

Title:

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Occupy Climate Change (OCC!)

*Creative story
entry*



FORMAS



Flower under the snow

Balint Kronstein

The warm winter sun blazing down on Áilu's back made her especially uncomfortable with wearing her ancestors' thick-layered *gátki*¹. She could not wait for the moment to step inside the NEA3 biodome – or how it was called officially by the Northwestern Bothania Sámi-Swedish Republic: Northvolt Ett Arctic Artificial Area – to finally get rid of her air-filtering device and all the equipment reminding her of the “outside” world.

Skellitta-Skellefteå had one of the few green-industry-turned-biodomes, or how the policymakers liked to call them arctic artificial areas, where the original climate after the Tipping Point was preserved and being upkeeped by the joint effort of those who survived. People fleeing to the area generations before Áilu was born, the indigenous people of Sápmi and the descendants of those living in Norrbotten and Västerbotten.

There were always signs that the point-of-no-return might happen, but society disregarded, repressed, or just simply did not care about those who spoke up. Did not matter if they were scientists, climate activists, religious fanatics, average civilians or capitalists seemingly going insane and wanting to destroy their own empires.

“I do not understand how people can survive out here for more than half-a-day” exclaimed Áilu annoyedly when the metallic gates of what once was the biggest battery manufacturing plant on the European continent started to materialize in front of her eyes. That unique matte glow was so familiar to Áilu. The European continent – once the center of colonial powers and the heartland of the European Union – now an almost uninhabitable land engraved with several seas and megarivers. Lowlands in Turkey, Greece, Western Europe, and Iberia all underwater. Southern Italy almost disappeared, similarly to the flatlands of the Balkans, Eastern and Central Europe. Those places that were still relatively habitable were all laid North from the Baltic Sea or located in the higher areas of the former continent, such as the Alps or the Pyrenees.

In the years after the Tipping Point – which Áilu heard so much about from the bedtime stories of her grandfather who was an archaeology professor specialized in the history of the sustainability transition at the International-Swedish University of Skellitta-Skellefteå – many tried to stay put and fight the natural forces unleashed by Gaia. Most of them perished and those who did not simply had to flee from their homeland and leave everything behind to

¹ Traditional Sámi upper clothing worn for ceremonial contexts or for working (e.g.: herding).

restart their life somewhere higher or Northern. “Probably the first time those people realized what it feels like to be indigenous and constantly being pushed out from your motherland” thought Áilu several times before. The same idea crossed her mind as the enormous metal gates to the stabilization area – the passageway between two worlds – opened up in front of her after the bioscan identification granted access to enter.

She liked “being one with the Arctic” – how Oula always referred to being born inside the biodome into a herder kinship –, but from time-to-time she could not help it. Somber thoughts took over her mind. “Not much better than those Native American reservations before the Tipping Point. Ugh... wonder when they will start to reduce the area of the dome... it already started... slowly but surely! I hate those ideas of the Renew Gaia project... sure, other cultures and biomes deserve a chance to survive... or a revival. But why at our expense? Why the same things happen again? And again? Always...”

She felt trapped and free at the same time during these journeys when she needed to run some errands in the “outside world”, as she liked to refer to it in her head. Felt free both by realizing every time how exceptionally lucky she is that she can live the life that her ancestors lived hundreds of years ago. How fortunate to see the grandiose radiance of snow hit by the first shimmering light beams of the sun on a winter morning. And for living in a time when the “outside world” is an improved and more equal place than it was ever before. Yet, happiness and joyous moments aside she could not help but worry. “Like a kingfisher with damaged wings longing after the heights of the sky.” Worry about the dome. Its boundaries. The limits to survive. Worry about people growing distant and indifferent about past disasters with the relentless advance of time. Worry about civilization’s hubris. Humans repeat the same mistakes all over again.

She arrived back from a trip. Visiting distant kin in the Hybrit dome a few hundred kilometers North. These journeys always took days, but drained physical and mental energy to levels as if she would travel for months. The emotions, the thoughts, the different climate she experienced with every single step outside of Northvolt.

Living in the city of Skellitta-Skellefteå was one thing. The road from there to other settlements and domes was another. It was not especially dangerous, or at least the dangers were non-human. An acid rain or a desert hailstorm – even the slight chance of it – meant that the chargeless hovertrain service did not leave the shelter of the mid- or end-stations. These events made the travel times impossible to know, but people get used to the new normal generations ago. “You get there when you get there” Oula always said when Áilu complained about the transport.

Life was slower after the Tipping Point. In Skellitta-Skellefteå you could have lived the accelerated lifestyles of those who came before, but simply people did not want that anymore. The extensiveness of virtual reality for work, leisure, socializing and culture, the artificial nature created in general biodomes, digitalization and above all the local hub – a new form of societal organization based on the Sámi kinship idea and guided by the *Árbediehtu*² – made terms like rush-hour, multi-tasking or burnout obsolete and unfamiliar. Skellitta-Skellefteå, one of the bigger cities of the North, led by the democratic council of the local hubs' leaders was a living paradise. “Must be somewhat like Eden, I suppose” told Áilu to an “outsider” friend once. Truly, it was an oasis on the border between the calmness of the Baltic Sea and the roughness of the Great Northern Desert.

As Áilu passed through the stabilization area unrushed and entered the small connection chamber – the final stop between home and the “outside world” – a sudden harsh feeling heavily pressed on her chest. “What if it will all happen again? Yes, Renew Gaia might succeed. We, or... they? Might win back territories to extend the habitat... might not... but even if it does, do we need it? Why do we always want more? Why? And why does wanting more means taking from others? Why Northvolt must play the role of a laboratory rat. Will the herd survive that? Will we survive it?” She had so many questions in her mind. And very few answers. “Why do I feel it is happening all over again? Why cannot we just be happy about what we have right now? We have our hubs, our domes, kin around us. We stopped worrying about what does not matter. We are finally equal. Yes, equal in hardship and equal in a world which is almost uninhabitable for our kind... but... finally equal. Our words, our ideas, the *Árbediehtu* final leads and governs. Everyone is welcome in our city, in our living quarters, in our life. Why cannot we stop craving for more?”

As the door connecting the inside of the dome and the chamber split the late afternoon sunlight blinded Áilu for a moment. “The biodome is life. But it also disregards the will of Gaia. It is not meant to be... this meant to disappear. And why? Because those in charge did not listen... by the time they did... by the time they understood the difference... by the time they started celebrating distinctiveness and realized we should not be another colonial project of equalization driven by white guilt... by that time it all was too late. The only thing they managed to do is this... captive life under a glass cover. Mom always says I should be happy that we have all this and the other domes... she never tells me how.” Her eyes began to sense the world around.

² Sámi Inherited knowledge.

A light breeze of familiarity reached Áilu as she was stepping into the snowy landscape of the dome. “Perishing. Yes... perishing without a trace is what I am afraid of” a voice remarked in her head. “To disappear... me, the parents, kin, Skellitta, the domes... everything that I know and those things that I am yet to know... some which I do not even know to exist. Perish... like the Azure Window... those during the Tipping Point... or Heike and Lemma.”

When her eyes finally got used to the light after the darkness of the chamber she noticed a Snowdrop blooming below a snow pile under a peaceful and sheltering Norway spruce. And the realization came as sudden as the fear. “Perishing is a part of the circle of life. Death as much as birth. The important thing is that we make out as much as of our life as we can. This is what we all should live for. To prevail regardless of harsh environments and circumstances. To think and feel together with kin, society, and Mother Nature. To not to make the same mistakes again. For making Gaia a better place together.”