

TRANSCRIPT
Land Body Ecologies Podcast
Episode 3 – The End of this World

Sirges Sámi reindeer herding community, Sápmi.

Part 1 - *We have been here together since the last ice age*

CJ (5.34 5:34) - Okay, today is 19th of June 2022. We are in Jokkmokk. My name is Carl-Johan Utsi. I used to work as an active reindeer herder in Sirges Sámi reindeer herding community. And I also do photography and film and a lot of other things.

JL (7.39) Sámi people and the Reindeer we have a sacred relationship and we have a reciprocal relationship with each other and we have been here together since the last ice age. So, it is because of the reindeer we are still here, or we have been here and we are still here. The reindeer has been feeding us, clothing us and it's, its a base for our culture and survival in the, in the arctic conditions in the Arctic world.

JL (1.03) Bures! Mu namma lea Mihku Ilmar Jenni Unni Áile ja gulan Mihkuide ja Anárjohkii. Bures, Hello my name is Jenni Laiti and I just introduced myself in Sámi language and I told that, told my name, but also that I'm I belong to the family of Mihkuos and belong to the place called Anárjohka and the way we present ourselves, we also present where we belong. I think it's, I think it's one of the most beautiful things in the world to belong somewhere, to be part of something.

CJ: Yeah, that's a long story. Also, last year two, two years ago, I decided, after a lot of thinking, of course, to stop, not stop, but you know, to have a lot less reindeer, I've been working as the reindeer herder for 15 years actively. But in the end, in the end, I kind of think it's, it just it's, I don't just think it's, it's, it is too hard to work with reindeer in this in this situation with all this exploitation of nature and the combination of reindeer, in the combination of climate change, the warming temperature makes it really hard. During the wintertime, the snow freezes over, it turns into ice and things like that basically. And also the warming climate also makes all the different exploitations like aggressive forestry more hard to cope with and yeah, hydropower like all the river systems here are very affected by hydropower dams and power stations. And also that in combination with climate change makes those existing exploitations, in this case rivers, much worse, because you get less ice on the rivers and very bad ice. Sometimes you cannot travel on the ice as you used to. Things like that.

CJ: (8.25) Yeah, anyway, so now we're going across the great Lule river, one of the biggest rivers in Sweden that are exploited by hydropower and also creates a lot of electricity and was

one of the first big major exploits like river exploitations in Sweden. And it started in the, i'm not so good in years, but it started in the 30s, they needed the electricity to, to the, also to their mines further north of here. So they needed electricity to the mines... this is just a really good example of a broken system.

The European Union ministers of energy had a crisis meeting about the energy crisis in Europe. In meanwhile, they are letting the water just pass here because it's too much water. I mean, too much electricity here. That's... I mean, they, they fuck up this place and they cannot even use it in a good way.

They're huge industrial projects starting up here in the North, like two big sites where they're going to produce carbon free, carbon dioxide free steel. And that requires a lot of energy. Like *green* energy, I call this green, but we call it grey, because they leave just grey shores behind.

JL (8.38) We have been the caretakers of the reindeer for many thousands of years. And we have been following the reindeer migration from, from the coast to the inland and then again to the Coast, Coast-land. And so it's, so we have had this semi nomadic lifestyle. We have been using our living together on this, on these territories together with the Reindeer, but also other Arctic animals and more than human beings.

CJ: In late October, November, sometimes December but mostly November we drive snowmobiles far in the western mountains of northern Sweden in the Vájssaluokta area the which is a big part of the Sirges reindeer herding community. And this time of year, you are dependent on snow and, and good ice. The ice should be on the small lakes and on the rivers and swamps and so on, so you can drive your snowmobile safely. The snow is not that important, But of course, it makes it easy to drive, snowmobile on the frozen ground.

And we are a couple of guys, between four to eight guys. And we have a little bit of help with the helicopter nowadays. To make things more efficient and more safe. It is a very hazardous time of year because of the darkness and remote area. We are very far from big roads and cities. And you're very dependent on yourself and on your friends. And it's difficult work to gather the reindeer in the difficult terrain. It's very rocky and of course, a lot of creeks, rivers, and so on. Which makes it very difficult to work, you need to know what you're doing. And you need to be at your physical best to cope with the snowmobile in the terrain where it could be very different terrain, as I said before, it could be rocky or it could be deep snow sometimes or sometimes it rains and it's stormy weather of course. And they are a little bit stressed because you need to gather the reindeer before December starts because in December it's even more dark and much worse weather.

And we also use reindeer herding dogs of course that sit behind you on the snowmobile and, and that you use when you need to push on the reindeer herd faster or so. And it's a good companion but all this combined makes it very hard to travel on the ground with the snowmobile. And what we have seen in the past 10 to 20 years is that the snow comes much

later and so does the ice on the small lakes and swamps. But the darkness and the weather is the same kind of so it makes it even harder because you cannot wait as I said until December because then it's too dark. It's too short daylight time. And you need to have a couple of hours of daylight to gather the reindeer and start migrating them further east towards the corral.

JL: (5.01) Right now you're in the Jokkmokk on the Arctic Circle located in so-called Sweden but this is an indigenous territory which belongs to the Sámi people called Sápmi. So we are right now in Sápmi and we just came down from the high, high mountains where we took part in reindeer slaughter and the place where we were it's Boalno mountain in Vájssaluokta area in Sirges Sámi reindeer herding community.

JL (47.45) Yeah, right now it's autumn And it's raining. I'm really longing for the winter for the winter time, snow and cold temperatures and the darkness it's not, it's not so dark. It's not like a dark in a in a like in a snow less place but this heart of the winter there are a lot of different kinds of colour or colours but you don't you cannot see. Otherwise. For me it's a shape shifting period.

CJ: (11.53) But yeah, so and we're going to travel along this river, West, I say West, because this is the, this is the direction where the reindeer - this is, of course, valleys, river valleys, and the reindeer, they want to stay in their valley, to their mountains, so they travelled along, like they always did, even before we started to domesticate them. Reindeer are considered semi domesticated, but they are a lot more domesticated than moose and other wild animals. And also a big misconception here, I mean, all these misconceptions are, are there for a reason. So you know, the winner writes the history and all that. So this is, these mountains where we go in they're calling like *Europe's last wilderness* and stuff like that. But that's not that's never been true. Because as soon as the ice inland-ice melted away, it was settled. The whole, all these areas were settled by mostly Sámi

Of course, you have, like Viking settling settlers and in the Swedish coastline here East you had a Swedish settlements, but inland, it was Sámi land, and he still might for us, because he did something that but and it's always been, like, as I said, like 1000s of years ago, it's always been people and you can see it on the archaeological traces and marks that this land was never like, wilderness, because wilderness is where there's, there's no people at all.

...

But it was good for the Swedish government to call it wilderness because then it means it's, it's there for the taking. So it of course served the purpose to call it like, uninhabited area and things like that it was just part of the colonisation. As late as 1920 my family on both my mother and father side was forced to move here to this area from the farther and farther north of Sweden, kind of swamp area. They were forced to move because they closed the borders between Norway, Sweden, Finland. So with Norway, Norway became independent and the Sámi weren't

allowed to travel across the borders freely as before, even though they always had been. So it became a problem for the Swedish and Norwegian governments that they were overpopulated in some areas. And in these areas, they were less Sámi population. So they thought they could just move them around like pieces of chess. And so therefore, my relatives are spread across the mountain line on the Swedish side, all the way down to like mid Sweden. And they were forced to move by the Swedish government, and the Norwegian but mostly the Swedes. So therefore, I speak Northern Sámi dialect, even though we are in the Lule, Sámi land. And that's different. We have different clothing. And we also brought a different way of herding reindeer. So, so it was, it became, of course, a collision between different ways of reindeer herding, just living in basically and Lule Sámi people were of course forced away from their places to make room for us. And yeah, you have still I mean, that was as late as in 1920, 1925. So, so you can see it and feel it still.

CJ 34.29 The thing is that you can argue against how they treated people. Not only that reindeer herders are the Sámi people, all the people living around this, they were treated like dirt. Like, they were, like, like we talked before, based on race biologist theories, that the Sámi people were not worth as much and therefore should not be compensated equally, or as little as possible. So that's the thing, that, that's the hard thing to swallow because also the Swedes are still taking advantage or they still, I mean, a lot of politicians can say, but there wasn't, it was not us doing that wrong. No, but if you still benefit from your forefathers, from your predecessors, misbehaviour, you still owe us an apology. That's just me, and they have not given that apology. And an apology for that also needs to be, needs to come with something to make amends. Like, just words, it's not enough. And that's what they're afraid of. Because if there's opening up for that kind of dialogue, or that kind of discussion, they don't know where it's going to end. So they are just keeping the lid on and hoping that we will disappear. And unfortunately, they are on the winning side right now because climate change is doing their work for them.

(42.14) The description for diversity in Sámi is that you have to have all the different kind of reindeer in your herd. And that is a beautiful, a beautiful herd is where we have every kind of animal in your herd. And it also refers to the appreciation for diversity and the respect for it that every being has the right to be, but also that when you have a variation in your herd, you have a better possibility to survive. And I'm thinking about all the colours in the nature too because we need all those colours. We need all the diversity of the colours in our lives so that we can try and we can survive and I'm just right now and in the mountain area where we are living the colours changing and vanishing after many years our birch forest is dying because of one warm, which has been, the forest has been impacted by a warm and because of the warmer climate and huge forest areas are dying right now. And like autumn is really colourful time, we have all the colours, but in that forest, it's only black and shades of grey.

CJ 33.06 In Sweden we are divided into 52 reindeer herding communities, and within every reindeer community you have, in English, "winter groups". Like for example, me and my father and a few of my cousins, aunts and uncles and some other guys, is one winter group. And that's come from the Siida system originally, the reindeer community was divided into these winter

groups on the Siida system. Like they were extended family and someone. Yeah. best group of people Yeah, so this road was built for the hydro power structures. Of course.

CJ 20.30 So now we reach. Porjus where I grew up and this is the heart of the hydropower expansion in Sweden. This was the first bigger hydropower station that we will pass. It's a very small village, it was maybe 6-700 in the 90s and I grew up 80s and 90s. But now it's down to 200. And it's like this this is a very typical the northern paradox that you have all like the resources here but still it's a very poor area and a lot of like villages are dying and you know when it comes and goes speaking it was big because the hydropower company after this is was the first to say it's built as a cathedral that tells a lot extension in looks like it's it's built like a cathedral with the grace like a big church with the cross...

So I could never like live here again, because it felt, it feels so different. From when I grew up, it was pretty good growing up here and still, even if it was kind of a strange mixture of these people working at the hydropower company, and Sámi reindeer herding families.

... a lot of things come together here, it's like a singularity for a lot of things, like, like the migration, the forced migration of us with this expansive hydropower and aggressive forestry and like the mean temperature of 2 Celsius degrees already and a lot of things, like also this northern paradox they talk to you about a lot of things come together like here in this area and with my family, and with me and Jenni also.

Part 2 - A tragic event

CJ 2009, my father sat in a helicopter and he had a couple of guys on the ground. And it had been fairly good conditions to gather the herd of about 3000 this year. Sometimes it's even more but this year it was about 3000 in the western mountains and they gather them to the corral. At Kutsjaure where we have like main corral, where we gather this herd before we start migrating them in main corral Suorvaso they have gathered this herd and it's about 90 - 95% of the herd that you should gather and the rest we take take on later. But it's all the reindeer in one place in that group of Sirges reindeer herding community. And so, after the calf marking, we mark a few calves that we didn't catch during the summer calf markings, we tag them with plastic tags. And then we're supposed to go over the lake **Kutsjaure** as the gathered heard, and this sometimes - depending on how fast and depending on the weather, the lake freezes, and sometimes not. But this year, it has been frozen. And you need about 10 centimetres of good ice to migrate the herd across the lake. And the reindeer are, of course, very good on feeling how safe the ice is. So if you just get them started, they travel over the lake by themselves basically, depending on if the ice is thick enough, but of course, the reindeer herd it has checked ice thickness, of course, by driving and testing it with pikes and access on the ice was good supposedly, and they decided to put the reindeer after the corral onto the lake. And slowly, slowly as pushing them towards the shore on the other side. But the thing is also that the reindeer of course know their way, they have migrated many times the old females as they have migrated that path for 10's of years that those older individuals and as a collective herd they have migrated these paths for hundreds of years. So they know that they are supposed to go across and they want to go across because

they also have this urge to go down to the forest area to the east during this time of year. Because they are creatures of habit and they know when it's time to move. But the difference with reindeer herding is that you of course want them to migrate in a group and not separately in smaller herds or groups for practicality and safety.

JL (15.49) Because right now or actually for many hundreds years we have been experiencing end of the worlds, end of our world many, many times because of colonialism and extractivism, logging, damming, really stupid race biology assimilation and now the global warming and climate crisis. So, when, when one forest is logged that is the end of the world, when when one river is dammed that is the end of the world for the ecosystem then and now when the temperatures are rising four times higher than the average and the world right now here in the Arctic so that is end of one world, end of the Arctic world. Our culture and of course reindeer herding is based on the Arctic, Arctic world, the cold temperatures, snow, ice frost and when all these things, they are not only changing they're vanishing so our world is vanishing too.

CJ This day in November this particular year, they also had a French documentarist with them and they have dropped him off for many, many 10s of kilometres further east of the lake to film when they cross, cross the lake with the herd, and he was filming that particular migration that day. And all of a sudden, what you can see on his footage is that the whole herd just stops and tries to, starts to circulate in the middle of the lake, on the ice. The whole herd of 3000 animals starts to slowly side circulate.

JL: (39.25) We experience and witness the end of the world as the melting glaciers and clear cut ancient forests, but also everything what we do in our relationship with the land, with reindeer, with the fish and birds and other more than more than human beings. And everything in our ecosystem is impacted by the ecological crisis and climate crisis. The snow and ice are vanishing and the reindeer herds are decreasing, the pike is taking over the lakes and river systems, the arctic char is vanishing from our lakes. This is all happening right now.

JL (52.48) It's really stupid to think about that that the the technology would fix it or or the green shift which means the green colonialism for us, that, this everything could be fixed by by technical solutions, but those that are not solutions for us. The green shift would mean that there would be a new mine everywhere in my, in our traditional territories.

JL (58.55) How we Sámi people do take care of the land. Right now I think most of our time is going to protest the new this new green shift and new industrial projects, green and new colonialism, so I think every, every Sámi has some kind of project to, to, to protest against and something something to protect for.

And yeah it's it's it's a thing makes me angry too because we would have, we have lots of other things to do other than just to resist as stupid projects, we could just live our beautiful life together with the land but instead we just fight for it.

CJ: On the footage that French documentarists took, you can see that the whole herd suddenly just disappears and drops through the ice, the ice breaks under the herd at once, basically, and the whole herd just goes into the cold water, and panic erupts with a herd of course, and they start to go back to shore. And not even the reindeer herders of course, understand what happens at first, because it's a big cloud of yeah it's a big cloud from the from the, what do you call it? from the mouth, from the warm water. It's steam, just coming from this lake, you can't see the herd at all, and the reindeer herders can't see it, and the helicopter can't see it. And they don't understand what they see, of course, but then the herd went through the ice and started to go back to shore, but the ice just breaks in front of them, which makes it harder to go back. And a lot of animals is trampled by the other animals from behind and drowns in that water. Usually, when smaller herds goes through the ice, they slowly make their way back and nobody's trampled. But this was such a special event, when the whole herd went through the ice. So, of course, a lot of panic erupts, even within those kinds of animals who are used to, to sometimes go through the ice, in smaller creeks or small lakes. So in the end, 400 animals died in that accident.

And that's very tragic, of course, the event itself. And for the reindeer, and for the reindeer herders who lost a lot of animals at once. And also very costly for the reindeer herding community because they had to take out all the animals from the lake and lift them with the helicopter through to the road to a road and take them down to the city to bury them because we were not allowed to leave the dead reindeer up in the mountains. So it was extremely costly for the reindeer, for the Sámi reindeer community and of course very sad for all the reindeer herders who lost their their animals and so on but the worst part was the long term effects for for the reindeer herders who particularly those who experienced it, because it is a very stressful and tragic moment, you feel that it's your fault, you feel it is many ways in your whole body and you get a lot of physical effects except for the mental effects of course, you get heart problems and high blood pressure and so on so on.

So all combined, you can you can divide it into different pieces like the, as I said, the event itself, the economical cost, and so on, so on, but, but if you put it all together, it's one or a few individuals who are there and these, these kind of events, shorten their lives and creates, creates effects for the whole families around them, that surrounds them, and so on.

It's like, we compared it to a tragic accident when a very close, close family member dies which is very unexpected. And that is what we felt and for those who weren't there, but it had to be even worse for the reindeer herders who were there on site. And saw the thing and felt so powerless and you get a lot of problems afterwards, other reindeer owners who accuses them for making the wrong decisions and that's also a very heavy burden to bury because a lot of the herders at site probably felt that some they made some mistakes, some miss judgement, but as we see in, in in the years to come that the weather conditions, extreme weather are very uncertain and problematic because of the climate change, you get certain events that has never happened before. And, of course, you cannot blame one event, one certain event on the whole

climate change. If you sum it up, if you sum it up together into one long list, you can see the tendencies and trends of more extreme events and more tragic problems that comes along. And you can see it's by certain it's the climate change.

The reindeer herders on site, the community itself didn't receive any help by the authorities or similar and the only thing they got was problems from the authorities to cope with the dead reindeer and nothing was even considered to, nobody even considered giving them any mental aid or physical aid or or trauma expertise or anything like that. Or even economical help. It was just one big problem that needed to be solved by the reindeer herders on site also.

Part 3 - *It's a home, one I deeply love*

JL (58.00) I experience the land as a collaborator as a partner, comrade, a mother, a family member and something where I come from, something where I belong to, something to fight for. It's a home, it's a home, one I deeply love.

I think it's one of the most beautiful things in the world to belong somewhere, to be part of something.

The solutions for sustainability are totally something else. And it's in our relationship, how we are in a relationship with this world and with each other.

Part 4 - *I don't know anyone who is well*

CJ: (59.22) It's a combination of many things... oh it's a dead moose.

The main thing is still climate change. That's, that's the, that's the demon that is haunting us and takes many different shapes. And more direct ways and more indirect ways. And I think that indirect ways we don't, we don't understand all of them, because it's also happening so fast... this is going so super fast, that we don't even understand it, even we who live very close to the ground, I don't say close to the nature, but close to the like, the actual things... can't hardly grasp it. Because it's from year to year to year, every year is something new that we haven't seen. And also, like, of course, it's very sad to see that all this traditional knowledge that has been built up like a huge and wikipedia for 1000s of years, it's not anymore applicable to this new set of problems. That's so scary. Also, you're fumbling in the dark. And sometimes you fumble right, and you manage to survive that winter or that occurrence, that extreme thing. And then you get a new one, that you're dealt a new one like this winter when we're dealt sickness. So it's just like you know, these tarot cards that you have, but only with bad things that you're dealt. And, and you're never dealt a good card, don't think that it can happen that you're dealt a good card. Like, some winter, you're not getting any cards at all, that's, that's a good thing. The reindeer are suffering the most. I mean, you're human you can you can handle your suffering with like good things and bad things. You can handle it by having a good family to take care of

you or you can handle it badly with alcohol or pills or money or something. But reindeer, they don't have anything. They just have this; they just can handle it by dying. And in the end do you get sick of forcing this upon them. You get sick of torturing them. Like making them eat food they don't, that is not natural to or forcing them to migrate far and wide or forcing them to suffer from starvation or from disease or drowning on bad ices and you know, grazing on areas that they're not used to. And you know, they are just lab rats for us trying to figure this thing out. In the end I can't. I cannot put them through it anymore...

No, I mean, of course we have come a long way on talking about mental health, mental health issues, and things like that. But basically, I don't know one person feeling well.

JL 19.41 Yeah, how can you talk about something like that, that? The end of the world is here. How can you describe all the feelings? What you are feeling. How can you, how can you talk about your thoughts when there are no clear thoughts. Because when you're thinking about for example, the Atlantic Salmon, which is not coming back to the Deatnu River, no longer when you're thinking about it, and talking about, talking about it with someone who is familiar with the situation it's, it's there is, there is so much going on that you cannot even communicate it because like, for example, the Salmon is the key species in Deatnu river but also in, in, in in the Arctic sea. And when it's impacted, it impacts the whole ecosystem, in the rivers, in the sea. And like, our minds are not constructed to understand really huge, big pictures. And just when I'm thinking about the Salmon, how is it doing? So I just start to go way beyond like, till I'm somewhere in the Pacific. And thinking about all the things that are happening in the oceans, everything what is happening in our river systems in the communities and thinking about the future. How will they, how will we survive? And there is such a huge loss but also... uncertainty.

We don't, we know so little about all of this, all of it is what is happening, but and, and we don't, we don't know what's going to happen next. And it frightens us. We get anxious, depressed, we're sad. But I don't, I haven't, I haven't heard if there is a word to describe the feeling when you lose your whole world.

JL (1.16.00) The degradation what is happening to our land it's impacting me it's not it's not only about my, my mourning or my grieving... but it's also it's also... it's also bodily experience because you feel if if the reindeer are in stress if the land is in stress because of the climate crisis we feel the stress in our body. When the snow is melting and when it's raining in the middle of winter we can feel it all.

CJ (43.27) For me personally when I decided to stop working with reindeer, it's like, when is reindeer herding reindeer herding? When does it stop to be reindeer herding or just being some totally different form that is not reindeer herding. You know, so that's kind of the definition. So the government can always say, oh, but a mine that won't, that won't make any difference. They will still exist or they will still thrive. They will earn a lot of money working in that mine. So then

you know they can all come up with all kinds of different reasons and all that of course it's just politics like different ideas and different people competing for the same thing and who is just the better one to make their case and often if you're, if you're a minority and....

Part 5 - *The next world*

JL: (35.06) So, in this process of mourning, and letting go, I found an escape and exit which was given, given to me by my ancestors. And it is precisely the thing to create, craft and remake the world.

I am a traditional craft maker. So in my parents and my families, my father's family in many generations. And for me for me, being Sámi means means to create and give a birth to new life to this world. Because that is the core in the life it is the meaning in the life to, to create and craft, new life it has always been and and that's how my people have survived here because they have re and de- made the world every, every single day they have been really creative. And if something didn't work, they made it in another way. So, so for me to be creative and and craft new realities is that's that's something to be Sámi it's something to be indigenous. And that's something what we have always had we have had that another kind of world we have been living and that's like when when when we craft or remake things or redesign this world it shall be done in a beautiful way in a beautiful manner. So so that is what being Sámi for me means.

I am there somewhere thinking about creating another realities, because we have always done that and we always can do it if we just want to do it. Another world is possible another realities are possible, if we just wish wish to wish it to be, another, another kind of reality.

JL (1.10.40) What shall we take with us to the next word? What, what should we pack with us? How should we pack these things? What things matter in the next world? How should we construct, build the other world? Or even if we can do it, like maybe in this other world, humans? We are not having. so a significant role I hope so, maybe we just like insects in this world. It will be so good that we will not rule the world at all. But anyways where to, where to pack? How to travel, with who? What is the destination? Where to start? Which path to take. And when you are there in this other world? How, how are you...arriving there?