

# Exploring Transcultural Community

## Realistic Visions in Sami (Norwegian-Danish) and Ojibwe (Canadian) Novels

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**ABSTRACT:** This article compares the protagonists' identity constitution in the novels *Og sådan blev det* (2013) [And so it turned out] by Maren Uthaug (2013) and *Medicine Walk* by Richard Wagamese (2014). Indigenous identity is historically and theoretically framed by political discourses and postcolonial theory. Indigenous concepts of land and story, concepts of cultural memory, western postmodern subject philosophy, and Indigenous research methods serve as a basis to explain the characters' success in constituting their individual Indigenous identity within ethnically and culturally diverse communities while finding ways of mutual understanding, bridging the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous People. The novels suggest visionary but realistic ways of constituting Indigenous identity in transcultural communities and convey ethical values fundamental to all human beings—regardless of ethnicity and culture.

**RÉSUMÉ :** Cet article compare la constitution identitaire des protagonistes dans les romans *Og sådan blev det* (2013) [Et c'est ainsi] de Maren Uthaug (2013) et *Medicine Walk* [Promenade médicinale] de Richard Wagamese (2014). L'identité autochtone est historiquement et théoriquement encadrée par les discours politiques et la théorie postcoloniale. Les concepts autochtones de territoire et d'histoires, les concepts de mémoire culturelle, la philosophie occidentale postmoderne des sujets et les méthodes autochtones de recherche servent de base pour expliquer le succès des personnages dans la constitution de leur identité autochtone individuelle au sein de communautés ethniquement et culturellement diverses, tout en trouvant des moyens de compréhension mutuelle, comblant ainsi le fossé entre les peuples autochtones et non autochtones. Les romans proposent des moyens visionnaires, mais réalistes de formation de l'identité autochtone dans des communautés transculturelles et véhiculent des valeurs éthiques fondamentales pour tous les êtres humains, quelles que soient leur ethnie et leur culture.

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## Introduction: Fiction as Substitute

“**F**or sent for sannhet, på tide med fiksjon” [Too late for truth, time for fiction]. Is fiction in the context of Indigenous identity a substitute for an unattainable historical truth as Norwegian author Helene Uri<sup>1</sup> suggests in her novel *Rydde ut* (2013, 93)? The phrase expresses a female first-person narrator’s regret for not having known of her Sami heritage.<sup>2</sup> Due to this lack of knowledge, she turns to fiction to imagine her parents’, grandparents’, and ancestors’ lives. Fiction serves as a prop to create oneself a new identity and life story. Taking Uri at her word, there are three questions to focus on:

1st: What truth exactly is it too late for?

2nd: What kind of fiction is implied?

3rd: What is the outcome regarding Indigenous identity in contemporary transcultural communities?

Offering a transatlantic comparative literary perspective, I concentrate on two novels, *Og sådan blev det* (2013) [And so it turned out] by Maren Uthaug (Sami, Norwegian-Danish), and *Medicine Walk* (2014) by Richard Wagamese (Ojibwe, Canadian). Comparative Indigenous literary studies is—beyond a few exceptions—nearly unknown to a broader academic community in Europe. Given this context, I begin by providing a selective review of literature, including aspects that define Indigenous identity. I also give some insights into political, social, and cultural goals achieved by Indigenous movements. As the majority of academics in related fields are either familiar with Sami literary studies or First Nations, Métis, and Inuit literary studies exclusively, the present article serves as an introduction and hopefully inspiring contribution to an evolving field of transatlantic comparative Indigenous literary and cultural studies, by looking at literature written by people from Sápmi and Turtle Island. My overall goal is to raise awareness of Indigenous ways of thinking as presented in literary works, point out Indigenous philosophies conveyed in literary texts, as well as build bridges where Indigenous and western philosophies and theoretical approaches can meet.

In a cultural and political sense, the term “Postcolonial North Atlantic” covers the geographical region in the middle of the North Atlantic Ocean, historically marginalized through Danish rule (Körber and Volquardsen). From the middle of the twentieth century, the term “postcolonialism” chronologically describes the period after contact between Indigenous and non-Indigenous People in addition to the consequences suffered by Indigenous People (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin 168). The Postcolonial North Atlantic is also defined as a geographic

area from the Arctic Ocean to the equator and from the European west coast to the American east coast (Kresl 10–15; cf. also Frost). Combining these concepts, Greenland, as well as North America and northern Scandinavia, are “postcolonial” regions.

The relevance of a transatlantic perspective in comparative Indigenous literary studies is also emphasized by the history of cooperation between the Sami People, Native Americans, and Canadian First Nations, Métis, and Inuit communities. After nearly 50 years of preparation, the United Nations (UN) adopted the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (henceforth UNDRIP) on September 13, 2007 (United Nations 2008; cf. Minde 52–58). In the beginning, some people raised doubts about whether Sami were Indigenous People because of their white skin colour. Referring to this disagreement, Sami scholar Harald Gaski described the Sami humorously as “[t]he ‘White Indians’ of Scandinavia” (1993, 115). The UN’s definition, though, is neither based on skin colours nor on the Blue Water Theory, which defines Indigenous Peoples in relation to regions situated across an ocean, obviously from a European perspective. Therefore, the Blue Water Theory does not refer to Finno-Scandian Sami (cf. Minde 56, 63). The UN implemented an inclusive definition to ensure that also the Sami be acknowledged and addressed by the term “Indigenous.”

The International Labour Organization’s Declaration C 169 (1989/1991; henceforth ILO and ILO 169 respectively) employs a similar set of criteria, although ILO states that “there is no universal definition of indigenous and tribal peoples” (International Labour Office 2).<sup>3</sup> ILO 169 criteria, however, “are jointly applied to identify who these peoples are in a given country” (2). The subjective criteria consist of self-identification as belonging to an Indigenous People, while the objective criteria mark Indigenous People as descendants “from populations, who inhabited the country or geographical region at the time of conquest, colonisation or establishment of present state boundaries. They [i.e. the Indigenous populations] retain some or all of their own social, economic, cultural and political institutions, irrespective of their legal status” (2).<sup>4</sup> ILO 169 has been important in Sami politics and activism.<sup>5</sup>

During the long definition process, the UN was collaborating with international Indigenous organizations as for example the World Council of Indigenous Peoples (WCIP) and the International Indian Treaty Council (IITC). The collaboration resulted, inter alia, in taking into account suggestions by George Manuel (Shuswap), Aslak Nils Sara (Sami), and Sam Deloria (Oglala Sioux) (cf. Minde 58–61, Aarseth).<sup>6</sup> All these actions helped to pave the way towards a global definition of “Indigenous” as described in the following reflections by Shawn Wilson:

Indigenous is inclusive of all first peoples—unique in our own cultures—but common in our experiences of colonialism and our understanding of the world.  
(Wilson 16)

So many of the conditions that we have faced as colonized peoples are the same, but more important to me, our views of the world seem to be so similar.  
(Wilson 28)

I have noticed that we share similar beliefs and a common spirituality.  
(Wilson 32)

Nearly at the same time as UNDRIP was adopted, Henry Minde, Svein Jentoft, Harald Gaski, and Georges Midré edited a book that aimed to move in the direction of making Indigenous studies more comparative. There are few comparative studies regarding land rights, ecological sustainability, and culture, although global contexts and de-essentializing of indigeneity make it desirable to highlight similarities and differences on an international and transnational scale (cf. Minde, Jentoft, Gaski, and Midré 2). Similarly, comparative Indigenous literary studies mainly focus on English literatures.<sup>7</sup> Sami scholar Harald Gaski, however, encourages a broader perspective as well as comparisons between Sami and global Indigenous literatures (H. Gaski 1997a, 1997b, 1997c, 201-202, 2003, 2004). In connection with this, he places emphasis on the growing field of Scandinavian studies in the United States of America, which is much more inclusive of Sami studies than European-based academic research and higher education within this discipline (cf. H. Gaski 2003, 146-47). With the introduction of Indigenous content requirements, some Canadian universities have recently taken a small step towards the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's (TRC's) *Calls to Action* to “develop and implement a multi-year National Action Plan for Reconciliation, which includes research and policy development, public education programs, and resources” (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada 7).<sup>8</sup>

Identifying literature as “a new means of identity expression,” Gaski maintains: “What makes Sami literature ... interesting in an *international* context is its affinity to indigenous peoples' literatures in the rest of the world” (H. Gaski 2004, 376, original emphasis). Moreover, in Gaski's view “the identity question in all its nuances is naturally a common theme [of Indigenous literatures]” (H. Gaski 2004, 376). As far as a theoretical frame is concerned, he is especially interested in a “*meeting place* of different texts or cultures” (H. Gaski 2004, 379, original emphasis) and consequently supports the equal status of Indigenous and western theory and epistemology while emphasizing the need for a process of indigenizing academia (H. Gaski 2013). This encouraged me to apply a variety of theories in the study at hand in order to understand the Indigenous protagonists' constitution of identity as comprehensively as possible.

## Defining Indigenous Identity

Japanese ethnologist Takashi Irimoto, who collaborates with Indigenous researchers, identifies an interesting new paradigm caused by the effects of globalization: “[e]thnicity and identity are dynamic, sometimes variable and even fictional, though they are the absolute truth for the people concerned” (Irimoto 401). This new paradigm consists of four main points:

### Identity

1. is comprehended in the framework of the relationship between nature, human and society, and
2. is associated with a variety of groups ranging from individuals in society to the entire humankind.

Moreover, if ethnicity is added to identity, identity

3. can be positioned in the relationships among groups, which come into contact with each other, and
4. is associated with the process of changes in population and its culture.

(Irimoto 401)

Indigeneity consequently is a form of ethnic-cultural awareness of belonging and therefore a form of collective identity (cf. Barth). While Irimoto’s first two points confirm the Indigenous concept of land and all-relatedness, the last two are of particular interest to my study as both novels are deeply concerned with the living together of persons from diverse and mixed ethnic backgrounds. The characters struggle to define and interpret their own Indigenous identity within contemporary transcultural communities.

Shawn Wilson states that a distinct way of viewing the world and of being is an integral part of Indigenous identity (15). For identifying themselves as Indigenous, it is essential for Indigenous People to incorporate their cosmology, world view, epistemology, and ethical beliefs in their everyday lives as well as academic activities. This holistic and relational attitude is at the same time cultural and collective (nation, clan, etc.) as well as individual and subjective (a single member of a nation and his or her relations). According to Wilson, in an Indigenous paradigm, relational accountability is the ethics and moral guide for seeking knowledge and judging information (34, 39). Thus, relational accountability is an integral part of Indigenous identity. Wilson adopts the three R’s to describe an Indigenous researcher’s guidelines: “Respect, Reciprocity and Relationality” (Steinhauer’s interview with Cora Weber-Pillwax quoted in Wilson 58).

Non-Indigenous understandings of identity are often very different. German scholar Aleida Assmann, for instance, claims that identity is nowadays, i.e. after a process of de-essentializing, freed from substantial characteristics such as territory, race, language, and religion. Instead, it is a form of discourse (A. Assmann 1993, 2012, 204). Compared to Wilson's Indigenous concept of identity, this is too narrowly considered. Instead, discourse and social interaction are components of Indigenous identity and Indigeneity, which are also connected to land, story, and language. As the three R's show, Indigenous identity can never be reduced to an abstract form of discourse as Aleida Assmann suggests.

## The Authors: Information on Maren Uthaug and Richard Wagamese

Maren Uthaug's debut novel *Og sådan blev det* [And so it turned out] was published in 2013. Uthaug was born in 1972 as the daughter of a Norwegian mother and a Sami father, the activist, social worker, and ex-chairman of Norske Samers Riksforbund NSR [Sami Association of the Kingdom of Norway] Tor Regnor Solbakk who died in 2009 (cf. Hætta). Until she was about seven years old, she used to live in the Norwegian part of Sápmi, i.e. the Finno-Scandian Sami traditional homeland, but grew up in Denmark after her parents' divorce. She now lives with her partner and their children in Copenhagen. Since 2009 she has been publicly writing *Marens Blog* (cf. Uthaug 2009-in progress) and received wide recognition after winning the cartoon competition of the Danish Newspaper *Politiken* [Politics] in 2013. Since then, the newspaper has been publishing her satirical drawings *Ting jeg gjorde* [Things I did] daily (cf. Uthaug 2013-in progress). Encouraged by her Sami relatives who run a publishing company in Karasjok in northern Norway, Uthaug started to publish satirical cartoon books about Sami, which met with broad acceptance among the Sami People (cf. Uthaug 2010, 2011, 2012a, 2012b, 2015; cf. also Hætta; Platou). *Og sådan blev det* [And so it turned out] was chosen for the 2015 Danmark læser [Denmark reads] (cf. Steinbeck). Uthaug writes in Danish, so her books are translated for her Sami as well as Norwegian target audiences (cf. Uthaug 2012b, 2014, 2016).

*Medicine Walk* is the thirteenth book and the last finished novel by Richard Wagamese (October 14, 1955–March 10, 2017).<sup>9</sup> Wagamese was an Ojibwe from Wabaseemoong First Nation, Ontario, and had worked as a journalist for Canadian and First Nations media since the late 1970s. Besides winning some recognized awards, Wagamese placed first with his novel *Indian Horse* in 2013's Canada Reads competition. Additionally, he was awarded two honorary doctorates: from Thompson Rivers University in Kamloops, British Columbia, in 2010, and from Lakehead University in Thunder Bay, Ontario, in 2014. In addition to writing fiction, Wagamese published autobiographical texts such as *For Joshua* and *One Native Life* where he wrote about his attempts to clear the aftermath of

intergenerational trauma (Wagamese 2002, 2009). As residential school survivors, Wagamese's parents were deeply traumatized and had severely neglected their children. Wagamese openly talked about his experience with the Sixties Scoop and about having been transferred to many different foster homes and an adopted family, about alcohol problems, the diagnosis of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) as well as therapy and a process of slow healing (cf. Rogers; CJSF Radio). He published in English, although as an adult, he rudimentary learned the Ojibwe language. One of his novels was translated into German (Wagamese 1994, 1997a). The novel *Indian Horse* (2012) was adapted as a movie (*Indian Horse* 2017) and premiered at the Toronto International Film Festival in 2017, followed by its general theatrical release in 2018.<sup>10</sup>

Wagamese's untimely death came as a shock to friends, readers, and scholars alike as Canada lost a strong, artistically elaborate literary voice and an author who was deeply and personally engaged in the process of truth, reconciliation, healing, and forgiveness (cf. Deerchild 2017).

## Comparative Literary Analysis of *Og sådan blev det* and *Medicine Walk*

*Og sådan blev det* [And so it turned out] is the story of Risten, a girl born to a Norwegian father and a Sami mother in northern Norway in 1975. The story is set in 2007, where we meet the adult Risten and are given analeptic insight into the child Risten's life. After her parents' divorce, Risten and her father Knut move to Denmark in order to live with Grethe who becomes Knut's new wife and Risten's stepmother. The reader witnesses Risten's various struggles and is left with many questions, until the past and the present reunite and Knut is forced to reveal the truth about Risten's maternal descent.

In *Medicine Walk*, the 16-year-old, visibly Indigenous Franklin Starlight is lovingly and in a down-to-earth manner raised by Bunky, an old European settler and farmer in British Columbia. The story is set in the 1970s. Franklin strongly dislikes his biological father Eldon, an untrustworthy alcoholic. As Eldon is about to die of alcohol-caused liver damage, he asks his son to bring him into a remote mountain area in order to bury him in his ancestors' warrior way. Franklin, troubled by not knowing who his mother is, reluctantly obeys and transports the dying Eldon by horse into the wilderness. Analepses give insight into the father's as well as the son's biographies. Eldon confesses to his son that volunteering for the Korean War and killing his best friend during a confusing war action in order to save his own life led him to alcohol abuse. Finally, the dying Eldon reveals who Franklin's mother was.

Reviews identify rootlessness, alienation, and family estrangement as the main topics of the two texts. Canadian reviews allude to a transnational and transethnic potential of Wagamese's novel (cf. Fischer Guy; Grainger; Hoffgaard;

Rothstein).<sup>11</sup> At first glance, this seems convincing, as diaspora and dislocation are quite obvious (cf. Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, 61–62, 65–66). Renate Eigenbrod, however, suggests that some of Wagamese's texts imply elements that subversively undermine the postcolonial discourses of victimization in a positive way (143). As Eigenbrod points out, in the novel *Ragged Company* (2008) Wagamese “imagines a society in which each person recognizes his or her dislocation” (137). In his novel *A Quality of Light* (Wagamese 1997b), “the constructedness of identity is central to the story ... home is a quest and cultural identity a becoming rather than something already in place” (Eigenbrod 140). Defining identity as a becoming emphasizes a situational quality corresponding with subjective as well as relational aspects, especially the three R's suggested by Wilson. What is more, fluid identity has much in common with postmodern western identity philosophy. This provides an opportunity to explore intersections between Indigenous and western academic concepts of identity in order to foster and support mutual understanding. In this sense, I suggest that reading Uthaug's novel in a similar way as Wagamese's texts are read by Eigenbrod promises interesting answers to my introductory questions. As land and story are key factors to Indigenous identity, I will have a closer look at their relation to Indigenous identity in a transcultural environment.

## The Concept of Land

In most Indigenous cultures land means a perception of geology and landscape structure, including the inhabitants, i.e. animals, plants, humans, and invisible beings or spirits (cf. H. Gaski 1997c, 199–200, 203; Miller; Nelson). The land is a partner to live with in mutual respect and reciprocity. UNDRIP recognize these general aspects:

### *Article 12*

Indigenous peoples have the right to manifest, practise, develop and teach their spiritual and religious traditions, customs and ceremonies; ...

### *Article 25*

Indigenous peoples have the right to maintain and strengthen their distinctive spiritual relationship with their traditionally owned or otherwise occupied and used lands, territories, waters and coastal seas.

(United Nations 2008, 6, 10)

Risten's perception of land is strongly influenced by her grandmother Áhkku and her syncretistic world view.

Det var i disse tidlige år, på Áhkkus skød, at Risten lærte at være bange for de underjordiske. ... Áhkku [fortalte] om mystiske, underjordiske væsener, der ikke tålte korsets tegn ... om underjordiske kvinder, der lokkede mennesker ned i huler under skoven og aldrig slap dem fri igen. ... .



“Men hvorfor vil de have os?” hviskede Risten. ...

“Fordi deres egne mænd og børn er så grimme,” svarede Áhkku. “Derfor kan de også finde på at bytte vores babyer ud med deres egne. ... Men der er dog en ting, der altid virker. ... De kan ikke tåle sølv. ... Hav altid sølv på dig, så holder de sig væk.”

(Uthaug 2013, 19–20)

[It was in these early years on Áhkku’s lap that Risten learned to be alert to the Subterranean Beings. ... Áhkku told stories about mystical Subterranean Beings who did not stand the sign of the cross ... about subterranean women who lured human beings into holes beneath the woods and never set them free again. ...

“But why do they want us as captives?” Risten whispered. ...

“Because their men and children are so ugly,” Áhkku answered. “Therefore they can also think of exchanging our babies with their own. ... But there is always one thing that helps. ... They cannot stand silver. ... Always have some silver on you and they will stay away.”<sup>12</sup>

Áhkku teaches Risten a special and distinctive spiritual relationship with the land, in which pre-Christian traditional Sami beliefs and Læstadianism are mixed. She defines Subterranean Beings as dangerous and Risten learns how to protect herself by wearing jewelry made of silver or by reciting Lars Levi Læstadius’ Kven prayers. One should also avoid gazing at the Northern Lights, careful to not give them more than a quick glance at best (21). These beliefs become key factors of Risten’s identity. When Risten moves to Denmark she continues to practice the rituals, hidden from her father’s and stepmother’s view (45). In addition to that, Risten also shares the rituals with her foster brother Niels, a Vietnamese refugee orphan (53–56). In this way, Sami beliefs also become relevant to Niels’ identity.

Hun [i.e. Risten] tog ham [i.e. Niels] med hen under træerne, pegede på jorden og prøvede med fagter at forklare, hvor de underjordiske boede. Hun viste ham at han skulle have noget sølv på sig.

(56)

Man vidste ... aldrig, om nordlyset pludselig uden varsel kunne finde på at drive hen over himlen. Hun instruerede nøje Niels i ikke at kigge op i mere end et øjeblik ad gangen. ... Nordlyset ... det kom bare og tog én, hvis man ikke udviste nok respekt.

Niels sugede det til sig. Prøvede at lære så meget om dette nye sted, han kunne. Messede de kvenske bønner sammen med Kirsten [i.e. Risten].

(68)

[She [i.e. Risten] took him [i.e. Niels] to the trees, pointed at the ground and tried to explain to him by gesticulating where the Subterranean Beings were living. She showed him that he should wear something made of silver.]

[You never ... knew whether the Northern Lights suddenly without any warning decided to float over the sky. She strictly instructed Niels not to look up longer than one moment at once. ... The Northern Lights ... just came and took you, if you did not show enough respect.

Niels absorbed it. Tried to learn as much as he could about this new place. Recited the Kven litanies together with Kirsten [i.e. Risten].]

The Danish summer house is an equivalent to the Sami turf *gamme*<sup>13</sup> situated away from settlements in the tundra. Protected by silver jewelry, it becomes a place of refuge for the two children where they hide from Grethe and the dominant Danish education she imposes on them (81, 94). Although the children's stealing of silver jewelry is irritating to the adults (56, 82, 88-8, 91-93), they are never reprimanded for it. Knut excuses Risten's challenging behaviour, stating that she is "et naturbarn" [a child of nature] (57). As a result, conflicts, misunderstanding, lies, and dishonesty continuously poison the atmosphere in the patchwork family. In addition to that, Grethe's insensitive control over the children repeatedly provokes escalations. The children are never asked why they steal silver and what they wish to use it for. Grethe's actions in the microcosm of the multicultural family may be seen analogously to colonialism, culminating in renaming the children: the Sami Risten becomes Danish Kirsten and a not-mentioned difficult Vietnamese name becomes Danish Niels (55, 64). Grethe generally reacts harshly to anything that cannot easily be integrated into her concept of Danish family life (94-101). After several conflicts, Grethe gives the pubescent Niels over to a Vietnamese refugee living in Copenhagen. The summer house, however, remains Risten's refuge until she leaves home in order to study architecture in Copenhagen, where she meets Niels again and starts a family with him (102-19, 131-38). As an adult, Risten persistently adheres to her distinct relation to the land and to her protection against the Subterranean Beings. In this, she is unconditionally supported and accepted by Niels, for example when she tests their son Rod with the help of silver whether he might be exchanged by Subterranean Beings and replaced by one of their offspring. As the result proves negative, she protects her son with a silver necklace and anklet. Risten believes in the positive effects of silver that helps to protect oneself against the Subterranean Beings in order to uphold a strong bond to positive powers present in the natural world. For the first time, Risten is able to defend her relationship to the land openly against her overbearing, egocentric, and increasingly racist stepmother Grethe:

Næste dag kom Grethe og Knut på besøg på barselsgangen. ...

Uden at skele til hvor grim Rod egentlig var, hvinede Grethe begejstret over hans skønhed. ...

“Han er fantastisk. Man kan jo næsten ikke se, han ikke er dansk.”

Kirsten gik på toiletet og fik Niels til hjælpe sig derud. Da de kom tilbage, lå halskæden, Rod havde haft om halsen, på bordet ved siden af sengen.

“Hvorfor ligger den der?” spurgte Kirsten uden luft i stemmen.

“Åh, jeg tænkte bare, den kunne genere den lille, hvis den lagde sig ind mellem alle hudfolderne ved halsen,” svarede Grethe og stak hånden ind under dynen for at mærke, om Rod havde det for varmt.

Rod gav sig en smule. Grethe tog dynen af ham for at give ham lidt luft.

“Nej, men han har jo også en sølvkæde om benet. Sig mig, hvad er det for noget med alt det tingeltangel, Kirsten? Han ligner jo en lille krakkemut.”

“Du skal ikke tage smykker af mit barn igen,” hvæsedes Kirsten og tog først blikket fra Grethe, da låsen på sølvkæden krævede hendes opmærksomhed.  
(137–38)

[The next day, Grethe and Knut came for a first postpartum visit. ...

Without looking at Rod and his actual ugliness, Grethe enthusiastically rejoiced at his beauty. ...

“He is fantastic. You nearly can’t see that he isn’t Danish.”

Kirsten went to the toilet and asked Niels to help her. When they came back, Rod’s necklace was lying on the table beside the bed.

“Why is this lying there?” Kirsten asked breathlessly.

“Oh, I just thought it might bother the little one in case it came in between all the skin folds at his neck,” Grethe answered and put her hand in beneath the blanket in order to feel if it was too warm for Rod.

Rod whimpered a little bit. Grethe moved the blanket to give him some more air.

“No, good heavens, he also has a silver chain around his leg. Tell me, Kirsten, what is this bling all about? He looks like a little savage.”

“You never take jewelry off my child again,” Kirsten hissed and first averted her eyes from Grethe when the necklace clasp craved her attention.]<sup>14</sup>

Despite the cultural environment in Denmark and the occurring difficulties, Risten maintains her ritual and thereby her special relationship with the land. The animistic idea of the ground being inhabited by evil Subterranean Beings and the need to protect oneself by silver is not only part of the Sami belief Áhkku taught Risten, but it is also an essential part of Risten’s identity as an Indigenous Person. Practicing the silver ritual and defending it against Grethe’s encroachments is an important step for Risten in gaining independence and confidence in her Indigenous identity.

In Franklin’s education, land plays a double role. On the one hand, he grows up as a farmer and is taught a settler’s view of the land serving as an economic resource. On the other hand, Bunky also teaches him an Indigenous “distinctive spiritual relationship” (United Nations 2008, 10) with the land. In doing this,

Bunky shows transcultural sensitivity as well as humility. Not only does he convey a farmer's knowledge, teach the correct use of a rifle, and how to behave in order to hunt successfully (Wagamese 2014, 27–35), but he also transmits basic rituals that embody Indigenous People's specific spiritual relationship to the land in a general way, including to give thanks for food provided by the land.

He [i.e. Franklin] shot his first deer when he was nine. ...

It was a clean heart shot. The buck died instantly. The kid stood looking down at it and there were tears suddenly. He wept quietly and the old man stood by and waited. When he wiped at his nose with his sleeve the old man handed him a knife.

"Cut the throat, Frank," he said.

When the slash was made the old man drew a smear of blood with two fingers and turned the kid's face to him with the other hand. He made a pair of lines with the blood on each of his cheeks and another on his chin and a wavy line across his forehead. His face was calm and serious. "Them's your marks," he said.

The kid nodded solemnly. "Because I'm an Indian," he said.

"Cuz I'm not," the old man said. "I can't teach you nothing about bein' who you are, Frank. All's I can do is show you to be a good person. A good man. You learn to be a good man, you'll be a good Injun too. Least ways, that's how I figure it works. Now you gotta give thanks."

"Thanks?"

"To the buck. He's gonna feed us for a good while, gonna give us a good hide to tan. So you pray and say thank you for his life on accounta he's takin' care of your life now. Our life. It's a big thing."

"How do I do that?"

The old man looked up at the sky. "I was never much for prayer. Least, not in the church way. But me, I figure everything's holy. So when I say somethin' I always just try'n feel what I feel and say whatever comes outta that. Always been good enough for me."

"I feel sad," the kid said.

"Yeah. I know. Speak outta that, Frank. What you say'll be true then."

The old man walked off and sat on a fallen log. The kid stood over the body of the buck and looked down at it. Then he knelt and put a hand on its shoulder. It was warm, the fur felt alive under his palm. He closed his eyes and let the sadness fall over him again. When the tears came he spoke.

"Thank you," he said. "I'm sorry about this. Whenever I come here, I'll think of you. I promise."

(35–37)

Franklin internalizes this attitude towards the land and its inhabitants and respectfully regards them as relations (45–50, 62–67). At first, however, he excludes his father from this relationship of all living things because he despises him, the drunk. The ride into the mountain woods framed with the eponymous concept of the medicine walk, which Franklin also learned from Bunky, changes his point of view. On a medicine walk, a person gathers physically as well as spiritually

nurturing things offered by the land. Finally, Franklin talks to his father about it:

“Everything a guy would need is here if you want it and know how to look for it. ... You gotta spend time gatherin’ what you need. What you need to keep you strong. He [i.e. the old man Bunky] called it a medicine walk.”  
(65)

When he buries his father, Franklin gains a deeper understanding of the fact that no being is excluded from the comprehensive concept of land. During the burial ceremony, which he holds in complete solitude, Franklin finally finds a way of making peace with his deceased father, laying him to rest with honour and deep respect: “He [Franklin] cried then, feeling the raw edges of a new hurt deep within him. ... ‘War’s over, Eldon,’ he said finally” (237–38).

In comparison with the concept of land of UNDRIP, which emphasizes that “states shall provide effective mechanisms for prevention of, and redress for: ... any action which has the aim or effect of dispossessing them [i.e. Indigenous Peoples] of their lands, territories or resources” (United Nations 2008, 5), the concept of land in the two novels seems hardly locally bound to territories. It is rather tied to individuals’ relationships to the land, similar to the concept of “my home is in my heart” stated by Sami artist Nils-Aslak Valkeapää in *Trekways of the Wind* (Valkeapää, n.p.), meaning to be able to feel at home everywhere because of a nomadic concept of land, provided that it is possible to live together in mutual support and respect. This concept can seemingly be upheld at any place (cf. H. Gaski 1997c, 200–201, 203) and by any person.

This seems a challenging finding, particularly because Indigenous scholars along with the above-mentioned UNDRIP clearly emphasize the importance of a connection to aboriginal peoples’ respective traditional lands. However, the two texts are written by Indigenous authors who obviously present new ideas and concepts based on a history of forceful dislocations from the land. While no one doubts the traditional importance of specific places in Sami and First Nation worldviews, in the two novels, the land seems to be a spirituality individuals carry with them to be put into practice on any piece of land, in any geographical region, and in different situations. What’s more, the Indigenous concept of land can be transferred beyond the boundaries of biological kinship and contains identity-constituting aspects: Risten teaches the Sami concept of land, which she has been taught by Áhkku, to her Vietnamese stepbrother. Niels adopts it as his own worldview. The old man Bunky, on his part a non-Indigenous Person and descendant of European settlers, teaches Franklin about Indigenous Peoples’ relationship to the land and everything he knows about it, an aspect which becomes vital to Franklin’s identity. Instead of expounding the problems of appropriation or white-controlled revitalization of Indigenous rituals, Wagamese’s

novel emphasizes Bunky's humility and honesty, his sincere intentions, his loving care for the boy, and their good relationship of mutual trust. The respectful process of building a strong relationship with any piece of land, any human being, and any spirit plays an important role in transcultural understanding between individuals. Traditional Indigenous concepts of land are set in a much wider context because the Indigenous technique<sup>15</sup> of building cognitive landscapes out of different cultural landscapes is highly individualized:

Cultural landscapes contain concrete, physical elements that can be identified regardless of the observer's background. In addition, they contain cognitive elements expressed by interpreting and assigning value to the meaning and content of the landscape. ...

Landscapes include physical and tangible elements as well as non-material components. The latter may relate to religious and mythical dimensions, sometimes reflected in the names of localities. ...

Cognitive landscapes are personal in the sense that content and meaning vary between individuals. ... Personal landscapes manifest themselves as a mental map, expressing the way a person perceives his or her environment. (Bergman 16)

Risten and Franklin get in touch with the land in a similar way: Risten uses her Sami traditions as cognitive props in perceiving the Danish landscape and starts to assign value to her new environment. Franklin builds a similar relationship to the farmland and the surrounding mountains based on Bunky's Indigenous teachings. He also develops this relationship with the landscape on the medicine walk. Even if it is not their traditional homeland with which Risten and Franklin develop their relationship, they perceive land exactly as defined by Robert M. Nelson who claims that

one of the fundamental tenets of the creative vision informing American Indian fiction ... is the proposition that place, understood as a living physical landscape invested with the same type and degree of spirit as humanity, has the power to shape the identities of the People, individually and collectively, whose lives take place there. ... Taken as a premise, this claim in turn predicates the possibility of individual identity not only with the land but with the cultural traditions grounded there. For the protagonists ... overcoming alienation by recovering identity is a matter of shaping one's vision and motion to a particular landscape, a process requiring surrender to the power of place rather than personal imposition upon it. Coincidentally, such an act of reidentification and self-verification in terms of place brings the individual into identity also with the life of the People, whose collective traditions have evolved out of (and are verified by) a similar process. Understood as texts, the individual's story or personal myth and the myth of the

culture share a common pretext: both are humanized stories—versions—of the land.

(133–34)

Due to the protagonists' permanent dialogue and relational interaction with the land, displacement can never happen to them again.

In many of Richard Wagamese's literary works, diaspora and cultural dislocation affect Indigenous as well as non-Indigenous People alike. By thematizing relationships between marginalized individuals and groups of diverse ethnic origins, Wagamese revises the perception of First Nations People. Not only does he proclaim mutual understanding, he also claims that diasporic experiences, which define Canadian immigrant society, as well as many other societies, are an untapped resource whose positive and transformative social power has not yet been used (cf. especially Eigenbrod, Schorcht).

I suggest *Og sådan blev det* conveys a similar message. Grethe is introduced as a character who seriously lacks social as well as inter- and transcultural competence. At the same time, Uthaug underlines the inclusive potential of the Sami worldview in a global, i.e. migrant, context focused on the multicultural patchwork family. The Sami Risten and the Vietnamese Niels inclusively share the Sami concept of land and successfully build a microscopic community within an environment that represents diaspora and dislocation for both of them. In this respect, Risten's behaviour also corresponds with the Sami idea of "my home is in my heart" mentioned above. By explaining the meaning of two Sami words for "home," *báiki* and *ruoktu*, Gaski emphasizes that Sami people are able to feel at home everywhere because of their nomadic concept of land (H. Gaski 1997c, 200–201, 203). This means, too, that a Sami cultural background can be brought to and upheld at any place, i.e. it has the capability to migrate. From a contemporary global perspective, these aspects seem very important.

## The Concept of Story

Both novels contain two complementary concepts of story respectively. On the one hand, story is a traditional, mainly orally transmitted narrative in the collective cultural memory of a certain group of people. According to Jan Assmann, cultural memory includes "mythical history of origins, events in an absolute past" and is medially transmitted as "fixed objectifications, traditional symbolic classification and staging through words, pictures, dance, and so forth" (2011, 41, cf. also J. Assmann 2011, 5; [1992] 2002, 19, 56). Narratives and cultural memory of this kind are guaranteed in UNDRIP:

*Article 13*

1. Indigenous peoples have the right to revitalize, use, develop and transmit to future generations their histories, languages, oral traditions, philosophies, writing systems and literatures . . .  
(United Nations 2008, 7)

In *Og sådan blev det* narratives like these are implied when the story-telling Sami grandmother Áhkku informs Risten about the Subterranean Beings. In a similar way, with the help of the story of Star People, the dying Eldon explains to his son Franklin in *Medicine Walk* their peoples' origin and that of their family's surname, Starlight.<sup>16</sup>

“Starlight’s a teacher’s name. . . . Starlight was the name given to them that got teachin’ from Star People. Long ago. Way back. Legend goes that they come outta the stars on a night like this. Clear night. Sat with the people and told ‘em stuff. Stories mostly, about the way of things. . . . The wisest ones got taught more. Our people. Starlights. We’re meant to be teachers and storytellers. They say nights like this bring them teachin’s and stories back and that’s when they oughta be passed on again.”  
(Wagamese 2014, 158-59, emphasis cleared)

Narratives stored in collective memory prove insufficient for the protagonists of *Medicine Walk* and *Og sådan blev det*. Risten and Franklin need a concept of story that is connected to communicative memory as

a person’s memory forms itself through his or her participation in communicative processes. It is a function of their involvement in a variety of social groups—ranging from family through religion to nation. Memory lives and survives through communication.  
(J. Assmann 2011, 23; cf. also J. Assmann [1992] 2002, 36–37)

Hence a communicative memory is added to the cultural memory. Its contents are “historical experiences in the framework of individual biographies,” medially transmitted by “living, organic memories, experiences, hearsay,” and supported by “contemporary witnesses within a memory community” (J. Assmann 2011, 41; cf. also J. Assmann [1992] 2002, 56). Therefore, directly transmitted communicative memories are important for the constitution of identity. Blanca Schorch highlights Wagamese’s concept of story, defining it as shared experience that comprises a transformative power based on integrity and authenticity used as a means of self-reflexion rather than self-performance (75–81). In *Medicine Walk*, this need for a communicative and individual memory is explicitly expressed by Franklin:



“I like that story [of Star People]. Makes sense to me how I wanna be out here so much. Under the stars ... . But it’s another thing woulda been good to know before this.”

“I know it,” his father said.  
(Wagamese 2014, 159)

Franklin wishes to know about his mother and his individual story of origin in order to implement it in his individual memory, but his father remains silent.

Similarly, Risten agonizes about being separated from her mother. Her father angrily refuses to talk about their time with the Sami people, and he even forbids Risten to get in touch with her Sami relatives. After Grethe had renamed Risten as Kirsten, Risten talks to her father:

“Tror du, vi skal fortælle nogen hjemme, at jeg nu hedder Kirsten?” spurgte Kirsten. ... “[H]vis hun [i.e. Rihtta] ... skal have fat i mig, så ved hun jo ikke, hvad jeg hedder.”

“Hun skal ikke have fat i dig.” Knuts stemme blev pludselig hård. “Du skal ikke tale med nogen deroppefra, har du forstået?”  
(Uthaug 2013, 64-65)<sup>17</sup>

[Do you think we should tell someone at home that my name is Kirsten now?” Kirsten asked. ... “If she [i.e. Rihtta] wants to try to get hold of me, she doesn’t even know my name.”

“She will not get hold of you.” Knut’s voice was suddenly hard. “You mustn’t talk to anybody from up there, do you understand?”]

In both texts, the Indigenous protagonists lack sufficient knowledge about their respective biological mothers because their fathers refuse communication. As a consequence, a gap in their individual memory and their identity occurs.

As it comes to Risten, she had no contact with her supposed mother Rihtta between the age of seven and thirty-two. Such being the case, any stories of origin that could have allowed her to come to terms with her Sami heritage are constantly foiled by her father and her biased Danish stepmother (60–61, 64–65, 77–78, 83, 93). Even when Risten, delirious with fever after a conflict-laden period, starts to talk Kven, and Grethe finally finds Risten’s drawings of Rihtta, Knut does not understand that his daughter suffers psychologically from experiences of loss (116–19). During her life in Denmark, Risten invents an idealized and escapist view of Rihtta as a loving mother, which helps her to survive difficult times, seemingly bridging the gap of communicative memory (93). Risten’s imaginations, however, are dashed when she finally visits her mother. Rihtta does not seem to be particularly glad to see her daughter again (139–40) and does not react to Risten’s suggestion of further visits (156–58).

Franklin accuses Eldon of not having told him about his mother (Wagamese 2014, 171–73). It was not until he was sixteen that Franklin was told his mother's name, Angie, and the story of her premature death while giving birth to him. In the moment of birth, Eldon was away drinking; after a period of sobriety he was again addicted to alcohol because of shame, fear, and self-doubt. When returning home, he was far too intoxicated to drive Angie to the hospital in time. Eventually, a caesarean saved the baby's life but cost the mother's (220–22). It is difficult for Franklin to accept that the truth about his mother and his origin had been concealed from him for so long. He confronts his father with his feelings, anger, and accusations.

“I *shoul*da known all that way before now. I shoul<sup>d</sup>a been able to have an idea about her [i.e. his mother] instead of a head full of nothin’,” the kid said. “I had a fuckin’ right.”

“I know it,” his father said. “Been times I tried to speak of her but the words would never come. I never had the sand to open up to it. I was scared that if I did I’d fall right back into the hurt of it and keep right on fallin’ way beyond any bottom I ever landed in and not know how to find my way back up again.”

“I hope that ain’t supposed to be a comfort,” the kid said.

“I don’t know what it is.”

“You *shoul*d know,” the kid said and stood up suddenly. ... “You don’t get to say things like that and just die. You don’t get to get off that easy.” (215, original emphasis)

In a similar way, the disappointed Risten talks to her father. After her single visit to northern Norway, which did not turn out to be the start of a renewed relationship with Rihtta, her supposed mother committed suicide because she was terminally ill. Risten again travels to northern Norway to attend the funeral. There she is able to look into her mother's medical record, which reveals the paradoxical fact that Rihtta was sterilized by her own request in 1974—one year before Risten was born (176–77, 184–86, 194–95). She phones her father and confronts him with this fact and her feelings. Knut, however, refuses to tell the truth at first but, finally, has no chance to conceal it any longer.

“Var Rihtta min mor?”

“Ja, de første år, men siden har Grethe jo...”

“Var Rihtta min biologiske mor?”

“Jamen, ja. Ja, selvfølgelig.”

“Hun blev steriliseret før hun fik mig.”

“Nej, efter.”

“Hvornår er jeg født?”

“I 1975, det ved du da godt.”

“Jeg har fået nogle papirer fra sygehuset, hendes journal. Der står, at hun blev steriliseret i 1974.”

“Det må være en fejl.”

“Jeg har snakket med den sygeplejerske, der var der, da hun blev steriliseret. Hun sagde, at hun ikke havde nogen børn, da hun fik det gjort. Jeg kan give dig nummeret, så kan du jo ringe til hende?”

Knut sukker. “Kirsten, vent...” ...

Han har fortalt historien så mange gange, at den er blevet sand. Indtil nu, hvor han var tvunget til at sige den rigtige sandhed.  
(198–200)

[“Was Rihtta my mother?”

“Yes, the first few years, but after that Grethe has...”

“Was Rihtta my biological mother?”

“Yeah, of course, she was.”

“She was sterilized before she got me.”

“No, after that.”

“When was I born?”

“In 1975, you know that.”

“I have got some papers from the hospital, her medical record. There it says that she was sterilized in 1974.”

“This must be a mistake.”

“I have spoken to the nurse who was there when she got sterilized. She said that she did not have any children when she had the operation. I can give you her number, so you can call her?”

Knut sighed. “Kirsten, wait...” ...

He had told the story so often that it had become true. Until now when he was forced to tell the truth correctly.]

Risten gets to know that actually Ravna, Rihttas younger sister, is her biological mother. Ravna had seduced Knut when he was totally inebriated, kept the pregnancy a secret by moving to her brother Aslak in the gamme, but gave the toddler, i.e. Risten, to Rihtta and Knut, convinced that she was not able to bring her up in the tundra. Rihtta and Knut, however, kept this a secret as well and immediately arranged a stay in the capital Oslo for several months, coming back to northern Norway with their supposed daughter Risten (7–9, 22–35, 200–203). Unlike Franklin’s mother, Ravna is still alive, but severely mentally ill. Risten visits her in a special care home and unsuccessfully tries to talk with her. Ravna is not able to speak and does not recognize Risten; a real encounter is not possible due to Ravna’s bad mental condition (205–206). Knut remains the only person who can tell the communicative memory’s story. The protagonists in both texts are irritated that their fathers conceal the truth. Only in exceptional situations, confronted with proved records, pressed by the hurt feelings of their children—and in Eldon’s case threatened by the death at hand—the fathers tell the truth.

Renate Eigenbrod transgresses a postcolonial spatial definition of diaspora by following Neal McLeod who defines a spatial and an ideological diaspora. The

latter consists of an “alienation from one’s stories ..., the removal from the voices and echoes of the ancestors, ... the attempt to destroy collective consciousness” (McLeod quoted in Eigenbrod 136). According to Eigenbrod, narrating in Wagamese’s novels functions as a central coping strategy of an ideological diaspora (Eigenbrod 140). The same is the case in Maren Uthaug’s novel as Risten is only able to uphold her cultural identity by re-narrating and re-performing the rituals based on her grandmother Áhkku’s stories. In this, Eigenbrod’s and McLeod’s analyses are similar to Jan Assmann’s concept of story as a crucial part of the cultural and collective memory.

Also Assmann’s second concept of story, communicative and individual memory, is of major importance: In the same way as alienation from stories of a collective memory leaves an Indigenous concept of land hidden to someone’s recognition, one’s own individual memory and identity remain fragmentary, cryptic, and mysterious until it is completed by a narration stored in the communicative memory. Stories of the communicative memory deliver additional information that allow a person to more fully constitute an identity.

## “Being Prescribed” and Ethical Content

As the two fathers refuse communication on certain topics, Risten’s and Franklin’s individual memories contain a gap. Both children reproach their fathers in the process of seeking their story of origin. Finally, however, they successfully claim their individual stories (cf. Uthaug 2013, 198–99; Wagamese 2014, 171–72, 215).

Focusing on some aspects of the de-centred subject, Indigenous identity constitution in an individual communicative memory related to the concepts of land and story can be seen as a mode of subject constitution. Subjects construct themselves by being involved in discourses.<sup>18</sup> Being prescribed by discourses can be understood as an act of violence against subjects (cf. Butler 7–9, 19; Foucault 1982, 212).<sup>19</sup> Risten and Franklin are negatively prescribed by their fathers’ denial of communication. However, the literary analysis reveals three ways in which they are able to free themselves.

First, the freeing process can be read in a postcolonial context. Although the two novels do not provide classical encounters of the colonizer and the colonized, there are structural parallels in the fathers’ encounters with their children to Homi Bhabha’s depiction of oppositional political positions. According to Bhabha, the “true” is created in the meeting of opposites:

The “true” is always marked and informed by the ambivalence or the process of emergence itself, the productivity of meanings that construct counter-knowledges

*in medias res*, in the very act of agonism, within the terms of a negotiation (rather than a negation) of oppositional and antagonistic elements.

(Bhabha 33, original emphasis)

Bhabha solves the problem of prescription by deconstructing any form of cultural hegemony, suggesting a culture-inherent hybridity based on cultural difference (Bhabha 33). Much in line with this, none of the novels' protagonists claims cultural hegemony as well. Instead, they are marked by hybridity as there are significant differences between the fathers' and the children's individual as well as collective cultural knowledge. Thematizing and negotiating these differences with each other rather than negating them puts the characters' identity at stake. In their conversation, the fathers and their children have to admit their uncertainty in order to negotiate new identities (cf. Bhabha 41, 50–51). In the concept of the third space of enunciation, Bhabha focuses on the subject articulating him- or herself in the dialogic and communicative space of culture (Bhabha 54, cf. also Sieber; Rutherford). This is to a certain extent comparable to Jan Assmann's communicative memory, too, as the latter is connected with contemporary subjects talking to each other as well as situated within their respective traditional cultures. Bhabha places emphasis on the spatio-temporality of cultural practices continuously updated with new meanings in new environments and concrete situations. To this, Bhabha applies the term "negotiation" and thereby highlights the dynamics of the process (cf. Bhabha 35–37). Risten and Franklin are conceptualized as hybrid subjects. Their encounters with Niels and Bunky offer third spaces of enunciation that open up for positive negotiations and new dynamic Indigenous identities.

Second, in western subject philosophy, Foucault solves the problem of being prescribed with the concept of "ethos," defined as the attitude a subject can take towards discourses, with self-reflection being a necessary prerequisite. To Foucault, this is only possible in the time after modernity.

By "attitude" I mean a mode of relating to contemporary reality; a voluntary choice made by certain people; in the end, a way of thinking and feeling; a way, too, of acting and behaving that at one and the same time marks a relation of belonging and presents itself as task. A bit, no doubt, like what the Greeks called an *ethos*.

(Foucault 1984, 39, original emphasis)

Foucault points out these ways of thinking, feeling, and acting only within western epistemologies, experiences, and paradigms. However, I suggest also the Indigenous concepts of land and story can be a basis of ethos. In her Sami rituals, Risten practices and reflects on identity constitution by situationally differentiating between a Sami belief and a Danish, western way of thinking. She uses the concepts of land and story to construct her identity, which can be updated

at any time and therefore is an attitude, a belonging, and a task as defined by Foucault (cf. Uthaug 2013, 144). Franklin is placed between European and Indigenous thinking and marked by his hatred toward his father. The concept of the medicine walk, including the land used to build a personal story by gathering spiritually as well as physically nurturing things, helps him to achieve a reflected identity that continually faces the actual present (Wagamese 2014, 244–46). Both protagonists gain experience by oscillating between autonomy and heteronomy, implementing “a philosophical ethos that could be described as a permanent critique of our historical era” (Foucault 1984, 42) as well as a reflexive critique of their own subjectivity and Indigenous identity. That is, they enter a never-ending process of freeing themselves from any occurring prescriptions.

Third, Judith Butler solves the problem of prescription by recognizing the unaccountability of one’s own origin, the acceptance of not being able to completely tell the origin of one’s own self. Butler claims that our own opacity to ourselves occasions our capacity to confer a certain kind of recognition on others (41). This she calls “an ethics based on our shared, invariable, and partial blindness about ourselves” (Butler 41). In her view, the recognition that we are not quite the same as how we present ourselves in a certain discourse might imply patience with others that would suspend the demand that they be selfsame at every moment (41–42).

Every self in the process of constitution is dependent on others who do not completely know their origins and processes of constitution as well, the consequence of which is reciprocal responsibility and intense interdependence at any moment. To know about the incompleteness of one’s story of origin results in an attitude of mutual respect, trust, and understanding. The process of identity constitution is, thus, relational. Butler suggests that given the willingness to recognize the limits of acknowledgment and knowing, a new sense of ethics can emerge from this inevitable ethical failure which is a common trait of all human beings (42).

A continual, dialogic, and communicative exchange with the other, as well as a narrative continuity in one’s self-narration, becomes an ethical necessity. Read in the context of Butler’s remarks, Jan Assmann’s communicative and individual memory receive further significance for the protagonists’ self-narration as read from Butler’s perspective, both types of memory are connected to ethics. Butler emphasizes the fact that every individual self is made by its social, temporal, and environmental context:

When I tell the truth about myself, I consult not only my “self,” but the way in which that self is produced and producible. ...

To tell the truth about oneself involves us in quarrels about the formation of the self and the social status of truth. Our narratives come up against an impasse when the conditions of possibility for speaking the truth cannot fully be thematized,

where what we speak relies upon a formative history, a sociality, and a corporeality that cannot easily, if at all, be reconstructed in narrative. Paradoxically, I become dispossessed in the telling, and in that dispossession an ethical claim takes hold, since no “I” belongs to itself. From the outset, it comes into being through an address I can neither recall nor recuperate.

(Butler 132)

To know about the incompleteness of one’s story of origin results in a relation, in an attitude of mutual respect, trust, and understanding. The “self” defined by Butler is constituted relationally, it is not independent but exists because of its social and historical environment. Reading and interpreting the two novels with Butler’s discussions in mind, the protagonists’ identity constitution strongly reminds one of the above mentioned “three R’s”: “Respect, Reciprocity, and Relationality”.<sup>20</sup> Experiencing identity constitution in this way

can ... constitute a disposition of humility and generosity alike: I will need to be forgiven for what I cannot have fully known, and I will be under a similar obligation to offer forgiveness to others, who are also constituted in partial opacity to themselves.

(Butler 42)

From this, acceptance arises. In this regard, Risten and Franklin need to forgive their fathers for not telling the truth. Similarly, the fathers need to forgive their children for fiercely claiming the truth and for stirring past emotional pain. Grethe’s practice of re-naming Risten is commented with the title’s words *Og sådan blev det* [And so it turned out] (Uthaug 2013, 64). These words re-tell Risten’s story of origin presumably in the shortest possible way and immediately express acceptance: It all just happened. In *Medicine Walk*, Franklin explicitly thematizes acceptance and forgiveness in his conversation with Bunky (Wagamese 2014, 243).

From a narratological perspective, analepses mark a subject-constituting responsibility between Risten and Knut as well as Franklin and Eldon (Uthaug 200–203; Wagamese 2014, 173–214, 220–22). To tell one’s origin as far as it is known, functions as compensation for one’s own unaccountability and ethical failure. To Risten and Franklin, this means filling the gap of their individual memory. For the fathers as well as the children, this is a temporary constitution of the subject. As opacity to one’s self is at the same time unavoidable as well as unbearable, the process continues infinitely. Identity is a becoming (cf. above, Eigenbrod 140). The result is a mutual understanding based on forgiveness because of—and despite—our inherent ethical failure.

## Conclusion

Maren Uthaug's and Richard Wagamese's texts transgress the concepts of Indigenous identity presented by postcolonial theory and UNDRIP. By individualizing the process of identity constitution, traditional concepts of land and story are de-essentialized. These concepts are concentrated within single persons and microscopic communities rather than actualized collectively. As a consequence, Indigenous identity becomes a spatio-temporal, updateable attitude of a de-centred subject. To sum up: The two protagonists free themselves from the gap of their individual memory by developing an Indigenous mode of constituting identity that is based on the individualized concepts of land and story. Finally, they successfully practice this form of subject constitution as a new mode of existence. Both fictional texts present an Indigenous identity that is tightly connected with ethical aspects of subject constitution. Colonialism and postcolonialism, however, seem to take a backseat.<sup>21</sup>

In this bigger picture, Helene Uri's initially cited phrase "For sent for sannhet, på tide med fiksjon" [Too late for truth, time for fiction] may signify the following and thereby answer my three introductory questions:

First: The historical truth, i.e. the facts of colonialism and its consequences, are recognized, but it is too late to rework them over and over again. They seem to be disused as far as the constitution of Indigenous identity is concerned.

Second: Therefore it is about time to implement fictions and visions of Indigenous identity that are transculturally applicable in the present socio-cultural environment and suitable for young Indigenous Persons.

Third: Acceptance and forgiveness as presented in the two novels may be the result.

Hence the two novels from Sápmi and Turtle Island respectively might refer to a phenomenon that at present is probably just about to appear within transcultural communities and settings of Indigenous identity constitution. By inventing characters like Risten and Franklin, Maren Uthaug and Richard Wagamese not only keep up with the times but seem to be realistic visionaries.

## NOTES

1. While writing *Ryddet ut*, Helene Uri discovered her Sami ancestry. However, she is neither registered in the Sami electorate (*valgmantallet*) nor has she claimed Sami identity. Having been raised in Stockholm and Oslo, she never had anything to do with Sami communities. Therefore, a Sami identity feels totally foreign to her. She defines herself as a "Norwegian author" (pers. comm., email interview with Helene Uri on May 2, 2018, by Juliane Egerer).
2. Different spellings, i.e. Sami, Saami, and Sámi, can be found in English publications. In this article, I have chosen to use "Sami."



3. ILO 169 was adopted in Geneva in 1989 and implemented in 1991 (cf. International Labour Organization 1989/1991).
4. ILO 169 terminologically distinguishes between Indigenous and tribal people, whereupon the latter term seems to focus on a present form of organizing community and social life. The term Indigenous, in contrast, emphasizes descent as can be seen in the passage quoted above. For the purpose of this study, I am inclined to follow the ILO 169-definition of “Indigenous.”
5. While Norway was the first Scandinavian country to ratify ILO 169 on June 19, 1990, with Denmark following on February 22, 1996, Sweden, Finland, and Canada have up to now failed its ratification. Cf. International Labour Organization 2016.
6. Some regional results of the Sami People’s involvement in the discussions regarding UNDRIP became visible in 2014: On October 9, the Norwegian Sametinget [The Sami Parliament] celebrated its 25th anniversary in Karasjok (Sametinget). Only a few weeks earlier, the UN affirmed UNDRIP at the World Conference on Indigenous Peoples in New York (United Nations 2014).
7. Some examples for comparative Indigenous literary studies are Healy; McDougall; and Allen. Cf. also Moses, Goldie, and Ruffo.
8. At the University of Winnipeg, Manitoba, a mandatory Indigenous course requirement was introduced at the beginning of the academic year 2016/17. In the same academic year, Lakehead University in Thunder Bay, Ontario, launched mandatory Indigenous courses for their students. Both events were covered by national Canadian news (CBC) as well as Indigenous media (APTN), the latter also focusing on concerns about the potential impact the courses might have on aboriginal and other students who are not prepared to take these classes. Cf. Monkman; Deerchild 2016; MacIntosh; and McKenzie.
9. Wagamese’s last book *Embers*, published in 2016, was a collection of aphoristic poems, mini-dramas, and other short texts or “meditations.” However, *Starlight*, the unfinished sequel of *Medicine Walk*, was posthumously published in August 2018 and accompanied by annotations and an essay (cf. Penguin Random House Canada Limited).
10. With respect to *Indian Horse*, I see the necessity of giving an account of my perspective and my experience regarding the publication process of the novel’s German translation: By the time Richard Wagamese passed away on March 10, 2017, I, i.e. the author of this article, had translated *Indian Horse* into German. In 2017 and again in 2018, I offered this translation (which was peer-proofread by an experienced translator as well as a hobby reader to ensure high translation quality and readability) for free to Westwood Creative Artists (WCA), Mr. Wagamese’s literary agency based in Toronto, ON. I tried to engage in a collaborative process with the literary agency. WCA referred me to the Liepman Agency in Zurich, Switzerland, for the German publishing rights. I was not allowed to publish my donated translation and the agencies asked me not to approach publishers on my own with publication requests. My sincere request to be put in contact with with Richard Wagamese’s heirs, especially his son Jason Schaffer, to ensure Indigenous community involvement, was not answered by the agencies and seems not to have been considered further. By June 2019, the Liepman Agency had sold the rights to a publisher that remained unnamed. Receiving a note on this only after my repeated inquiries about how to go on in the publishing process, I explicitly renewed the donation

of my translation to the publisher, whose identity was not revealed to me by the Liepman Agency, i.e. I offered it for free for the third time in 2019. I suggested that any translator's fee should be donated to an appropriate Indigenous project. At the time this article was being prepared for publication (i.e. June to August 2020), the German Verlagsgruppe Random House Bertelsmann – Blessing Verlag announced on their website the German publication of *Indian Horse* translated by Ingo Herzke, with a planned publication date of March 1, 2021 (Verlagsgruppe Random House Bertelsmann – Blessing Verlag n. d.). I only learned about this by chance.

To date, this over three-year-long process and the literary agencies' and publisher's ethical guidelines remain opaque to me. The absence of open dialogue that respectfully and equally furthers sincere Indigenous as well as non-Indigenous efforts of collaboration (in this case launching the German translation as a joint collaborative project), raises many questions that still go unanswered. It suggests that commercial interest was given higher priority than finding a way of working together in a respectful collaborative atmosphere where all people concerned would be given an equal chance of participation and mutual exchange of perspectives.

However, I am very grateful to all Indigenous and non-Indigenous People and literary scholars, who especially since the Indigenous Literary Studies Association's (ILSA's) gathering held at First Nations University in Regina, SK, during 2018's Congress of the Humanities and Social Sciences have been more than willing to discuss and reflect on various stages of this process with me, and have been very supportive as well as interested in and open for exchange and consultation. Thank you all, I very much appreciate your efforts and advice.

In 2019, I also finished the German subtitles to the movie *Indian Horse*, which had its German premiere took place at the North America Film Festival in Stuttgart in February 2020. I am very grateful for the Festival organizers' support. My thanks also go to all people who have been working on introducing the movie to a German audience.

11. Surprisingly enough, neither the Danish original nor the Norwegian translation *Og sånn ble det* (Uthaug 2014) raised any debate about Indigenous Peoples, although Denmark has Indigenous Peoples living in Greenland and was directly and indirectly involved in Sami colonialization during the early modern period. In *Og sådan blev det*, the Alta-crisis is explicitly mentioned: Sami activists tried to stop the construction of a hydroelectric power station in the Alta river from 1978 to 1979 by sitting down in a blockade at the building site as well as in front of the Storting [The Norwegian Parliament in Oslo]. When the Norwegian police interfered violently, the crisis attracted international attention. As a consequence, Norwegian Sami politics, which were internationally regarded as ideal and exemplary within the UN collaboration, were seriously questioned (cf. L. Gaski). Norway's reputation in handling Indigenous issues was damaged.
12. All translations are my own unless otherwise indicated.
13. A brother of Rihitta's, Aslak, lives in isolation in the tundra far away from the Sami village in a gamme, a traditional Sami lodging built of tree and sod. There he spends his time hunting and offering sacrifices to supernatural beings. He is introduced as weird, violent, and inclined to mental illness. Rihitta's 16-year-old sister Ravna who flirts in a coquettish behaviour with her brother-in-law, Knut, abruptly moves to Aslak

in the gamme, where she has an incestuous relationship with her brother and lives through several miscarriages before finally becoming insane. Desperately longing for a child, she instructs Aslak to kidnap Risten. However, he fails to abduct the child. As a result, Knut splits up with Rihtta and the Sami family.

14. In this passage, I translate the word “krakkemutt” as “savage” in order to gain an equally offensive term in English. However, the word specifically means a “foreign” person with dark complexion, especially an aboriginal person from Greenland, and originally derives from Greenlandic “‘qaqqamut’, ‘til fjelds, op i fjeldet’” [in or up the mountains]. Special thanks to Lars Trap-Jensen, Copenhagen, from *ordnet.dk* and *Det Danske Sprog- og Litteraturselskab* who added this word to the online *Dansk Ordbog* after my request in October 2015 (cf. *Den Danske Ordbog, moderne dansk sprog*).
15. I use the term “Indigenous technique” here in the absence of a better phrase. However, one should be aware of the fact that this “Indigenous technique” is not to be confused with a western definition of “technique,” meaning “method.” Building a relation to a landscape and assigning value to a landscape in an Indigenous way is the state of being, the mode of living, and the relational defining of oneself.
16. Additionally, it has to be mentioned that Blanca Schorcht points out how Wagamese generally combines traditional aesthetics of oral storytelling and conventions of the novel (Schorcht). Wagamese’s novel *Indian Horse* for example uses oral storytelling techniques as aesthetic concepts within three layers of storying in one single text, i.e. oral stories, sacred stories, and the contemporary novel (Robinson).
17. Cf. also Uthaug 2013, 60–61, 64–65, 77–78, 83, 93.
18. Discourse involvement can be seen as an act of relating and a process of relation building, i.e. being related to someone or something. In this sense, subjects construct themselves, are constructed by discourse, and pick out discourses to construct themselves with the discourses’ help. Subject construction is both an activity as well as an action done to someone. The more conscious a subject is about his or her construction, the more active is the process of subject construction.
19. With these interpretations, I meet another desideratum expressed by Harald Gaski: He deplores that Indigenous literature often is assessed as romantic or sentimental because of its concepts of land and story. Consequently, possible coherences between Indigenous and current non-Indigenous discourses might easily be obfuscated (H. Gaski 1997b, 201–203). This fact may impede mutual and transcultural understanding.
20. By acknowledging an intersection between western and Indigenous theory, applying these criteria can also help bridge the gap between differing academic approaches.
21. This kind of de-colonized literary vision of Indigenous identity remarkably resembles the reciprocal fusion culture in Greenland ascertained by Greenland-Danish scholar Birgit Kleist Pedersen. According to Pedersen, young Indigenous Persons from Greenland do not any longer define themselves by reworking the traumatizing consequences of (post)colonialism. In much the same way they also refuse to solely emphasize traditional elements of Indigenous culture and society (Pedersen 283, 290, 293–94). They would rather like to position themselves as Indigenous subjects within a contemporary global reality, acting in connection with the centrifugal forces of increasing sociocultural and discursive diversity as well as the centripetal forces of

specific key symbols of the Indigenous community (286–88). Pedersen, who herself has a Greenlandic mother and a Danish father, embraces this development and emphasizes that it is about time to overcome hindrances as for example postcolonial self-pity and cultivating the imagination of the traumatized prey of colonialism. In lieu thereof, a future vision of Indigenous identity should be implemented (289–91; 307).

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