter upp oss både utifrån och inifrån. [...] Någon gång ska jag skriva artikeln som får hela Sverige att vakna. [...] Jag [vill] inte [...] ses som ett offer. Jag måste prata mer med Alva om det. Samer beskrivs alltför ofta som offer i media när man borde peka ut förövarna. Lägg fokus på vilka som gjort fel istället. [...] Det är staten allt leder tillbaka till. Gång på gång. Fina Sverige som slår sig för bröstet som det jämställda demomratiska landet, men staten har gjort samerna mycket illa. Och nu är makthavarna förblindade av pengarna när gruvan måste expandera. [...] Det är Alva som gör mig klokare. När hon berättar om renskötseln och allt de fätt gå igenom tvinger hon mig att see förövarna" (Laestadius, *Inte längre min* 270).

multitudes of realities and possibilities to traverse […] by moving from one reality to another, in one or many directions." Máilbmi "encompasses everything between the earth and the sky" and "refers to [both] the global world" and "different micro realities with their own ecosystem principles […]." Máilbmi is "a *pluriverse*—the idea of the coexistence of multiple worlds […] becoming real and being enacted in and through practices: different practices create various realities, not interpretations of the same reality" (2–3). Sámi world-making practices inherently hold the possibility of imagining otherwise and enacting another world. Teenage Sámi Alva inspires the power of pluriverse worlds in Maja and thus empowers her. At the same time, Laestadius's novels arouse emotions in readers and call for meaningful engagement with the world.

In contrast to Laestadius's more grounded narrative realist representation of everyday life and individual experiences, Tailfeathers's *Bloodland* portrays extractive violence with extreme realism, employing a heightened realist aesthetic that produces immersive, overwhelming emotional and sensory experiences. In the first scene, however, the Indigenous woman slowly appears as a fade-in body emerging from Earth. This reveals a miraculous reality that evokes astonishment and humility: Tailfeathers portrays Woman and Earth as wondrously connected. By evoking this connection, Tailfeathers builds on the immanent transcendence characteristic in Blackfoot worldview as explained by Blackfoot scholar Betty Bastien:

> [P]articipatory visions are represented in stories of how humans can carry out their obligations within an intricate network of relationships. In these stories, what Eurocentric thinking considers 'transcendent' is as present and real as what Eurocentric thinking refers to as 'immanent.' ("The Cultural Practice" 41–42)

Bastien also points out that "spiritual energies" emanating from "Ihtsipaitapiiyo'pa", the "Source of Life", "permeate the cosmic universe" and "manifest in physical form" ("Blackfoot Ways" 3). This "world of balance and harmony" (1)—a "multi-level reality from which meaning and connection to all others emerges"—is of "transformational nature" without any "separation" (177). Blackfoot reality consists of complex reciprocal relationships between humans and non-humans (9). If there is no separation but reciprocal relationships, the colonial exploiters in the short film not only do harm to Woman and Earth but ultimately to themselves: By exploiting and killing Woman, they exploit and kill Earth, and, in the end, will commit extended suicide because they aim at destroying Ihtsipaitapiiyo'pa, the Source of Life. In *Bloodland*, the moral imperative of imagining otherwise calls for an ongoing and meaningful engagement with the world by protecting and caring for Woman and Earth. Quotes framing the short film address the importance of maintaining cosmic balance and harmony beyond space and time: in the opening, Tailfeathers quotes Murphy Oil Corporation as alluding to relational responsibilities: "Some say we do not inherit our world from past generations as much as we borrow it from future ones." (*Bloodland* 00:17 min). With the introductory phrase "some say", Murphy Oil Corporation dismisses the statement an unproven minority opinion. In the closing credits, Tailfeathers quotes Blackfoot Chief Isapo-Muxika, in English known as Crowfoot. As a member of a minority, he has his say, too:

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> Our land is more valuable than your money. As long as the sun shines and the waters flow, this land will be here to give life to men and animals. We cannot sell the lives of men and animals. It was put here by the Great Spirit and we cannot sell it because it does not belong to us. (*Bloodland* 03:43 min.)

This statement is not just what 'some say,' but a powerful reminder of the wondrous reciprocal interconnectedness between humans, various non-human relatives, and the land as a life-giving relation. Fulfilling the moral imperative to imagine otherwise even further, Tailfeathers discloses in an ironic act that "this film [was] made generously possible by Murphy Oil[,] Bowood Energy[,] Kainai Resources Inc.[, and] Blood Tribe Chief and Council" (*Bloodland* 3:48 min.). While crediting the perpetrators might seem ominous and cause some uncertainty and mindful fear in readers, Tailfeathers explained in a public lecture that she used the fracking distribution cheque handed out by the Chief and Council to every member of the Kainai Blood Tribe to fund the film production (Tailfeathers, "Frack off" 6:10–6:50 min.; 8:15–8:55 min.). In this way, she powerfully re-imagines the destructive forces as generous, transformational, inseparable from everything else, and refuses to capitulate to them.

Therefore, Tailfeathers's and Laestadius's works neither are entirely realistic nor escapist fiction but Indigenous wonderworks (Justice 151–53): They encourage and empower their audience to imagine and enact different worlds and to continue the fight for the land and for decolonization.

Human-Place Relations and Transition Discourses

Both artistic works show that the relationship to the land and to particular places is indispensable for human identity and well-being. Non-Native cultural geographer Soren C. Larsen and Delaware and Cherokee scholar and geographer Jay T. Johnson focus on a profound understanding of the relationality of humans and more-than-humans in and with places. Place, they argue, is an agent—"actively initiating and sustaining coexistence struggle" and "forcing […] coexistents to acknowledge one another" ("Being Together" 1, 2). Place inspires life-supportive relationships, mutual recognition, reciprocity, and respect with the aim of coexisting in balance, in an interconnected and decolonized way, and without asymmetrical and unequal powers and hierarchies (184–202). The agency of place is a call with which place as a more-than-human engagement invites and convenes human encounters and dialogues in various ways, for example, conflict, protest, tragedy, grief, and activism (2). Often, state and corporate actors do not recognize but try to suppress the hospitality and invitation of place (189). Place, however, calls to decolonization, teaches acknowledgment, and guides humans and more-than-humans on the pathways of responsibility, in that resistance and resurgence arise from the agency of place. "[P]lace […] has the agency to *compel* or *oblige* transition discourse among more-than-human communities engaged in struggles for more respectful ways of coexisting" (191; emphasis in original).

With their artistic creations, Tailfeathers and Laestadius enact placework, a methodology that emphasizes place as an active agent in shaping a more-than-human geographical self, highlighting how place constitutes human identity through

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entangled, more-than-human relations and its inherent ontological and cosmological agency (Larsen and Johnson, "The Agency of Place" 153).

> Place creates—it personalizes the power consciousness of Creation into ways of being whose manifestations are enmeshed within more-than-human relationships. Place speaks—its creative aegis is expressed in the diverse personalities, moods, and intentions of the many place worlds of being and relationship. Place teaches—its manifestations guide us in our responsibilities in the pluriverse by reminding us when we forget, as we so often do, how to be Natural People. (Larsen and Johnson, "The Agency of Place" 152)

According to Seneca historian and writer John Mohawk (10), to whom Larsen and Johnson refer, "Natural People" are those who "see beauty in the things and processes that support and produce life" and are considered "spiritual proprietors of the Universe, not because they possess the things of Creation, but because they celebrate them" (Larsen and Johnson, "The Agency of Place" 152).

> Places live—they are born, change, and age. Places have moods. They get angry and invoke fear; they nourish, soothe, and protect. The personality of a place is an expression of what it has to teach, and also of how it teaches. To understand a place's personality is to understand its story and the lessons it has to teach. (Larsen and Johnson, "The Agency of Place" 158)

In this sense, Blood Reserve land and Kiruna are places that teach the artists and call for action and for sparking the transition discourse in complex environmental justice cases. This raises the question of whether and how Tailfeathers and Laestadius hear and respond to the calls of their respective places, and to what extent their creative works transcend Tailfeathers's self-identification as 'not an environmentalist' and Laestadius's as 'not an activist' in the sense of becoming a more-than-human geographical self—given that both produce powerful and influential artistic contributions deeply engaged in gendered Indigenous environmental justice.

Evoking the respect and humility of relational ontology and epistemology, Tailfeathers describes Blood Reserve land as "the kind of place that brings you inward. The sky is endless. It's the kind of place that makes you think, it's the kind of place that makes you feel, and it's the kind of place that makes you grateful to be alive" (Tailfeathers, "Frack Off" 3:40–3:54 min.). This also resonates with perspectives advanced by non-Indigenous scholars: By circumventing a body/spirit and science/animism dichotomy, rejecting the "individual" and rather drawing on the "dividual", "a person constitutive of relationships" and "a person constitutive of transferable particles that form his or her personal substance" (Bird-David 68, 72; with reference to Strathern 1988 and Mariott 1976), Israeli cultural anthropologist Nurit Bird-David conceptualized animism as relational ontology and epistemology that "is about knowing the world by focusing primarily on relatedness, from a related point of view, within the shifting horizons of the related viewer" (69). Interactive, reciprocal human-place relationship thus allows related Indigenous selves to be aware of all-relatedness as the unifying modality of human and more-than-human life: "I know as I relate" and "I relate, therefore I am" (78) or, even more concisely, "We relate, and therefore we are" (Morrison 39). This contrasts the Cartesian "cogito, ergo sum", "I think, therefore I am" which German American Studies scholar Hartmut Lutz exposes as

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> a statement that is entirely isolationist and shockingly solipsistic. It constructs the thinking subject as removed from any relations with the surrounding world, from time or place, from social relations and the ecosystem, and even from his or her own physical being. (72–73)

Rather, the statement "I live on this place on earth, therefore I am" would be "less egocentric and certainly more life sustaining" (73).

To display the dualism and separation of Cartesian thought, Tailfeathers uses filmic techniques and visual narrative strategies of materialist atomization and dichotomization. While heading toward its dramatic climax, *Bloodland* is a succession of two alternating, antithetical, divided, unrelated images, moving forward in rapid cuts: The image of reddish-black liquid running down a white surface flashes rhythmically, disrupting the portrayal of spiritual connection, intimate tranquillity, and profound relatedness. This connection is initially presented through the gentle dissolve of the Indigenous woman slowly rising from Earth, marvelously materializing on the land, and finally standing upright in the natural place that she is and is of (*Bloodland* 0:25–0:43 min.; for being of a place see Deloria and Wildcat 31). After that, images of drilling machines penetrating Woman's and Earth's bodies as well as images of the gloved hands of the Euro-Western male resource extractors rummaging in Woman's intestines and Earth's soil alternate rhythmically (*Bloodland* 1:06–1:40 min.). Fast-moving, visualized fragmentation and disconnectedness increasingly provoke a perceptual, cognitive, and emotional overload intended to shock the viewers into realizing the analogies between the two forms of violence: The first one, against human beings, abhorred, the second one, against the land and a particular place, accepted as resource extraction. Woman is the animated land and place, recognizable in relational epistemology and ontology. Through this analogization, land and place in *Bloodland* are agents like Woman and any other person, not resources or commodities made up of geological formations and chemical elements that are utilized as exploitable raw materials to fulfill complex abstract, inanimate functions in dichotomized, individualized, neoliberal, and capitalist systems.

Through *Bloodland's* entire audio-visual design, Tailfeathers prompts viewers to engage in critical self-reflection, exposing how consumerist and exploitative lifestyles ultimately result in death and devastation. She calls for allyship with Indigenous peoples, particularly women, while the persistent Blackfoot female voice and the triumphant Women Warrior Song affirm that resistance is not only possible but effective.

In Laestadius's *Tio över ett* and *Inte längre min*, Kiruna is depicted not merely as a backdrop but as an active, dynamic agent shaping the characters' identities and experiences by interaction. However, in Kiruna, anthropogenic exploitation attacks Earth's soil that should safely carry humans and more-than-humans. Ground subsidence is reaching close to the town. Laestadius has Maja describe the process of ore extraction using partly medical terms, drawing an analogy between the human body and Earth, similar to the analogy implied by Tailfeathers:

> Every night preparations are made for the underground blasts. [...] Liquid explosives are injected into several boreholes in the [...] mine tunnels. [...] Dangerous gases are

> generated in the tunnels. Then there is a roar and the iron ore loosens. The iron ore that makes Kiruna live. (Laestadius, *Tio över ett* 30)[16]

The passage is highly ambivalent. On the one hand, it employs medicalized language—terms such as "preparations," "injected," and "mine tunnels"—evoking the imagery of surgical intervention and the intravenous injection of an anesthetic via a venous cannula, thereby framing Earth as a living body subjected to invasive procedures. Yet this figurative surgery does not heal but instead inflicts harm. Within this ambiguous metaphor, iron ore operates dually: as the life-sustaining core of Kiruna and as a pathological object—the core of systemic extraction and environmental injustice. This tension also lies at the heart of the stressful and complex socio-environmental dilemma that Maja faces, constituting her greatest challenge.

On the level of story, the central theme of Laestadius's young adult novels is the protagonist's motivation to survive as a dividuum, as defined above. Maja struggles to protect and maintain her relational identity by being and knowing her place-relations while Kiruna is relocated. On the one hand, the internally focalized narrative voice provides insights into fragmentations that threaten Maja's identity: the experience of being misunderstood and isolated. Maja expresses her loneliness within an environment shaped by the Euro-Western dichotomy that sanctions neoliberal resource exploitation and has no understanding of relational ontology and epistemology in strong words: "Damn LKAB. Damn municipality. Damn all those who do not understand what will happen when the town changes. People will choose to move. And not just three kilometers but three hundred and fifty kilometers or farther away" (Laestadius, *Tio över ett* 75).[17] Ignoring the agency of place causes humans to disappear. When Maja voices her relationality with the town's places and buildings and her concerns about their disrespectful treatment, even her own family evades her, downplaying her perspective, refusing to move back into their old house, which has been saved from demolition and relocated. Surrounded by an environment that subscribes to Cartesian separation and dichotomy, she experiences existential threat: "It is as if I don't exist" (Laestadius, *Inte längre min* 24, 102).[18] On the other hand, the internal focalization employed throughout the novels allows the readers to feel and comprehend Maja's relations and the shifting horizons and points of observation, which are additionally dynamized by the alterations that the place agent Kiruna undergoes. Maja is profoundly attached to Kiruna's places who speak to her in their unique manner and help her to find ways of relating to the alterations of the outside world through interactions guided from within. Places and many buildings—the library, the community hall, the church—that are closed, demolished, or rebuilt elsewhere, relate to Maja with their details. Their architecture, building materials, and shapes evoke memories of social gatherings and emphasize their central role in

[16] "Varje natt förbereder man för sprängningarna under jord. [...] Flytande sprängmedel injiceras i flera borrhål i [...] gruvgångerna. [...] Det bildas farliga gaser i orterna. Sedan dånar det och järnmalmen lossnar. Järnmalmen som gör att Kiruna lever." (Laestadius, *Tio över ett* 30)

[17] "Jävla LKAB. Jävla kommunen. Jävla alla som inte förstår vad som kommer att hända när stan förändras. Folk kommer att välja att flytta. Och inte bara tre kilometer utan trettiofem mil eller längre bort." (Laestadius, *Tio över ett* 75)

[18] "Det är som om jag inte finns." (Laestadius, *Inte längre min* 24,102)

bringing a community of humans and more-than-humans together (Laestadius, *Tio över ett* 20, 34, 47; *Inte längre min* 58, 96).

> I […] pass by the old library, its rusty red brickwork and green peeling metal roof. A stately, old building with wide spiral stone staircases between the floors. [...] I ran up and down those stairs between the departments so many times. It is almost impossible to look at the building without feeling a cramp in my stomach. It was the first thing I lost. The library closed and moved to Union Street [...]. I was there at the opening. My mom was too. [...] She is always so nostalgic. That is why she should understand me. But she doesn't. She only gets angry. (Laestadius, *Tio över ett* 34)[19]

To Maja, Kiruna is an entity. Her practised relation to Kiruna is reminiscent of Sámi "*meahcci*," "a *creative collection of practical places and relations*—a set of *activity spaces*" or "*taskscapes*" (Joks et al. 307; emphasis in original). In the plural, "meahcit" are "locations where people undertake different tasks at different times," "a part of home and a place of safety," and "a set of potentially *productive relations*" (307; emphasis in original). As multiple, unfolding, specific, and concrete "*places–times–tasks*" and encounters with "*morally sensible*," "*lively and powerful beings*," meahcit "bypass not only the nature/culture binaries […] but also the abstractions that go both with clock time and two- or three-dimensional cartographic conceptions of the spatial" (308; emphasis in original). Although Maja is Tornedalian rather than Indigenous, her attitudes and practices advocate for a shift toward understanding built and natural environments as relations. Her emotional engagement with Kiruna's places evoke Sámi ways of knowing and relating to environments, emphasizing the material and processual dimensions of lived environmental relationships, as embodied in concepts such as *meahcci*. Maja rebuilds Kiruna from within herself and finds ways to express these internalized place relations: on the one hand in her mobile phone videos, on the other hand in her decision to pursue a career as a journalist. Supported by her Sámi friend Alva, Maja eventually plucks up the courage to confront Aurora who appropriates non-human beings by drawing and painting them, using places and the social relations they encourage with colonial intent to increase her power and gain status and prestige (Laestadius, *Inte längre min* 258–59). Addressing Aurora directly, Maja explicitly voices the fundamental difference between her relational worldview and Aurora's separated dichotomist one:

> I am not like you at all. I dare to be myself [. ...] I think you are just sad that you do not belong anywhere [...] And that simply proves that you have no roots. You don't know what home is. My home and Kiruna are everything to me, that is who I am. (Laestadius, *Inte längre min* 274–76)[20]

Laestadius expands the horizon for alliances between Indigenous peoples, ethnic minorities, and even non-Indigenous individuals, such as the above-mentioned Swede Stina, Maja's teacher. Laestadius stages a confrontation between Maja,

[19] "Jag […] passerar det gamla biblioteket, rostrött tegel och grönt flagnat plåttak. Ett ståtligt, gammalt hus med breda spiraltrappor i sten mellan våningarna. [...] Jag har sprungit upp och ner i de där trapporna mellan avdelningarna så många gånger. Det går nästan inte att titta på huset utan att det krampar i magen. Det var det första som försvann för mig. Biblioteket stängde och flyttade till Föreningsgatan [...]. Jag var med på invigningen. Mamma också. [...] Hon är alltid så nostalgisk. Därför borde hon förstå mig. Men det gör hon inte. Hon blir bara arg" (Laestadius, *Tio över ett* 34).

[20] "Jag är inte alls som du. Jag vågar vara mig själv [. ...] Jag tror att du egentligen är ledsen över att du inte hör hemma någonstans [. ...] Och det visar bara att du inte har några rötter. Du vet inte vad hemma betyder. Mitt hem och Kiruna är allt för mig, det är jag" (Laestadius, *Inte längre min* 274–76).

granddaughter of a local politician who strongly endorses the mining industry and Kiruna's relocation and daughter of a mine worker family, and Aurora, daughter of an LKAB business economist. Through this encounter, Laestadius presents Maja as an empowered young woman who transforms her vulnerability into defiant strength. Simultaneously, she portrays Aurora as both a colonized subject and a victim of a paradoxical "maternal patriarchy" enacted by her mother—LKAB's business economist—who engages in the mine's extractive self-sabotage. Moreover, the juxtaposition and confrontation of the two girls gestures toward the possibility that Aurora might embark on a process of transformative self-reflection: Both her names, Linnea Aurora, inscribe a polyvalence in their bearer, opening both for colonial acts (Linnea) as well as the chance to be multifaceted (Aurora) which carries the risk of being a deceptive threat but also opens the chance to unseen transformation in a pluriverse. Thus, with the character Aurora, Laestadius challenges readers to confront their own complex identities, attitudes, positionalities, and colonial complicities.

As the examples above show, from a trans-Indigenous methodological lens, the place-based relational ontologies and epistemologies Laestadius and Tailfeathers put forward in their artistic works correspond with each other.

Artivism: Facing Politico-economic Elites in Post-democratic Societies and Turning to Kin Approaches

Hitherto nothing has been done to successfully alter the overall global course of ongoing colonial exploitation and resource extraction. Both fossil energy extraction on Blood Reserve land and iron ore extraction in Kiruna are harmful to Indigenous and minority communities and environmental living conditions by design. LKAB even announced the exploitation of Europe's largest deposit of rare earths near Kiruna**,** arguing that access to rare elements is important for Europe's becoming independent from Chinese and Russian markets as these elements are essential for the manufacture of electric vehicles, wind turbines, and a successful climate transition. Claiming that "this is good news, not only for LKAB, the region and the Swedish people, but also for Europe and the climate" (LKAB, "Europe's largest deposit"), LKAB overlooks the fact that such an unbalanced transition will inevitably lead to environmental injustice that will eventually affect the entire Earth.

Swedish scholar Moa Sandström relates art produced by Sámi artists to the aim of implementing decolonization and coined the term decolonizing art:[21] artivism, i.e., art intended to function as a means of bringing about social change, can include any type of art, artwork, or artistic practice (3–11, 243–49). Laestadius and Tailfeathers use their respective textual and audio-visual forms of art deliberately to encourage and bring about socio-political, liberating, and collective change. Accordingly, their works *Bloodland* as well as *Tio över ett* and *Inte längre min* can be defined as artivism, or—since the social changes they aim at are multiple and entangled—even more precisely as decolonizing gendered Indigenous and minority

[21] Sandström's Swedish term and title of their work is "dekoloniseringskonst", which literally translates as "decolonizing art."

environmental artivism. Returning to the question posed at the outset—whether a conceptual category beyond Tailfeathers's and Laestadius's self-designations as "not an environmentalist" and "not an activist" might more adequately encompass their positions, creative practices, and artistic output—this study proposes that they may more aptly be understood as artivists.

Regarding the initial question of equitable democratic participation in decision-making processes concerning Indigenous environmental justice—as an intersectional issue encompassing colonial, gendered, social, and political dimensions—the functions and limitations of democracy must be critically examined. Colin Crouch situates his analysis within advanced Western democracies, illustrating how liberal democratic systems have been increasingly hollowed out by elite influence. As in the examples from Northern Europe and North America outlined in the introduction, democratic frameworks—such as the Canadian federal parliamentary democracy and the Swedish parliamentary monarchy—formally exist. However, meaningful participation in decision-making processes concerning one's living environment has failed in the case of the Kainai Blood Reserve and is entirely absent in the case of Kiruna. As these cases show, both Sweden and Canada bear marks of a post-democracy, defined by Crouch as a society in which democratic "institutions and habits remain; but the real energy of the political system has passed into the hands of small elites of politicians and the corporate rich, who increasingly ensure that politics responds to their wishes" (3). In pursuing their objectives, politico-economic elites hinder, among others, environmental justice and Indigenous environmental justice as defined by Schlosberg and McGregor et al. A "strong democracy," however, requires "two characteristics: a capacity for citizens to confront established elites with unsettling demands; and institutions outside democracy itself that protect its operation, particularly from the conduct of rulers" (Crouch 139). Crouch's findings are further supported by examples from other parts of the world, illustrating that challenges to democratic participation are inherent to environmental justice struggles, which constitute a global phenomenon. For instance, a case study of a coal mine in Aotearoa/New Zealand by Lillian Fougère and Sophie Bond highlights these dynamics through the lens of post-politics: "Postpolitics describe processes that, perhaps under the guise of participation or public involvement, protect the status quo in which progress equates to increased economic growth. Here, dissent is annulled, delegitimised, likened to background noise to ensure progress continues […]" (144). Fougère and Bond argue that "in the current conjuncture, where postpolitical processes are systematically closing down possibilities for alternatives, there is a need to push back against the techno-managerial tendencies of contemporary planning practice" (164). They underline the legitimate and important role of informal activism "in making alternative worldviews and discourses prominent in the public eye […] and creating possibilities for cleaving open dominant ways of knowing and inserting alternative imaginaries" (164).

In Tailfeathers's and Laestadius's artivist works, Indigenous world-making practices and the act of imagining otherwise become unsettling demands that question the state of Euro-Western democracies and fight a gendered struggle against multiple forms of colonial violence to achieve Indigenous and minority environmental justice. By unmasking the hollowed-out structures of post-democracy and post-

politics, Tailfeathers's and Laestadius's artivism exposes the ontological failure at the heart of the neoliberal capitalist ideology and environmental governance. In line with Taiaiake Alfred's argument that democracy is incompatible with Indigenous governance systems and values, Glen Coulthard's critique of the politics of recognition and his concept of grounded normativity (also employed by Leanne Betasamosake Simpson), and Dina Gilio-Whitaker's observation that capitalist democracies' legal systems clash with Indigenous environmental justice, the works of Tailfeathers and Laestadius reveal how the techno-managerial strategies, renewable energy initiatives, and green transitions mentioned at the outset of this article operate to manage Indigenous dissent rather than confront the colonial logics that underpin all forms of resource extraction. Rather than offering real solutions, such strategies reproduce the very violence they claim to remediate—disregarding the relational understandings of land and life that are central to Indigenous world-making practices and environmental justice. The place agents Kiruna and Blood Reserve land teach Tailfeathers and Laestadius how to create works of art that communicate relational ontology, relational epistemology, accountability, respect, and reciprocity between humans and non-humans.

Enacting the kwe method of refusing colonial domination and heteropatriarchy (Simpson 33), Tailfeathers's and Laestadius's works issue powerful artivist interventions that challenge not only politico-economic elites but also many ordinary citizens who fail to respond to, or respect, calls for reciprocal relationality. Refusing to align with the short-sighted techno-managerialism that generates life- and world-destroying consequences, their works speak to those who recognize the urgent need to enact alternative modes of living. They call for the creation of conditions that enable living well with Earth, beyond the colonizing logics of neoliberalism and the perilous limitations of insufficiently self-critical Euro-Western capitalist democratic political systems. To return to Daniel Heath Justice's vocabulary: Through their works, Tailfeathers and Laestadius show how wonder works, how wonderworks imagine otherwise, and how they bring into being worlds otherwise.

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