Sámi Selves in the Northern Landscape

Nomadism and Indigeneity in Swedish Classics for Children

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Abstract
The nomadism and reindeer-herding practices of the Sámi, the indigenous people of Scandinavia and northern European Russia, offer a model for a different relationship with space and natural resources than that of settler colonialism, centered on a fixed metropole. This article examines representations of the Sámi and the relation to space in two classics of early twentieth-century Swedish children’s literature, while focusing on nomadism and indigeneity. Deploying an ecocritical and postcolonial perspective to view the representation of Sámi selves and the relation to space in the two nearly contemporaneous Swedish classics Nils Holgersson’s Wonderful Travels Through Sweden (1906) by Selma Lagerlöf and The Children from Frost Mountain (1907) by Laura Fitinghoff shows that, although the books ultimately reinforce an exploitative and dismissive colonial attitude toward the northern landscape and its inhabitants, they also display an admiration of Sámi nomadism that penetrates to deeper levels of the narrative. These classic Swedish novels for children not only portray nomadism through Sámi selves in the landscape of the north, but also embody nomadism through emblematic and central protagonists, as well as the overarching narrative structure. Although the romanticizing of a more sustainable Sámi relationship to people, nature, and space modeled in the course of the narrative ultimately capitulates to a hierarchical and exploitative mindset problematic from a postcolonial or ecocritical perspective, the narrative adoption of indigenous modes in relation to the land also displays a dialogic relation different from a settler colonialist view that revolves around the metropole. Indeed, these two Swedish classics display how ideas and values did not necessarily flow only from a colonial metropole to an indigenous periphery, but that ideas identified with indigeneity also influenced central narratives of Swedish national mythopoiesis.

Keywords
nomadism, indigeneity, Sámi, Swedish, children’s literature, classics, Selma Lagerlöf, Laura Fitinghoff, Nils Holgersson, Frostmofjället

They found out where it was best to take the herd at different times of the year, and they discovered that it was best to migrate just as the Lapps do to this day. In those days it was easy to live, for there were no settlers […]. Really the Lapps have almost the same nature as reindeer, both of them migrate north and south, in the way they are used to migrating, and both of them are a little shy, and because of this shyness they have been driven away from everywhere. (Turi, 1931, pp. 23, 65)
The reindeer-herding Sami has, in truth, been a prince of the mountains; on his wanderings he has seen the world, experienced the cosmopolitan spirit, and lived in harmony with the mountains and enjoyed the freedom they have given him […] For the Samis themselves, reindeer-herding is a way of life, a philosophy. […] Nomadism uses feeling and heart. Throughout the centuries it has developed more than just one occupation; it has created the core of a culture. (Valkeapää, 1983, pp. 26, 36)

The Sámi, the indigenous people of Scandinavia and northern European Russia, inhabit a region called Sápmi that spans the borders of Norway, Sweden, Finland, and Russia, while traditional reindeer-herding practices and nomadism traverse these national boundaries. This cultural history of nomadism offers a model for a different relationship with space and nature than that of settler colonialism, centered on a fixed metropole. This article examines representations of the Sámi and the relation to space in two classics of early twentieth-century Swedish children’s literature, while focusing particularly on nomadism and indigeneity. Deploying an ecocritical and postcolonial perspective to view the representation of Sámi selves and the relation to space in the two Swedish children’s books *Nils Holgerssons underbara resa genom Sverige* [Nils Holgersson’s Wonderful Travels Through Sweden] (1906) by Selma Lagerlöf and *Barnen ifrån Frostmofjället* [The Children from Frost Mountain] (1907) by Laura Fitinghoff reveals that, although the books ultimately re-inforce an exploitative and dismissive colonial attitude toward the northern landscape and its inhabitants, they also display an admiration of Sámi nomadism that penetrates to deeper levels of the narrative.¹

In fact, these classic Swedish novels for children not only portray nomadism through Sámi selves in the landscape of the north, but also embody nomadism through emblematic or central protagonists, as well as the overarching narrative structure. Although the romanticizing of a more sustainable Sámi relationship to people, nature, space, and place modeled in the course of the narrative ultimately capitulates to a hierarchical and exploitative mindset problematic from a postcolonial or ecocritical perspective, the narrative adoption of indigenous modes in relation to the land also displays a dialogic relation different from a settler colonialist view that revolves around the metropole. These two Swedish classics thus display how ideas and values did not necessarily flow only from a colonial metropole to an indigenous periphery, but that ideas identified with an indigenous way of life and thinking also influenced central narratives of Swedish national mythopoiesis at a key time of national mythmaking, while Sweden was re-conceptualizing its national identity at the beginning of the twentieth century.

Indigeneity and Nomadism

In a Nordic context, the concept of nomadism is closely linked to indigeneity.² Yet, this may itself be regarded with due skepticism as a kind of «branding of northern European regions» (Keskitalo, 2017, p. 39). Although tourists may regard as typically Sámi «reindeers/reindeer herding/nomadism/indigeneity, a different culture and way of living, and traditions, traditional outfits, and the landscape and nature» (Olsen, 2006, p. 43), «Sámi also cannot be conceived of as a reindeer herding identity only,» since, though it remains «a culturally important occupation, presently it is practiced by a very small minority of Sámi» (Keskitalo, 2017, p. 33). Even at the beginning of the twentieth century, when these books were written, «the number of nomadic Sámi was diminishing» (Lindskog, 2013, p. 22).³ Yet, as Lindskog summarizes,

In most Swedish children’s books, the term Sámi and the concept of Sámi culture are synonymous with reindeer herding, a nomadic lifestyle and alpine nature. The fact that a section of the Sámi population had permanent homes was unappealing to authors of the time.
During the first decades most authors ignored this fact. (Lindskog, 2005, p. 423)

This same, virtually unchanging «branding» of Sámi identity, which is linked to nomadism, was propagated by these two classics of early twentieth-century Swedish children’s literature.

In fact, nomadism partly serves a rhetorical purpose here. As Lindskog summarizes at the end of her study of the representation of the Sámi in twentieth-century Swedish children’s literature, «it is primarily the life of the nomadic Sámi of the mountainous regions that is chosen as subject matter,» while «Their free lifestyle is idealized and depicted as the antithesis of the constrained frenzy of modern civilization» (2005, p. 424). Sámi nomadism thus serves as a strategic ‘other’ that offers a critique of the hegemonic structure within which these early twentieth-century women writers also in some sense may have felt entrapped by gendered limitations, despite their comparative privilege. Consider, for example, Valkeapää’s observations that

Migrating with the reindeer has been an important factor in the development of Sámi culture. The wandering life is a life of freedom. There are no chains binding us to the same place. New landscapes and new perspectives also liberate the mind and thoughts. There can be no doubt that mode of living also affects personality. (Valkeapää, 1983, p. 37)

The freedom of nomadism appeals to those chafing at the limitations to which hegemonic culture enchains them.

Nomadism surfaces as an emergent concept in ecocritical theory today. It figures prominently in Axel Goodbody’s chapter on «The Nomad as Theoretical and Literary Model of Ecological Inhabitation» in The Future of Ecocriticism: New Horizons (2011, pp. 82–99), which draws on the work of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari on nomadism (2013), as well as Rosi Braidotti’s Nomadic Subjects (2011). In Goodbody’s assessment, «Deleuze and Guattari envisage nomadism as an indispensable mechanism for change. An irruption of the ephemeral, it is a constant source of social and cultural renewal, harbouring the potential for an alternative way of relating to nature» (2011, p. 90). Indeed, nomadism alters the terms of the debate within an ecocritical framework, by challenging old ways of relating to nature and loosening the grip of a colonial view on the land, as well as by offering a more sustainable model for such relations.

Yet, such recent theorizing fails to acknowledge the indigenous roots of the practice of nomadism or earlier indigenous perspectives on the subject. For example, Valkeapää offers an ecocritical perspective on nomadism from a Sámi perspective as early as 1971, when he notes that migration minimizes the impact on the land:

Migration itself, this wandering from one place to another, also has its function. It has prevented too many demands being made on the susceptible countryside, either by people or by animals. This can be food for thought in an age when there are ever more cottages and other permanent settlements! (Valkeapää, 1983, p. 37)

A «nomadic life» makes a person «a part of Nature and maintains a peaceful coexistence with it,» he notes, and argues that this aspect of nomadism marks it as «advanced» (p. 37). When Valkeapää observes, «It should be especially important to encourage such a way of life bearing the world situation in mind» (p. 37), he, like other, still earlier environmentalist voices in Sápmi, anticipates by half a century today’s discourses about sustainability in light of the ecological crises of the present age.

Indigeneity and Nomadism in Two Swedish Children’s Classics

The concept of nomadism also provides a tool for considering these Swedish classics in
relation to Sámi indigeneity and the environment and thereby reconceptualizing the spatial and ecological implications of the narrative. Nomadism offers a different way of navigating the opposition between exploitation and sustainability with respect to nature and relations with other living beings. I would argue that both Lagerlöf and Fittinghoff adopt an indigenous and nomadic model in staging a journey over a variety of landscapes that always moves toward a greater insight about oneself and others, the environment, and ethically sustainable relations with animals, as modeled by the nomadic Sámi represented in these books as exemplars.

If nomadism defines a relation to space, then the mobility of the protagonists in Fittinghoff’s and Lagerlöf’s texts also may be viewed in these terms, insofar as these protagonists in some sense choose a nomadic lifestyle, relinquishing an unsustainable fixity in order to take up a nomadic life and find a more sustainable path. One might consider here Goodbody’s observation that «As an ‘intellectual style,’ nomadism is then a privileged state between languages, places and texts, consisting ‘not so much in being homeless, as in being capable of recreating your home everywhere’ (16)» (2011, p. 92; cf. Braidotti, 2011, p. 16). From this perspective it becomes clear that these nomadic protagonists who gracefully handle the challenges of their journey are not at home nowhere, but everywhere, as part of the conceptual reorientation allowed by a nomadic philosophy, as described above by Valkeapää.4

Nomadism also has distinct environmental implications. Most fundamentally, «the nomad’s relationship with the environment is a non-exploitative one; ‘the nomad gathers, reaps, and exchanges but does not exploit’» (Braidotti, 2011, p. 25; qtd. in Goodbody, 2011, p. 92). The nomadic relationship to the land represents a radical alternative to colonial use and exploitation of the land, which views uncultivated land and undisturbed natural resources as unclaimed and unused. By contrast, nomadism enables a more sustainable and flexible stewardship of nature and cultivates «relationships promoting identification with and care for the natural environment, while conceiving of place as a basis for solidarities (to use Massey’s term), rather than differences between individuals and peoples» (Goodbody, 2011, p. 93). As Valkeapää notes, «Nomadism captivates me first and foremost through its philosophy. By being a part of Nature, Man shows respect for Nature» (p. 37). He also observes, «There also exist peoples who have adapted to Nature so that they form a natural part of the environment, and live in harmony with Nature,» including in their numbers Sámi who follow a «traditional way of life» (p. 121). Nomadism thus shares the land and levels the playing field in a non-hierarchical relationship between humans and other living beings, as shown by the ethical treatment of animals cultivated in and practiced by central protagonists in both stories. Moreover, the concept of nomadism has the potential to challenge ethnocentric and colonialist/imperialist assumptions of the metropole.5

I would argue that these two early classics of Swedish children’s literature, which each contain extensive wanderings and include time in a Sámi encampment in the landscapes of the northern Sweden, undertake a distinctly nomadic narrative. In both cases, the child protagonists at the outset find themselves in an unsustainable home environment or initial situation that has reached a state of crisis, although for opposite reasons: in the case of Nils Holgersson it is the boy’s lack of fitness for his lot and of consideration for the needs of others that precipitates his transformation and departure (Lagerlöf, 1986, 5–8), while in the case of the children from Frost Mountain, it is the lack of parents and resources that precipitates the initial crisis and departure (Fittinghoff, 1985, 7–8). Yet, in both cases, the initial lack or problem motivates the same type of journey, which is not a typical circular
journey from home and back again; rather, I would argue that these child protagonists permanently uproot themselves at the beginning of the story, leaving behind an existence they cannot abide and abandoning home altogether. They embrace a nomadic lifestyle by choice in search of better pastures, or _nomos_ (the origin of the word nomad, in contradistinction to _polis_, or city), since the status quo is intolerable to them.

The nomadism these characters embrace in the course of the narratives finds a concrete reflection in each book’s representation of the Sámi, who inspire the nomadism of the narratives. The Sámi thus not only take a more significant place than it at first may seem in these omnibus children’s introductions to the Swedish land, peoples, and values; they also arguably infuse the entire narrative’s nomadic relationship to the land, nature, animals, and people and the overall thrust of the narrative about caring for one another, all people, and all living things. These books thus teach an ecological ethics of care toward all living beings. Indeed, the Sámi relationship with the land and treatment of other living beings, including lonely, lost, and abandoned individuals, emerge as exemplary in these books for children.

Selma Lagerlöf’s _Nils Holgersson’s Wonderful Travels Through Sweden_ (1906)

In Selma Lagerlöf’s survey of Swedish landscapes and provinces in _Nils Holgersson’s Wonderful Travels Through Sweden_, the northernmost point of the journey of Nils and the wild geese is in Lapland (Lagerlöf, 1986, p. 465), as this northernmost province continues to be designated on Swedish maps, although the Sámi consider the term «Lapp» to be derogatory. Although the designation «Lapland» proves problematic, it acknowledges and codifies the relationship to the land of the indigenous people of Scandinavia. At the same time, however, it also strategically locates and delimits the Sámi presence and rhetorically restricts it to one province. Yet many toponyms, or place names, attest to a far more widespread Sámi presence, offering evidence contrary to accounts of settler colonialism that seeks to erase the traces of an indigenous presence and thereby claim land. Such traces of the past also attest to intercultural contact, dialogue, and exchange, as demonstrated also in these two Swedish classics.

In Lagerlöf’s text it is in Lapland where Nils is reunited with the wild geese and his friend of another species, Mårten (pp. 476–79). By this point, when the flock rejuvenates, Nils has been transformed by his nomadic travels into the person he should be, who has a proper relationship with nature and animals, including even the villain Smirre fox, for whom he sees a place in the world, properly circumscribed (pp. 477–78). The parallel narrative involving Åsa the Goose Girl also reaches its resolution in Lapland in the chapter «With the Sámi» (pp. 496–506). Having fled from misfortune, Åsa’s grieving father Jon Assarsson resides in the far north near a Sámi encampment. Having abandoned his home and gone wandering, Jon has become a nomad himself and learned to speak Sámi.

With the help of Nils, Åsa finds her way to this encampment and receives assistance from the Sámi in recovering her father (p. 499). There a Sámi coeval named Aslak tells Åsa the story of another Swedish girl who came to love life with the Sámi and refused to leave (pp. 501–3), and thus inspires his father, Ola Serka, foremost among the Sámi, who seeks a way to persuade Jon Assarsson to resume his parental role (p. 503). Ola proposes that he will adopt a Swedish girl abandoned by her father, in order to provoke Jon to reclaim this worthy daughter (pp. 504–6). This story within a story within a story thus stages a kind of struggle over progeny, juxtaposing the idea of Åsa’s adoption by the Sámi proposed by both indigenous father and son, with Jon Assarson’s neglect of parental duties (p. 506). This proposal also models for Jon, and the reader,
the more responsible and sustainable relations embodied by Sámi figures in the book. Aslak and Ola both seek to reintegrate suffering individuals into families, natural or adoptive, by relating narratives of people being brought together across cultural differences. In the end, the restoration of the relationship between father and daughter brokered by Ola Serka (whose surname symbolically means “good” in Old Norse) also presages the restoration of Nils’s return and reconciliation with his parents at the end of the book (pp. 592–3).

Neither Åsa nor Jon stay in Lapland, however, but ultimately return to southern Sweden, where they reforge bonds with Nils Holgersson’s family (pp. 589–90). In the end, then, Åsa and Jon abandon the Sámi way of life in the north, despite the fact that the Sámi intervention, stories, and nomadic example can be seen as a model for their own journeys and helped reconstitute their familial bonds. By the end of the novel, Jon leaves Lapland after making his fortune by extracting and exploiting resources in the far north (p. 590). Mining has made him a wealthy man in southern Sweden, where the story ends, thereby capitulating to an exploitative approach to the environment and animals – including the tame goose, who is threatened with death when he returns to the farm at the end of the book (p. 592) – to the newfound nurturing attitude toward other living beings that Nils has come to represent as a result of his nomadic wanderings and has brought back home with him (p. 592).

Nils’s new ideals leave him capable of recreating a “home” anywhere, like a true nomad, and to live in a respectful and harmonious way with his environment and observe the principles of a flexibly constituted community. In the process, this journey has taught the protagonist, and all the book’s readers, about the landscape, community, and morality, including an ecological sensibility. That Nils looks wistfully after Akka and her flock of wild geese heading south at the end of the book indicates that his heart has become forever nomadic too: “And the boy felt such a longing after those who were flying away, that he nearly wished to again be Tom Thumb, who could ride over land and sea with a flock of wild geese” (p. 596).

This final vision of the wild geese underscores how they function as animal embodiments of Sámi wisdom (cf. Elenius, 2000, p. 94; cf. Elenius, 2005, p. 201; qtd. in Lindskog, 2005, p. 153). Indeed, “Akka from Kebnekaise,” like the mountain Akka in northwestern Lapland in the region from which she hails, bears the name of the female spirit Akka in Sámi shamanism and stands for beauty and wisdom, underscoring the invisible Sámi presence that undergirds this Swedish classic.² Maderakka refers to the feminine goddess, mother of the tribe, and urmother, who has three goddess daughters or “Akkas,” and seems to be recalled when Nils addresses the leader of the wild geese more than once as “Mor [cf. Moder] Akka [Mother Akka],” such as when he finds her after a separation (p. 477) or when she ap-
pears one final time as «old mother Akka» (p. 595) at the end of the book. Akka’s Sámi identification thus reconfigures the relations between the wild and domesticated geese as a metaphor for the relations between the Sámi and Swedish settlers that quite reverses colonial expectations. Consider the tame goose’s realization that the flock he has joined on its journey to Lapland is led by none other than «Akka from Kebnekaise»:

The worst of it was that he had happened to encounter Akka from Kebnekaise. Because, tame goose though he was, he had heard of a leader goose who was named Akka and was more than a hundred years old. She had such a reputation that the best wild geese to be found would join her. But no one had such disdain for tame geese as Akka and her flock, and he very much would have wanted to show them that he was their equal. (p. 23)

The prominent and pathbreaking Swedish woman writer Selma Lagerlöf thus embodies the greatest wisdom as a teacher and guide in this old female wild goose, who bears a Sámi name for a female spirit and hails from Kebnekaise in Lapland. It would seem that in the greater scheme of the book, the domesticated goose and southern Swedish boy need to prove themselves to the northern Akka as an embodiment of ancient natural and indigenous wisdom.

Laura Fitinghoff’s The Children of Frost Mountain (1907)
Another journey takes place in Laura Fitinghoff’s The Children of Frost Mountain, where a band of orphaned siblings’ nomadism ultimately succeeds in locating a more favorable environment – for all the children and their goat – without necessitating the abandonment of the principles by which they had been raised. It also tells the story of the teachings these nomadic children in turn offer to the people they encounter during their own wanderings, with the notable exception of the Sámi, who have nothing to learn from the children, self-sufficient and ethically unimpeachable as they are. The children also learn to flexibly reconfigure their sense of «family» and embrace new adoptive families, espousing a model that all are responsible for all, which the book seeks to advocate through their story.

Despite the rigidly Christian framework of The Children of Frost Mountain, one of the foremost models of this attitude of responsible and sustainable relations with living beings derives from the Sámi presence in the book. Notably, in the moment of greatest crisis in the narrative, apart from the initial parental deaths that occur before the story begins (Fitinghoff, 1985, pp. 7–8), when the three remaining children are threatened by violent and drunken villagers who wish to do them and their goat further harm (pp. 130–5), the children find refuge with a group of Sámi (pp. 136–8). Between the end of the twenty-third chapter, which ends on a high point of tension when the children think they have been found by their vicious pursuers (p. 135), to the beginning of the twenty-fourth chapter (p. 136), a dramatic resolution occurs when they realize the noise they feared was not the violent villagers pursuing them, but a Sámi reindeer herder they knew (p. 136). This scene symbolically reverses a xenophobic fear of the other, and turns the cultural critique inward, toward the cruel and drunken villagers.

Of all those the children meet on their long journey, the traveling Mattes Klip is the only one to immediately recognize and sympathize with the children and see them in the context of their place of origin and the hardship they had suffered: «Isn’t it Ante from Reed Top Village in the mountains. – And God comfort us, the small ones are thinner now than Sámi children. Food has been scarce for mountain children this spring» (p. 136). Mattes immediately offers them food and refuge. On returning to his encampment, he yoiks, «Found small Swede children by the frozen water, [they] fear the Sámi, but gladden when they recognize Matte from
Bear Falls. Sámi food they will share, sleep in Sámi hut. Abandoned are they, no father, no mother» (p. 139). Mattes instantly recognizes their needs and cares for them, taking responsibility for them.

Significantly, Mattes perceives with amusement that the behavior of the children, who wander a long distance with their animal, is distinctly nomadic in the way of the Sámi: «The Sámi was very amused by their fearless caper in bringing their goat on a long journey. A goat is almost as easily fed and tended as a reindeer» (p. 138). Mattes’s Sámi perspective thus reveals the children’s Sámi-style nomadism in traveling with their goat. Indeed, they are able to self-sufficiently make a home for themselves anywhere – as was shown even in the woods, where they were happy, before this episode. With Mattes the children find paternal and humane protection from an inhumane human threat, here likened to the wolves invisibly menacing them during their first journey from home and now rendered visible: «And he hid trembling behind Mattes […] Up, at the edge of the clearing, two coarse men, three boys, and a girl were visible. Like greedy wolves they were hunting, hungry for prey» (p. 138). The children’s most humane reception, on the other hand, is by the Sámi.

Other facets of this narrative interlude prove distinctive. In large part it takes place outside the narrative, which resumes when the children have long since left Mattes and his family behind, the same way the loss of the children’s parents figures narratologically. The narrative then recalls their adventures with the Sámi and their reluctance to depart, which particularly affected Månke: «Månke was so contented with the Sámi that he thought that it would be better to travel home with them again than to roam the roads and run oneself senseless on the ice to get away from nasty farm folk and dogs» (p. 146). Månke wishes to remain with the Sámi, who treat them well and see the children in the full context of their origin, history, needs, and humanity, as he also sees them.

That the children do not stay with the Sámi reflects on the one hand the needs of the narrative that is being written and the limitations of the author’s perspective (cf. Lindskog, 2000, p. 107; 2005, p. 141; cf. 2013, pp. 27, 78; Andersson, 2011). The text clearly does not view the Sámi as a viable adoptive family, despite the unrivalled positive treatment the children receive there and the desperately needed rescue the Sámi offered in a time of need. Yet, this departure also seems one of the most painful partings (with the possible exception of siblings from one another) when the narrative states, «It had been so dreadful, when the child wanderers and Sámi, who so soon had met, parted ways. The children to the south and eastward, to well-off people in fertile regions» (p. 146). The children’s departure proves necessary for the story, the narrative structure, and the greater rhetorical thrust of the text, which necessitates their descent from the colonial periphery toward the greater privilege available in more central areas of population, where the children find families the text defines as maximally worthy. That this trajectory moves from the periphery to the center reveals the distinctly hierarchical colonial framework of the time, oriented around a metropole.

Yet, these impoverished and needy children, who have been taught well, also bring the lessons not only of Christianity but also a hardscrabble industry, handicraft (cf. Sámi duodji), and determination to the families they join. So, in this sense, renewal and authenticity also comes from the periphery, a role the Sámi also play in the story. Indeed, this Sámi family restores the strength of the children, and figures as a deus ex machina (in this case in the shape of a reindeer sled) that spirits them away from inescapable doom (pp. 136–8). Perhaps Mattes was also sent by their late mother, as the children observed about the lemmings that helped Ante evade detection just before (p. 133), thereby displaying an interactive view of the spirits of the dead that both resembles Sámi shaman-
ism and is far more syncretic than the Christianity their mother taught them. Mattes has the final word about the children’s departure, when he yoiks from a distance, «Away go the child wanderers, away to see much and learn from the book’s black words,» thereby indicating that the story itself and the children’s own nomadism and journey of discovery necessitates their departure (p. 146).

At this point, the narrative takes a Sámi perspective in granting the reader the ability to effortlessly understand the yoiking – in Sámi – of Mattes, who acts as a kind of overarching narrator, summing up events in the story. Yet when he elaborates further, he employs a racist epithet to refer to himself and unconvincingly speaks demeaningly of his own inability, which betrays the ethnocentric standpoint of the narrative, despite its exoticizing admiration: «Poor Sámi knows nothing, cannot interpret black words» (p. 146). Nevertheless, the narrative then subverts this distinctly colonial and derogatory judgment of the Sámi by romanticizing all that he does know about nature, the world, and higher powers:

Poor Sámi goes to the mountains, to learn and understand the words of the great Father, to learn where grow the herbs that cure sick men, to learn to find the way to the den of ‘gray legs’ [wolf], to learn to interpret the paths of the stars, and interpret signs. Poor Sámi has a good father up over the mountain. (p. 147)

Despite the differences the text cannot reconcile, confined as it ultimately is by its own Christian and colonial framework, the text emphasizes the point that the same higher power watches over them all, thereby also erasing cultural differences and subjected all to the same hegemony. Still, Mattes gets the final word in some sense, since it is he who will sing the story about these wandering children – “sing a lay about child wanderers, who brought joy to the Sámi man in his hut» (p. 147) – thus assuming the role of the author and the «good father up over the mountain.»

Conclusion

In both classics of Swedish children’s literature, harmonious relationships with people, animals, and nature modeled by the Sámi provide a sustainable path to the future. A nomadic journey teaches the protagonist, and all the book’s readers, about the land, community, and morality in Lagerlöf’s book, while in Fitinghoff’s novel this journey ultimately succeeds in locating new homes, or more favorable pastures, or noumos, for all of the children and their goat. In so doing, the nomadic wanderings in these books also challenge the traditional model of the family and polis, since in a nomadic perspective, a worthy home, family, or values may be found everywhere, not only in the metropole. In so doing these books send the communal and welfare-oriented message that all are responsible for all, as exemplified by Sámi models showcased in the books. Attention to the Sámi presence in classics of Swedish children’s literature thus offers an illuminating avenue that reveals a greater Sámi presence in two Swedish children’s classics than one at first might expect, even as it underscores an ongoing journey to find sustainable models that right the balance between humans, nature, and all living beings, and instill these values in all their readers.

In some sense these books also circle back to their original starting point, like a traditional tale of «there and back again.» Even as they explore nomadism and exploit an exoticized other for the purposes of projection and self-realization, they ultimately return to entrenched traditional and conservative views that do not challenge the hegemony of the patriarchal and colonial world view in which they are situated. We might think here of Bakthinian theory in the sense that, despite this symbolic reversal about the axis, where the devalued and dispossessed other, embodied by the Sámi, has been reevaluated and lifted up as an exemplar in the
course of the books, the texts ultimately return to and reify the status quo. In this sense, as Caryl Emerson observes in her rethinking of Bakhtinian theory, the fact that «the hierarchy is flipped» is not significant, since «the axis has not changed» (Emerson, 1989, p. 152). Though something may «advocate abolition of hierarchy,» it may still be cast in what «Bakhtin would call a ‘pedagogical dialogue’» (p. 152), if it ultimately capitulates to a monologic view of the world rather than achieving a truly dialogic relation between self and other – in this case Sámi indigeneity and nomadism.

Notes
1 Although my focus on nomadism and indigeneity in the comparative analysis of these two books is new, I wish to acknowledge previous mentions of nomadism in these books by Lars Elenius (2000, pp. 97-98; 2005, p. 206), Gerda Helena Lindskog (2005, p. 153), and Maria Andersson (2011, p. 20), who have moved briefly in similar directions.
2 Like Müller and Viken, I use the term ‘indigenous’ «not to designate a natural category, but rather as an academically constructed term to describe peoples who are not organized into self-determined national states, yet represent culturally or ethnically distinguishable groups – normally minorities – within a state dominated by majority peoples» (2017, p. 3). Importantly, «Indigenousness and indigeneity represent perspectives that are products of time and space» (p. 3) and, indeed, the models of indigeneity and nomadism evident in the books treated here figure within the authors’ perspective, limited by a colonialist settler viewpoint.
3 These and other quotations from Swedish texts cited in this article are given in my own English translation.
4 For an important study of home in Canadian, including in aboriginal children’s literature, see Home Words: Discourses of Children’s Literature in Canada (Reimer, 2008). At times it addresses nomadism directly (Reimer 2008, p. 2) and offers necessary corrections to the poststructural glorification of homelessness (Wolf & DePasquale, 2008, p. 93).
5 See, for example, Ab Imperio 2 (2012) special issue on «Unsettling Nomadism» guest edited by Serguei Oushakine, especially «Structures and Cultures of Diversity: Nomadism as Colonialism without a Metropole» (Gerasimov, et al., 2012, pp. 10-16).
6 Like Sámi maps of Sápmi now and in the past, interdisciplinary evidence, such as that put forward by Noel Broadbent in Lapps and Labyrinths, shows that historically the Sámi presence extended much further in Scandinavia and Russia (2014).
7 As Broadbent, among others, notes, toponyms, or place names, attest to an indigenous presence that colonial settler history otherwise tends to erase; «The existence of more than 1,100 place names referring to Lapps in Sweden, of which 87% are on the Bothnian coast, is a reflection of the history of contacts between the Saami and other groups» (Broadbent, 2014, p. 2).
8 Elenius remarks that it is the idea of Sámi assimilation that motivates Åsa’s father to resume his paternal duties, since he cannot accept this occurrence (2005, p. 206).
9 Vivi Edström notes that in an original draft for the school book the leader of the geese was a male goose (Atje), which in Sámi means father, thus indicating how deliberate this choice was, as well as how Selma consciously overrides the contemporary presumption that the leader of a group was male (2005, p. 67). She further notes that «Akka became an archetype for a wise, experienced ‘woman’ with great authority» (p. 67).
10 Akka can also refer to a grandmother or other wise old women in Sámi languages.
References


