



Living with the loss: Emotional ties to place in the Vuoksi and Talvivaara regions in Finland



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1. Introduction

This article is about two lost places: the Vuoksi River Valley in the Karelian Isthmus, which was ceded to the Soviet Union in 1944, and the area of the Talvivaara mineral mine in Kainuu, Northern Finland, where mining activities started in 2004 (Fig. 1). It is about the people of the Vuoksi and Talvivaara areas—their experiences, emotions and memories of those places. Most of all, it is about living with forced displacement and trying to understand the diversity and fragility of human-place relations. In this article, we examine what kinds of emotions are manifested in narratives concerning human-place relations, especially place losses. We aim to stress the meanings of places in human lives and examine how the loss of place affects these meanings.

A place can be seen as a physical location; a zone of experiences, meanings and practices; a flow of social relations; and an emotional entity including memories and remembering (Cresswell, 2004; Lengen and Kistemann, 2012). Places have histories (Nuttall, 2012); in a sense of place, spatial and emotional ties with place, identity, community and history are combined (Korjonen-Kuusipuro and Kuusisto-Arponen, 2012; Lengen and Kistemann, 2012). Places interest researchers from various disciplines such as human and political geography, anthropology, psychology, sociology and history. Researchers have discussed whether a sense of place is self-closing or outward looking (Massey, 1991) and whether it has movement (Ingold, 2011). According to Duffy (1997), a sense of

place is formed out of the ways in which people experience representations of present and past landscapes.

Placelessness (Relph, 1976), the opposite of the sense of place, refers to a lack of unifying narrative of place, i.e. the human-place relation where humans are unable to combine history, territory and memory. Hostility to places has been studied by Porteus and Smith (2001), who described place losses with the terms “domicide” and “topocide”. Domicide means the killing of a home—the deliberate destruction of a home against the will of the home dweller, which may be due to government urban policies, wartime destruction or corporate economic changes. Topocide means the killing of a place; the process involves the reactions and responses of victims. Different emotional reactions such as stress, trauma, fear and shock follow these destructive incidents. The interplay between the sense of place, placelessness and destruction of places becomes crucial in conflicts (as in Talvivaara) or war (as in the Vuoksi River Valley), where displacement may create rootlessness (see also Kuusisto-Arponen, 2003) or an incomplete sense of belonging (Korjonen-Kuusipuro and Kuusisto-Arponen, 2012).

The Vuoksi and Talvivaara cases are topical, as Europe is experiencing a significant increase in refugee movements at the time of writing. Places have been destroyed, and people have been forced to leave their homes in these critical conditions and look for new places to live. Our study also has close connections with similar processes of land use politics and environmental crises that force people to leave their homes and places. This article shows that the problematics of human-place relations are real and far reaching in time. The findings of both case studies, including the central issue for the affected population of how to cope, will be applicable to similar large-scale contexts.

In this paper, we contribute to a growing body of literature that is concerned with emotions, places and narratives. This article also contributes to the fields of geography, memory studies and emotion studies by stressing the importance of time. We first briefly outline the three key concepts in our study, namely emotion, memory and place loss. Then, we discuss the methods and materials and introduce our case studies, before presenting our empirical findings, discussion and conclusions.

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Fig. 1. Locations of the Vuoksi River valley and Talvivaara mining area. Cartogram Erkki Hyvärinen.

2. Emotions and memories of place loss

In this article, we view losses from a cultural perspective across time and place. Place losses may be compared to cultural traumas, which, according to Alexander (2004, 1), occur “when members of a collectivity feel they have been subjected to a horrendous event that leaves indelible marks upon their group consciousness marking their memories forever and changing their future identity in fundamental and irrevocable ways”. In our case studies, the losses occurred at different times, which is why we wanted to analyse these two particular case studies in one article. We will look at the meanings of time in these processes or how transformations occur over time; transformations can be fast or slow, expected or unexpected. To produce cultural traumas, transformations do not need to be in the past. They may also be ongoing processes (cf. Alexander, 2004; Hudnall Stamm et al., 2004), as is the case in Talvivaara.

This paper conceives emotions as both physical, i.e. (subjectively felt and interpreted as bodily states, and socially constructed, i.e. felt in specific social and cultural contexts (Izard, 1991; Leavitt, 1996). While Jaggar (2009, 55) interpreted emotions “as ways in which we engage actively the world”, Turner and Stets (2005, 1) saw them as “the ‘glue’ binding people together and generating commitments to large-scale social and cultural structures”. Kleres (2010) stressed the storied nature of emotions and argued that they are embedded in narratives. However, analysing emotions in

narratives requires interpretation. Emotions are not always visible, as they are sometimes hidden under cultural practices and ways of being or embedded in bodily practices. For example, anxiety can cause physical pain and sorrow, or frustration can be hidden with laughter. The role of emotions in ethnography has been intensely debated. For instance, Beatty (2010, 437) argued that emotions mostly “fall outside the ethnographic frame”. He defined emotions as personal, biographical and shared; of the moment but in reference to the past; and both “in here” and “out there”. He stressed that when doing research, the researcher must be aware of whose emotions are concerned: those of the people under study or those of the ethnographer.

When talking about lost places, the Vuoksi and Talvivaara people refer to their memories, which are an essential part of human-place relations (cf. Gupta and Ferguson, 1997; Jones, 2007; Trigg, 2012; Tuan, 1977). We understand memory as both individual and collective: Individuals remember, but memories are collectively distributed (Wertsch, 2008). Memory involves knowledge, repertoires of stories and scripts, implicit memory, bodily aspects and forgetting. Recently, some researchers have started to view remembering and forgetting as multilinear, fuzzy and dynamic processes where memory is in constant motion. Seen this way, both the genesis and existence of memory are through movement (Eril, 2010, 2011). In our case studies, memories of the Vuoksi and Talvivaara areas were produced and constructed from “present times” when the primary research material—interviews and writings—were collected. Accordingly, memories are not only retrievals from the past; they are always new creations of the past in the present (Jones, 2007). In this way, memories also have a storied nature (Hua, 2009).

3. Materials and methods

Our paper is an empirically grounded qualitative ethnographic study. Ethnography is defined here as a form of study aimed at understanding and explaining the cultural context of lived experience. It is a process in which both the participants’ and researcher’s personality and the choices made by the researcher during fieldwork, analysis and writing play an important role. This process is never linear or sequential but overlapping, mixing the cultural contents of life (Chang, 2008; Forsey, 2010). The materials of this study are described in Table 1.

The Vuoksi case is based on a doctoral thesis in cultural anthropology (Korjonen-Kuusipuro, 2012). It draws on interviews, written memories and questionnaires collected between 2004 and 2011 (total of 125 participants, see Table 1). All the participants live or have lived in the Vuoksi River Valley. When Kristiina first came to the Vuoksi River valley, she was an outsider. She started her fieldwork, and gradually she began to notice and understand issues that made her feel more like an insider. As a child of a Karelian father who had experienced the loss of his home in 1944, Kristiina could understand the fragile relationship that the older generation had towards the lost part of the area. Being partly Karelian also helped the access to the field. However, as Ergun and Erdemir (2010) have noted, the insider – outsider division does not fully explain the complexity of researcher’s position in the field: It is an insider-outsider relationship that is under constant changes based on the perceptions that researchers and participants have of themselves and others.

The Talvivaara case is based on a postdoctoral study in cultural anthropology, but in this case, Anneli was also an insider in the field. The Talvivaara area was the home district of her parents and other relatives. She spent her summers in this area throughout her childhood until 2006, and the research material includes her autoethnographic text from 2009 to 2014. Autoethnography gives a

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