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## The Pioneers of Sámi Children's Books The "Mothers" Who Made the Invisible Visible

*Abstract: This article discusses the Sámi children's books produced in the 1970s and 1980s during the Sámi political "awakening," and which are part of the larger Sámi project of cultural self-determination. In the historical legacy of images of the Sámi that were part of the vast colonial apparatus employed by the surrounding majority cultures, Sámi children of earlier generations had been exposed to and internalized representations of themselves that reproduced a hierarchical social order in which they were on the lower rungs. Since the 1970s, Sámi children's book creators have been actively engaged in decolonizing children's literature from this legacy of settler colonization and assimilationist policies by not only foregrounding language and Sámi traditions, but also reappropriating stereotypes and images in a decolonizing gesture in order to reclaim their past and their identities. Because the first generation of Sámi children's book authors and illustrators were women, Vuokko Hirvonen has termed them the "mothers" of Sámi literature (Voices from Sápmi). Their books also contain deeply feminist critiques, not only of the legacy of the majority culture, but of patriarchy within Sámi culture as well. By working and reconfiguring traditional narratives, their books have thus a dual mission of giving voice, visibility and agency to the Sámi while recouping the silenced female voice.*

**Keywords:** post-/anti-colonialism, women authors and illustrators, representation, feminism, Sámi

The Sámi, the indigenous minority of Fennoscandia, are today engaged in a struggle for existential, material, cultural and linguistic survival; a response to the legacy of settler colonialism. The trauma and disruption of colonization continue to impact the material conditions of life in Sápmi: confrontations between the Sámi and the Norwegian state over mandated reindeer culling (Henly); protests over the building of a massive copper mine in Repparfjord in Northern Norway (Nilsen); and the physical relocation of the entire city of Kiruna are seen by many as evidence of an ongoing colonial presence.

These struggles continue alongside those for self-representation and self-expression. The Sámi, recognizing that the struggle for power is ultimately over language, have sought to revitalize Sámi languages and reclaim the terms of their own representation. Sámi children's literature, like the larger Sámi cultural reclamation project of which it is part, seeks to revive long-suppressed language and tradition and to celebrate Sámi cultural and linguistic distinctiveness not only by writing in Sámi, but also by explicitly locating the books' contents in a Sámi environment – both cultural and physical. In this process, historical representations of the Sámi by the majority/colonizing cultures have been reappropriated and resignified, reworking and subverting past themes and images in an act of “conscious decolonization” (DuBois and Cocq 94) in order to reclaim ownership of the forms of representation. Although all children's books are ideological, “purposively interven[ing] in children's lives to propose ways of being in the world” (Bradford 6), Sámi children's books born out of the Sámi political movement of the 1970s and 1980s were explicitly political and pedagogical.

Sámi children's books, since their earliest days in the late 1970s, have also been dominated by female authors and illustrators who have actively challenged not only the strictures of the colonial past but also the androcentrism of both the majority as well as Sámi culture. In the Nordic countries, children's books have generally been the domain of women, but Sámi children's literature is uniquely positioned to decenter and re-center discourses of both gender and ethnicity, and Sámi women authors and illustrators have, since the “birth” of Sámi literature and art, made the voices of women audible and made themselves visible in the face of both gender and colonial erasure (Hirvonen, *Voices from Sápmi* 18).

This article looks at the children's books by the pioneering women authors and illustrators Vuokko Hirvonen refers to as the “mothers” of Sámi literature – those born between 1940 and 1960 who pioneered new forms of expression – to understand the processes by which they

made the invisible visible. These children's books, in particular picturebooks, were the collaborative efforts of authors and illustrators; teams who actively worked not only to interrogate the intersection of ethnicity and gender, but also the relationship between the Sámi and the majority societies in which they lived. One of the strategies of decentering colonial discourse was to reappropriate representations of the past, and this article begins with a revisitation of this legacy. It concludes by presenting the Sámi children's books by the pioneering "mothers" and the visual and textual strategies they employed.

## Representations of the Sámi in Nordic Children's Material

It was not until the late twentieth century that books for and about Sámi children, written in the Sámi languages, began to be published. That is, the Sámi had not been in control of their own representation in a very literal sense: Sámi children were exposed to the same images of "Laplanders" that circulated throughout most of Europe as part of the "phantasmagoric Eurowestern Imaginary" (Justice 238). Representations of the Sámi were seamlessly woven through the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century Nordic children's classics, all of which provided lessons on Sámi alterity in a fairy-tale context (Conrad, "Encountering Otherness," "Into the 'Land of Snow'"). These textual descriptions tended to emphasize the geographical strangeness of Lapland and the capacity of the "Lapps"<sup>1</sup> for magic, but this would shift as illustration became a more prominent aspect of children's literature. Initially, the visual rhetorics concerning the Sámi were somewhat in flux, reflecting geographic conditions, national policy, and trends in popular culture, ultimately hardening into racial and cultural stereotypes.

In both Norway and Sweden, industrializing and settlement in the north was explicitly linked to national interests, as were the educational reforms aimed at future generations. At the same time, improvements in print technology, including the use of color printing, resulted in a proliferation of children's books and magazines. These served to articulate a new vision of nationhood based on the politics of difference. The representation of difference ranged from the "ethnographic" tableaux, such as those of Johan Tirén (image 1), to the performative, such as the illustrations of Swedish children dressed in what resembles the distinctive V-necked South Sámi *gápta*, skiing or engaging in some winter pastime (image 2). Not only are these images in which a Sámi child would fail to recognize themselves, but the "dressing up" is also an act of cultural appropriation that is about per-



LAPPFLYTTNING. Teckning för Jultomten af Johan Tirén.

Image 1. Johan Tirén's "Lappflyttning" in *Jultomten* (1894).



Image 2. Swedish children in Sámi outfits. Illustration by Lydia Skottsberg, back cover of *Jultomten* (1902).

formance and artifice: Sámi clothing has been commodified for consumption by bourgeois subjects re-creating in a winter wonderland.

The works of Nordic artists ranging from John Bauer to Ingri and Edgar d'Aulaire,<sup>2</sup> Bodil Hagbrink, and Inga Borg have perpetuated stereotypes of the Sámi, while their own interwoven personal narratives work to deny this: all visit Sápmi and befriend a reindeer-herding Sámi family and describe "falling in love with" or otherwise being significantly moved by their experiences, thus simultaneously establishing their ethnographic authority as well as their authentic and empathetic relationship with their subjects. In fact, their images have served to present a picture of Sámi life and culture that is limited to reindeer herders and which "incarcerates" the Sámi into an ethnographic present, placing them outside of time (Fabian). The colorful images, with playful children at the center, are appealing and seemingly devoid of ideology, masquerading as demonstrations of cultural diversity, and exploiting subjects who have universal appeal – children. At the same time, however, they continue to reinscribe stereotypes – Sámi dress in colorful North Sámi garb, live in *lavvu* (tents) out on the *vidda* (the high plateau), and are all reindeer herders, living a simple life in nature (image 3); in an evolutionist logic conflating the association of the child with the primitive.



Image 3. Illustration from Ingri and Edgar d'Aulaires' *Children of the Northlights* (1935). Reproduced with permission from Per Ola Parin d'Aulaire and Nils M.P. Daulaire.

The d'Aulaires' *Children of the Northlights* (1935) recycles such well-inscribed visual tropes. The Norwegian translation, *Lappe Lasse og Lappe Lise* (1935), tailored specifically to Norwegian conventions, emphasizes the generic and generically named "Lapp" brother and sister, rather than the broader "children" living ambiguously under the Northern Lights. Lasse and Lise live and herd with their family, but there are also glimpses of their life at the *internat* school (compulsory boarding school) and their visits into the town and church. In other words, despite the stereotypes and fanciful imagery, there are references to the effects of the policy of Norwegianization, albeit in a positive light. In contrast, Arnold Tilgmann's 1947 die-cut booklet *Lapp-Lisa* is a free association of images decoupled from any pretense of ethnographic accuracy (image 4). The eponymous Lisa is alone in nature with her dog, feeding her ptarmigans as if they were domestic chickens. Returning home to her *kåta* (hut) when it gets dark and cold, she stands over the fire, tasting the porridge her otherwise-absent mother has made, while her wild animal "friends" peek in the door opening. Lisa is dressed in a free adaptation of the North Sámi *gákti*, including the red topknot hat. Rather than an attempt at accuracy, the goal is to select those minimal clues that signify "Sámi." Here, representation meets performance: Lisa's hat is part of the mid-century Swedish Sámi costume *for men*, but these hats also were popular consumer products, and many Swedish children, boys and girls, wore them. It is this second context, the commodification of Sámi clothing, in which Lisa's topknot should be understood. The combined effect of the racialized phenotype Lisa embodies along with her modeling of a commodified piece of clothing has the effect in the reader of both estrangement and possession: owning and consuming difference. In addition to authoring children's books, Tilgmann was also a prolific postcard illustrator, and his array of cheap, mass-produced material conforms to a genre quite different from ethnographic (real or contrived) photographs and paintings. *Lapp-Lisa* shares the same chubby and infantilized features as those of the children on his postcards, which include Sámi children (image 5), but also "African," "Japanese," and many other racialized images. The widespread availability and circulation of such images insured the infantilization, racialization and commoditization of Sámi children.

The children's books of two Swedish author/illustrators in particular, Bodil Hagbrink and Inga Borg, require special consideration because of their ubiquity throughout the Nordic countries, internationally and in Sápmi and also because they are generally praised as



Image 4. *Lapp-Lisa* by Arnold Tilgmann (1947).



Image 5. Arnold Tilgmann's Finnish postcards of Sámi children (1940s).

being sensitive, sympathetic and affirming representations of Sámi children (Kokkola 46). Their work demonstrates not only how existing genre expectations and representations reflect and replicate ideologies of the dominant culture, but that they do so invisibly. Additionally, these Swedish women authors benefit from the structural privilege that accrues to white women in a racialized hierarchy, one which their work reproduces.

Hagbrink's small body of work consists entirely of pseudo-ethnographic portraits of a "typical child's life" in some remote part of the world: a village in Southern France, a Tibetan refugee community in Nepal, and Kautokeino in northern Norway. Her material from Sápmi, gathered in 1975–1979, is recycled in two books: *Den långa rajden* (The Long Caravan, 1978), and *Hemma på Vidda: med renfloken på flyttfot* (At Home on the Range: with the Reindeer Herds on Migration, 1982),<sup>3</sup> all presented from the point of view of five-year-old Márit Ingá as she follows the reindeer on their migrations. As in *Children of the Northlights*, the antics of the children and their parents in dealing with reindeer herding, that with which they have particular expertise, are portrayed as clumsy, inept and comical (images 6 and 7). What has changed over the course of forty years are the conventions in presenting Sámi costumes: the d'Aulaires conforming to earlier preference for the star-shaped "four winds" hat and fur *gákti*, while Hagbrink dresses her characters in the formal Kautokeino *gákti*, regardless of weather, season, or activity (image 8). Lacking perspective, Hagbrink's images also evoke a primitivism that is extended by analogy to her subject matter, the Sámi themselves. That is, Hagbrink's visuals materialize two fundamental analogies that undergird the racial categorization of the Sámi: the Child and the Primitive.

Hagbrink's books were published and distributed by very large, international publishing houses, and went through many editions well into the 1990s. They were also translated into all the major European languages and most Nordic languages, but *Den långa rajden* was only once published into North Sámi as *Davas-játtin* (1978). Hagbrink's depictions of spectacle rather than daily life – Easter reindeer races and church services, and the consistent and insistent use of the formal *gákti* as everyday wear also emphasize the performative nature of these images, directed, as were postcards and touristic images of the Sámi, at an outside audience. And yet, the books are used within Sápmi to represent Sámi life, particularly and exclusively that of the reindeer herders: Svanhild Andersen's research in elementary schools in the north Finnmark coastal community of Kokelv (populated by coastal Sámi who do not herd reindeer) notes that *Den långa*



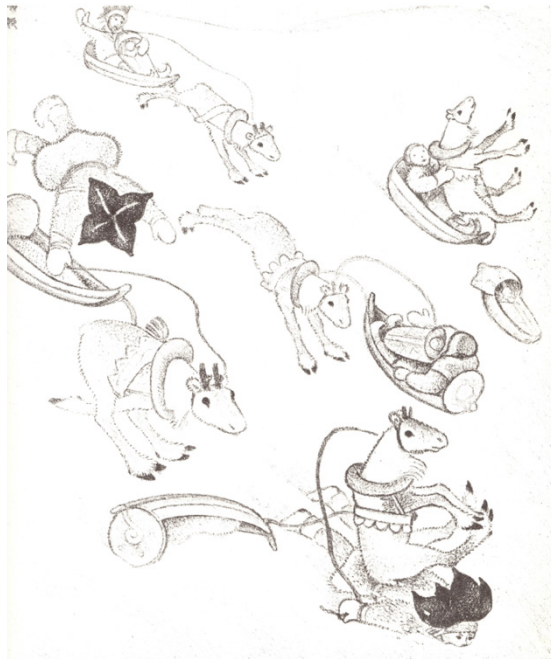


Image 6. Illustration from Ingri and Edgar d'Aulaires' *Children of the Northlights* (1935).  
Reproduced with permission from Per Ola Parin d'Aulaire and Nils M.P. Daulaire.



Image 7. Illustration from Bodil Hagbrink's *Barna i Kautokeino* (1978). © Bodil Hagbrink.



Image 8. Illustration from Bodil Hagbrink's *Barna i Kautokeino* (1978). © Bodil Hagbrink.

*raiden* (in Norwegian *Barna i Kautokeino*) was used in preparation for a field trip to Kautokeino to learn about Sámi settlements, language, and culture despite the fact that at the time of her research the book was already at least twenty years old. Andersen also notes that the head teacher of the school reported that in over 20 years of teaching she had never taught about the coastal Sámi (Andersen 35).

In the colonial context, the colonized-as-child, a form of infantilization, “innocently” circulates while upholding the central binary distinctions that form the basis of colonial relations. In Inga Borg’s children’s book series – a franchise that consists of 27 books issued between 1955 and 2005 – the central character Plupp is a small, child-like creature living in nature in a Sámi *kåta*, surrounded by animals (image 9), as did Tilgmann’s Lisa. Plupp is introduced in exactly the same manner in most of Borg’s books:

Plupp är en liten “osynling” som kan tala med djur. Han är osynlig för alla människor – utom för dig och mig. Plupp bor någonstans långt uppe i norr bland höga fjäll. Där har han sitt bo, en liten torvkåta, vid en sjö som han kallar Blåvattnet.

Plupp is a little invisible being who can speak with the animals. He is invisible to all humans – except for you and me. Plupp lives somewhere far up in the north in the high mountains. There he has his abode, a small peat *kåta*, next to a lake he calls Bluewater. (Borg, *Plupp och renkalven 1*)

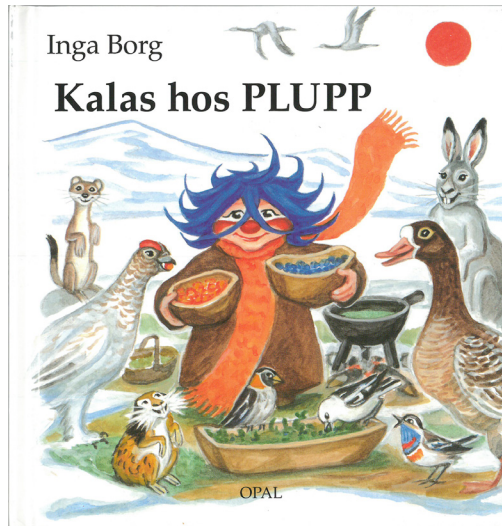


Image 9. Illustration from Inga Borg's *Kalas hos Plupp* (1996). © Inga Borg.

Borg's description of Plupp and his existence resonates with Jon Todal's description of the stereotypic physically small, culturally inferior reindeer-herding mountain-Sámi (*Fjellsamer*), living close to nature and thus having a special relationship to it (Todal, *Eldre nordnorsk barnelitteratur* 47). Plupp is simple, childlike and primitive, but also invisible. Beyond the contrast between civilization and savagery in the landscape, Plupp's invisibility is a doubly-loaded metaphor: invisible to the majority society (as are the Sámi, see Nordström), but also invisible like the *uldat* of Sámi folklore – the inhabitants of a parallel world who live alongside humans but who are generally invisible to them (see below). Plupp's invisibility is also a marker of inferior status and Otherness, extended, by analogy, to the Sámi.

As a teen in the 1940s, Borg visited the mountainous Swedish north, and in her subsequent children's book series she inserted her imaginary Plupp into a generic Northern landscape: fantasy friend in an equally fantastic North. Borg's images resonate with those such as *Lapp-Lisa*, which Borg herself may have seen as a child, and they continue to reinforce the sedimented "Lapp" stereotypes (image 10). Children's literature, fantasy and cute, colorful pictures of small creatures combined to allow these books and their racialized messages to pass as benign rather than condescending.

Borg also illustrated other children's books, often with images of Sámi children, such as the cover of the 1959 re-issue of Zacharias Topelius's *Sampo Lappelill och andra berättelser ur Läsning för barn*



Image 10. Illustration from Inga Borg's *Plupp bygger bo* (1956). © Inga Borg.

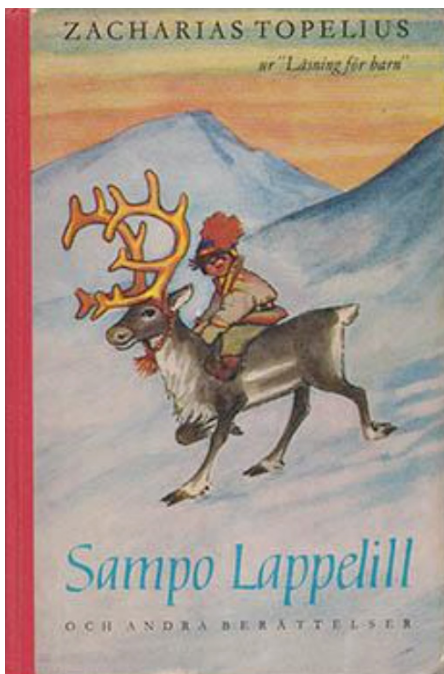


Image 11. Inga Borg's cover for Zacharias Topelius' *Sampo Lappelill och andra berättelser ur Läsnings för barn* (1959). © Inga Borg.



Image 12. Illustration from Inga Borg's *Plupp och renkalven* (1997). © Inga Borg.

(Sampo Lappelill and Other Stories from Reading for Children), which depicts Sampo riding the reindeer (image 11). Not only contradicting the text, in which Sampo more accurately hitches his sledge to his reindeer, the image evokes the historical legacy of an imaginary Sámi created and circulated far from the north, an image on which received knowledge of the Sámi has been constructed. Borg's images masquerade as originating in Sápmi (her youthful travels to the mountains), but they are well grounded in the visual legacy of the southern metropolises, which she incorporates into her Plupp series (image 12).

The formulaic and repetitive aspects of the Plupp books, coupled with the size of the series suggest that Borg has played a large role in reinscribing the historical racial ideology. So too has the publishing history. Plupp books have been translated into all of the major European languages and reissued in each several times. Their enduring marketability suggests that the images are received as familiar, reaffirming what is already known, and that the recirculation of such images has real economic value. In the mid-1980s, the Swedish Sámi publisher Sámis Sápmi, along with the major Swedish publishing houses Norstedts, and Almqvist & Wiksell translated several Plupp books into North Sámi<sup>4</sup> followed by translations into Skolt, Inari, and Southern Sámi, indicating the books' problematic acceptance by publishers who likely read these books as children and were now introducing them, with only the text changed to various Sámi languages, to their own children. That is, these images continued to inform Sámi children's notions of Sámi culture, thereby creating a new generation of Sámi children at risk of internalizing the message of their own racial inferiority.

## A New Sámi Literature

The 1970s witnessed an "intellectual awakening and radicalization ... that mobilized [the] Sámi towards the goals of defining and defending their identity on the principles of self-representation and through markers of identity and vernacular expression" (DuBois and Cocq 13).<sup>5</sup>

The effects of the Sámi political movement were uneven throughout Sápmi. Norway, with the largest population of Sámi within its borders, responded to ethno-political pressure with a series of reforms and policies, which were implemented to foster Sámi language and culture in the Sámi-speaking areas. Among these were the Norwegian law NOU 1985:14 *Samisk kultur og utdanning* (Sámi Culture

and Education); the establishment of the Sámi College in 1989 and the Sámi Education Council in 1997; and Reform 97 – *grunnskolereformen* (the primary school reform), which expanded teaching in Sámi beyond the core areas of Kautokeino and Karasjok. These reforms represent a significant shift from previous policies which included the Sámi boarding school system and, in the late 1950s and 1960s, a continuation of the policy of Norwegianization (assimilation). Books published in Sámi languages were vital to the cultural and linguistic revitalization program, and as an important condition for this, three new Sámi publishing houses were founded to promote Sámi language and culture: Davvi Girji in Karasjok, DAT in Kautokeino, both established in 1990, and Iðut, in Porsanger, a few years later.<sup>6</sup> It was out of this milieu that a new Sámi literature emerged. Writing in Sámi was political as well as creative; an urgent act of cultural preservation and identity formation: “Sámi writers have also a central role as they are the ones who constantly weave the past, present and future into a fabric that gives us the meanings we need to stay grounded in who we are” (Kuokkanen 92).

But the revitalization project was itself imbricated with the colonial past, complicating the project of creating a new Sámi literature. By the 1970s, the Sámi languages were endangered. How to begin to write in languages few could speak and even fewer could read? Should books written in Sámi simultaneously be written in the Nordic languages so as to be accessible to non-Sámi speaking Sámi children who perhaps lived outside the core Sámi areas? Would writing in the majority languages again “pay homage to Western intellectual and political hegemony” (JanMohamed and Lloyd, “Introduction” [1990] 2)? How could Sámi publishing houses be viable with such a small audience? (Sámi publishing houses are heavily subsidized by grants from the Norwegian state, once again complicating the power relationship.) The retrieval of traditional narratives to “weave the past” into the present also presented challenges. Although an “origin story” is written into many Sámi children’s books, one which traces them to oral tradition/transmission (“told by my grandmother”),<sup>7</sup> many of the narratives reworked into children’s books relied on folklore collections of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century. At heart, these were preservationist and salvage operations that were the work of colonial agents – priests, teachers, administrators – whose vested interests and ideological presumptions were grounded in an evolutionist logic in which the Sámi would inevitably “die out” in the face of modernity. These archival materials were also part of the dominant intellectual paradigm; a “universalizing humanist project [which] has been

highly selective, systematically choosing certain texts and authors and valorizing them as the humanist tradition while ignoring and at times actively repressing alternate traditions and attitudes" (JanMohamed and Lloyd, "Introduction" [1987] 8). How to retrieve these stories without "selective recuperation into the dominant culture" (9)? This was the discursive terrain from which a new Sámi literature emerged as an epistemological break with the colonial past.

## The "Mothers" of Sámi Children's Literature

The first, pioneering Sámi children's books were written by women – those born between 1940 and 1960 who had experienced some of the most aggressive assimilationist policies and had been awakened by the Sámi movement of the 1970s. Vuokko Hirvonen has dubbed these women the "mothers" of Sámi literature (*Voices from Sápmi*), and it is they who dominated early children's books production. These were literal mothers who were dissatisfied with the dearth of material available in Sámi for their own children and who decided to take matters into their own hands. These women, from different areas in Sápmi, also had one other thing in common – they could not read or write in Sámi. As adults, they went back to school to learn how to write in their mother tongue to ensure that the next generation would read and speak Sámi. These first books reflect a sense of urgency; that it was "most important to fight for the children and their rights, for it is Sámi children who constitute the future for us" (Somby, "Min situasjon" 141).<sup>8</sup> Directed at beginning readers, these books were also heavily illustrated. Thus, significantly, the "mothers" of Sámi children's books included both women authors and illustrators who shared the dual goals of decolonizing Sámi heritage and reclaiming a female voice from shackles of tradition. The remainder of this article looks at the strategies used by these "mothers" to make the invisible visible and the silenced audible: how they reclaimed Sámi tradition textually and visually; how they challenged the underlying patriarchal assumptions of that tradition; and how they engaged and were in dialogue with the legacy of colonial representations which had rendered them invisible by depicting them as racial stereotypes. The books under investigation here span from 1976 to 1990, up to the founding of the first Sámi publishing houses in Karasjok and Kautokeino, and include the authors Marry Áilonieida Somby (b. 1953), Kirste Paltto (b. 1947), and Rauna Paadar-Leivo (b. 1942), along with illustrators Berit Marit Hætta (b. 1948), Liisa Helander (b. 1955), and Merja Aletta Ranttila (b. 1960).<sup>9</sup>

Marry Áilonieida Somby and illustrator Berit Marit Hætta's picturebook *Ámmul ja alit oarbmælli* (*Ámmul and the Blue Cousin*, 1976),<sup>10</sup> considered to be the first Sámi children's book, in many ways establishes the template for future children's books. Using elements from traditional narratives while visually locating them in the Sámi context, Somby foregrounds Sámi language and culture while she critiques the colonial presence, and decenters the focus from the human/male character onto the *ulda*/female character, who represents alternative ways of being in the world in terms of ethnic, environmental and gender relations. In his analysis of *Ámmul ja alit oarbmælli* Jon Todal notes that Marry Áilonieida Somby has consciously used the fairy tale genre in order to provide commentary on present-day conditions ("Tradisjonen og boka" 11).

*Ámmul ja alit oarbmælli* reworks a Sámi variant of a legend type that has circulated and been recorded throughout the Nordic region.<sup>11</sup> The story is of the encounter and ultimate marriage of an *ulda*<sup>12</sup> girl and a Sámi boy, a transaction which confers wealth and luck on the boy. The *uldat* (pl.) in Sámi tradition share many similarities and are at some level cognate with the *huldrefolk* of Norwegian tradition, the *underjordiska* in Sweden, the *maahiset* in Finnish lore, and other traditions of the North Atlantic. Because these Sámi and non-Sámi (majority) narrative traditions all share common typological, functional and linguistic elements, they have been categorized and analyzed as part of the same complex (a function of the comparative nature of folklore collection), but there are significant variations, particularly in the Sámi material. Speaking of the Norwegian narratives, Bente Alver and Torunn Selberg describe the *huldrefolk* as "a mirror image of human family life," occupying a parallel-to-the-human-world space (24), but they are not human. Encounters with the *huldrefolk* are a disturbance and threat to the social order and must be avoided. When they do occur, the consequences need to be mediated and mitigated by the elder generation and/or institutional intervention. In non-Sámi narratives, the underground folk and the Sámi are both Other: a wide-spread legend has Eve's "hidden children" interchangeably identified as both the Sámi and the *huldrefolk*; both the Sámi and the *huldrefolk* are invisible (hidden) to humans; and the traditional turf-mound hut of the Sámi, the *goahti* (image 13) can be seen as validating and providing material evidence for equating the Sámi and the underground folk.

The Sámi are not Other within their own society, nor are the *uldat* of Sámi tradition, who are much more familiar and represent an ide-



alized, almost perfect version of above-ground Sámi society. They are human, yet different. According to Just Qvigstad:

Govetter er enslags mennesker som får lov til å bo under jorden og i berg. [...] De går i Finnmark i lappeklær [...] De tygger tobak som riktige folk. Lappene tror at govetterne ikke er troll eller onde ånder, men enslags mennesker som er usynlige for oss likesom også vi for dem, og derfor kan der ikke være noe almindelig samkvem med dem.

Gufihttarak [uldat] are a type of human who live under the ground or in the mountains. [...] In Finnmark they wear Lapp clothes [...] They chew tobacco like real people. The Lapps believe that the gufihttarak are not trolls or evil spirits, but a type of human that is invisible to us, as we are to them, and thus, there cannot be any ordinary contact with them. (Qvigstad 397)

The *ulda* world is a better, richer, more perfect version of Sámi society (Utsi), emblemized by their pure white reindeer herds.

Somby highlights this aspect of *ulda* society in a decolonizing critique. In *Ámmul ja alit oarbmælli*, Somby's more perfect version of Sámi society is a pre-colonial world, or one in which there is little evidence of a colonizing presence. In contrast, above ground the air is polluted by car exhaust and industrial output (image 14) and is "vond å puste i" (painful to breathe, 21) whereas the *uldat* don't have roads or cars and continue to drive reindeer. Somewhat incongruously, however, the *uldat* do have radio, and Ámmul is surprised to learn that in the underworld, radio programs are in Sámi, in dramatic contrast to his own experience where Sámi language has been suppressed and supplanted by Norwegian.

In *Ámmul ja alit oarbmælli* the invisible *ulda* also functions as a metaphor for the invisible female in Sámi society, both of which are made visible by Somby. A close reading of various innovations in Somby's text reveals the strategies she employed to effect a decolonizing and feminist critique while maintaining a link with past narrative traditions. In the opening scene, the Sámi boy Ámmul is alone in the mountains watching his reindeer when he sees another large and unfamiliar group of reindeer in the distance. The reindeer are all white and beautiful – they are *ulda* reindeer. He also is astonished to see that none of the reindeer have ear markings (brands), Somby's subtle innovation to comment on the superior model of communal possession of the herds in (non-colonized) *ulda* society. As Coppélie Cócq has observed, "the traditional relationship to nature was ...



Image 13. "Fellesgamme i Nesseby: Høytørk" (1900). Photo: Ellisif Rannveig Wessel.



Image 14. The polluted view of the above ground world, from Marry Áilonieida Somby's *Ámmul ja alit oarbælli* (1976), illustrated by Berit M. Hætta. © Berit M. Hætta.

not based on the concept of ownership. [. . .] Property appeared as an imposed value that came with the settlers along with laws governing land ownership and payment for land and resource exploitation” (198). The *ulda* herd are part of the commons, but Ámmul lives in a world defined by the colonial imprint and immediately wishes to *possess* the herd and mark them as his own. He chases after them, but they disappear.

Aborting the pursuit, Ámmul decides to take a nap, but just as he is about to fall asleep, he hears giggling and sees two girls, one in a red *gákti*, the other in blue. He grabs the one in blue and pricks her hand with a nail, which causes her to bleed – an act of male violence, domination and possession. This puts the *ulda* in blue in an untenable position.<sup>13</sup> She is now neither of her world, nor of the boy’s world, and she is rightly terrified. This act of male aggression is consistent throughout the recorded folklore, a symbolic rape about which tellers, collectors, analysts, and Somby herself have been remarkably silent, speaking to the normalization of sexual violence.

Somby does, however, call attention to the terror of dislocation and disorientation that the girl experiences in the aftermath of the act of violence. In doing so, she again deviates from the record and tradition in redirecting the narrative focus to the girl’s perspective by introducing emotional and psychological depth, describing the fear, sadness, and disorientation the girl feels, alone in an unfamiliar world. This gendering of the narrative does have an antecedent in Emilie Demant-Hatt’s mostly forgotten collection of Sámi tales, which contains the related story “The Sámi Lad who Married a Halde Girl and was Given Lucky Reindeer Along with Her” (Hatt 11–12). Collected in either 1908 or 1916 from Anni Rasti, one of Hatt’s reindeer-herding informants with whom she lived, Rasti’s narrative describes how the girl is unable to return to her world after the boy has drawn blood, and that she miserably stands outside the boy’s turf hut, crying. The Sámi boy tells her that “if she could behave properly, she should [sic] come inside the hut and be his wife. So, she came in, and they built the fire up and lay down to sleep” (Hatt 11). Anni Rasti’s own personal story also informs the gendering of this narrative, in particular the stigma and isolation of unsanctioned sexual relations that disproportionately falls to women: after delivering her out-of-wedlock child, Rasti had to perform numerous rites of reincorporation into society for both herself and her child (Hatt 128–130). Her story and Demant-Hatt’s relatively obscure collection reveal the way certain folklore is preserved and others censored, acts which ultimately have suppressed the female point of view and si-

lenced the female voice. Demant-Hatt, the lone female folklore collector in the north at the time, was relegated to obscurity, and her stories have fallen out of circulation and publication. The gendered aspect of these tales has thus been buried by the preponderance of source material collected by men (see e.g. Qvigstad, Friis).

Anni Rasti's story shared another significant element with Somby's, which sets them apart from other collections. In the variants collected by Qvigstad and J.A. Friis,<sup>14</sup> the bulk of the action consists of the reconciliation and incorporation of the girl into the boy's society. Notably, she is brought to the local priest (a colonial agent) who baptizes, names, and marries the girl to the boy, reinforcing patriarchy and the institutions of colonial society. In *Ámmul ja alit oarbmaelli*, in contrast, the couple's relationship is determined without family or societal intervention. Absent are the motifs of marriage and baptism as legitimating and thereby sanctioning the union and which allow for the incorporation of an Other into human society and family relations. The two are simply married. There is, however, a vestigial remainder in the use of naming as the process of incorporation into human/Christian society, but again, Somby has made it the girl's decision:

En dag lenge etter at de var blitt gift, ropte blå kusine på Ámmul. Forresten het hun ikke kusine mer, for Ámmul kunne jo ikke gå rundt og kalla kona si for kusine. I stedet het hun Annot etter bestemoren.

One day, long after they had gotten married, the blue cousin called to Ámmul. He shouldn't go around calling her "blue cousin" anymore, because Ámmul couldn't very well call his wife "cousin." Instead, he should call her Annot, after her grandmother. (Somby and Hætta 13, *Ámmul og den blå kusinen*)

It is her decision, and she chooses matrilineality. The importance of naming in Sámi identity formation is part of Somby's own experience as well, changing her name from the Norwegianized Aslaksdatter Somby to Áilonieida Somby.

In the end, Ámmul and Annot settle down in the polluted and colonized world above ground, their material security guaranteed by the *ulda* reindeer from the underworld. That is, in *all* renditions of this narrative, including Somby's, the marriage is patrilocal and subsumed into a patriarchal logic by which the *ulda* wife is instrumental to ensuring the material wellbeing of the male: this is the "happy ending" of the fairy tale.

Somby's second book, *Ráiddostallan* (Reindeer Caravan, 1983, see note 3), illustrated by Liisa Helander, is usually described as a simple book about the life of a reindeer-herding family, but this is to miss the textual and visual engagement with those earlier non-Sámi books such as those by Hagbrink, which claimed to also represent this life. The book describes a family's reindeer-herding existence, from winter to summer camps, but has eliminated all references to the spectacular, performative, and the institutional. There is no Easter Celebration, no church going, and no reference to the *internat*. The book is not from a child's point of view, but it is descriptive of the operations of the entire family, including the four children, Áilu, Májjá, Biggá, and Ánde, *not* the generic Lasse and Lisa. These children interact within their multi-generational family. They are not shown, as in *Lapp-Lisa*, or the Plupp series, alone or in the company of their wild animal "friends." On the contrary, wild animals, such as wolves, are an existential threat to the herd and family. Helander's illustrations also depict the family's clothing as a functional response to seasonal conditions – skins in winter, cloth in summer – and not the formal Kautokeino *gákti* (image 15). Helander also revisits the stereotypic sectional view of the inside of the *lavvu*, but her image, rather than filled with every kind of craft activity going on simultaneously by all members of the family in formal gear, shows the family sitting around the fire while the grandfather tells the stories of his encounters with wolves (image 16). The book was initially published by a small press, but ten years later was picked up by Davvi Girji and released in Norwegian as *Raiden går*, with all new images by Helander. The book was also significantly shortened, omitting a chapter in which the family visits a sedentary, farming Sámi family.

*Beaivváš nieida: sápmelaš máinnas* (The Daughter of the Sun: a Sámi Tale), simultaneously released in Norwegian as *Solens datter: et samisk eventyr* (1990), is Somby's third children's book. Like *Ámmul ja alit oarbmaelli*, it tells the tale of a rather unpromising Sámi youth whose material wealth is greatly enhanced by virtue of the interventions and mentoring of a supernatural female. Although the titular character references a mythic past, the story fictionalizes an actual historical moment – the shift from wild reindeer hunting to reindeer herding that occurred roughly 400 years ago. The story begins with the young Sámi boy Alits, who, like Ámmul, is lying about in the wilderness daydreaming. He is drawn to a mysterious, singing voice, and comes upon a beautiful girl surrounded by tame reindeer. She tells Alits that her father is the Sun and her mother the Morning Star, and that she has come, at the behest of her father, to bring tame reindeer to the



Image 15. Mother and Májjá in Marry Áilonieida Somby's *Ráiddostallan* (1983), illustrated by Liisa Helander. Reproduced with permission from Davvi Girji.

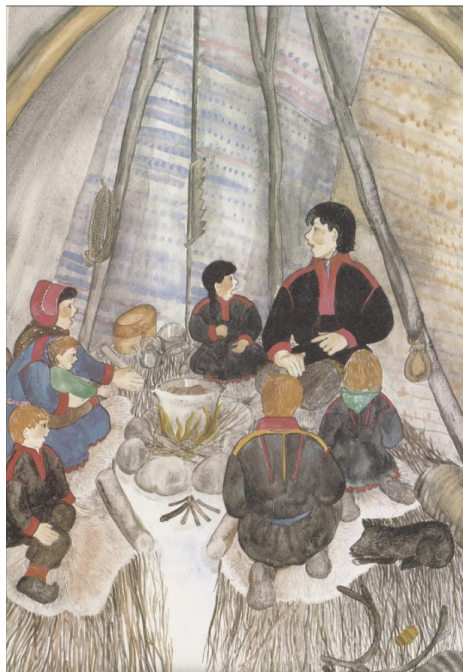


Image 16. Grandfather and family in Marry Áilonieida Somby's *Ráiddostallan* (1983), illustrated by Liisa Helander. Reproduced with permission from Davvi Girji.

Sámi. She teaches him to *joik* and the patience to tame reindeer, and also how to mark them, introducing the idea of private ownership. Although she tries to remain on earth with Alits, the girl along with her reindeer ultimately return to her parents in the heavens due to Alits' bungling. Despite this apparent tragedy and loss, Alits, and by extension the Sámi, have acquired the knowledge to tame reindeer and accumulate herds, suggesting that material wealth is itself the "happy ending."

In Sámi narratives collected in the past 120 years, interactions between humans and celestial beings, particularly with regard to the introduction of reindeer herding, that quintessential aspect of Sámi identity, involved one of the two central female figures – *Njávešeatni* (the daughter of the sun) and *Áhčēšeatni* (the daughter of the moon).<sup>15</sup> It is these female figures in folklore and their ties to female deities in pre-Christian Sámi religion who represent the forces of creativity – creation, reproduction, fire, fecundity, and the sun. In *Beaivváš nieida*, Norwegian illustrator Ingrid Jangaard Ousland makes these connections explicit with her generous use of Sámi sun symbols alongside Sámi *duodji* (handicrafts), which are commonly associated with women's work. In re-focusing on the daughter of the sun as the source of agency, knowledge, and power, Somby not only reclaims what had traditionally been female-centered narratives, she also re-centers and thereby challenges the general shift from a female- to male-centered sensibility that typifies contemporary literary works – most emphatically Nils-Aslak Valkeapää's *Beaivi, áhčážan* from 1988 (*The Sun, My Father*, 1997) and the work of Harald Gaski (for example: *Biejjen Baernie/Sámi Son of the Sun/Beaivvi Bárdni*). These recent works are based on the controversial recounting of the epic by Anders Fjellner and recorded by von Düben<sup>16</sup> (Conrad, *Contested Terrain* 277 note 419) and present an androcentric position that is not consistent with the historical record, in which the sun is coded female<sup>17</sup> (see Conrad, *Contested Terrain*; and Hirvonen, "How to Make" for two different critical gender analyses).

Despite Somby's reworking of traditional narratives to suggest female agency, however, both *Ámmul ja alit oarbmælli* and *Beaivváš nieida* fit into contemporary Sámi gender ideology. The sun's daughter is the medium through which the male prerogative is actualized: she comes at the behest of her father, and provides material gain for Alits, the metonymic Sámi man. In *Ámmul ja alit oarbmæll*, not only is female power channeled for the material gain of the man, that female power is put under the control of man, through the institutions of marriage and incorporation into the patrilineal line.

It falls to Kirste Paltto and her first children's book, *Vilges geađgi* published in 1980 (*The White Stone*, 2011), to discursively explore and rework *ulda* narratives to focus on female solidarity and empowerment as well as to offer up an alternative, female-centric sensibility. Paltto was already a well-established writer by the time she ventured into children's books and, unlike Somby, she chose to use small, local presses, writing only in Sámi, and using few illustrations. In *Vilges geađgi*, Paltto, like Somby, reworks traditional *ulda* narratives to make visible a female-centered point of view, but Paltto breaks with tradition by making the human-*ulda* relationship one between two little girls, removing the sexual subtext that pervades so many recorded narratives. *Vilges geađgi* highlights the transmission of knowledge and language between females. Early in the story, five-year-old Elle's grandma tells her of the kindly old mountain spirit who lives in Ptarmigan Mountain who is the head of the *gufihtar*, the underground people. Grandma's knowledge is at odds with most circulating masculinist narratives in which the "king of the mountain" is dangerous and aggressive and must be fought and vanquished. Here he is benign. Grandma further describes the *gufihtar* as "like the Sámi used to be in the old days" and that anyone who befriended them would be happy all their lives. Interaction is thus presented in terms of cooperation rather than incorporation, and benefits of interaction with the *gufihtar* are neither exclusively realized by men, nor are they exclusively material. Elle is soon befriended by Sáija, a *gufihtar* girl, and eventually they go visit Ptarmigan Mountain and Sáija's family. As in *Ámmul ja alit oarbmaelli*, the issue of language preservation is a topic of conversation. Sáija's mother cautions Elle about losing her language, which she ties to the Sámi way of life, and, as in *Ámmul ja alit oarbmaelli*, she contrasts the *gufihtar* way of life with that of the Sámi who have slowly adopted the ways of the colonizers. Again, the concept of private ownership is depicted as foreign: "our reindeer are not marked. The herd is our common herd. Nobody has their own reindeer, except for the draught bulls. We look after the herd together. And we use it together too" (Paltto, *The White Stone* 62).

As the decade of the 1980s rounded out, Somby and Paltto were joined by others who built on their work in reclaiming the terms of Sámi representation, in part by reworking and reimagining Sámi narratives. Perhaps most notable are the author-illustrator collaborative efforts of Rauna Paadar-Leivo and Merja Aletta Ranttila, who created whole new stories out of sediments of the past, or thin references to folk and fairy tale motifs. *Mo gidđa boahhtá Sápmaí* (When Spring Came to Sápmaí, 1988) is an original story about seasonal



weather changes that occur because of the actions of the Frost King's three young sons, who venture south to retrieve the Sun's daughters and bring Spring to the North. It is an environmental parable with no antecedent in tradition. Its underlying project is to highlight not only the presence of Sápmi, but its centrality to the existential conditions in the southern metropole. This is made emphatic with Ranttila's map of Sápmi on the inside cover. Referencing the visual rhetorics of the Sami Movement iconicized in Hans Ragnar Mathisen's 1975 map of Sápmi, it shows Sápmi encompassing the land of four nation states, disregarding geopolitical boundaries. Their second book, *Luobbalvári stallu* (Stallo from Luobbalvári, 1989), published only in North Sámi, both alludes to Topelius's *Sampo Lappelill* (1860), as well as to the entire Sámi tradition of Stallo legends. In Paadar-Leivo's retelling, Stallo is not a gruesome, cannibalistic ogre to be killed, but a kindly hermit, who befriends and mentors the young Sámi boy who seeks him out. The message is clear: cooperative rather than adversarial relations.

## Mothers and Daughters

Sámi children's literature emerged out of the multiple, and often conflicting discourses of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries: the evolutionist enterprise of Folklore, the collection of which explicitly hinged on the imperative of salvaging material thought to be "dying out" in modernity; the modern (and nostalgic) construction of childhood as a separate and safe realm, which also contains clear mandates of progress through standardized education; and the post-colonial discourses of reappropriation, reclamation and self-representation. Negotiating how to reappropriate stereotypes without being trapped in them or how to incorporate the past into lessons for the future are challenges that set indigenous, post-colonial children's literatures like that of the Sámi apart from mainstream children's literature. The relatively new phenomenon of Sámi children's books gives evidence to the tension that inheres in the project of creating a distinctly Sámi children's literature that combines an emphasis on the preservation of the past with the explicit linkage of children and futurity, and one which also seeks the preservation of oral tradition in written form. The kinds of experimentations in children's literature engaged in by the pioneering women authors and illustrators continue into the present. Authors like Somby and Paltto are now joined by the next generation. But Sámi children's books continue to be the domain of women.

The next generation of authors and illustrators – the “daughters” – has built on the legacy of their pioneering “mothers” and their books. Having grown up speaking Sámi, benefitting from those first books written for them, their issues have also moved from militant revivalist efforts to more complex discourses on identity, ecological sustainability, and themes that run through all children’s and YA literature – loneliness, depression, family dysfunction and other social issues that are, in Sápmi, exacerbated by minority/majority relations. These more recent books contain the recognition that Sámi culture is the product of long-term multi-cultural contact, and that Sápmi is a “contact zone” – a social space where different cultures “meet, clash and grapple with one another, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power, such as colonialism” (Pratt 34), even as these ethnic groups in contact engage in the construction and maintenance of boundaries based on the politics of difference (Barth; Edheim). Many contemporary Sámi children’s book authors produce what Mary Louise Pratt calls “autoethnographic texts,” engaging with the representations others have made of them and with which they are in dialogue. Such texts “involve a selective collaboration with and appropriation of idioms of the metropolis or the conqueror. These are merged or infiltrated to varying degrees with indigenous idioms to create self-representations intended to intervene in metropolitan modes of understanding” (Pratt 35). These texts are directed both at Sámi as well as international audiences, something evident in the collaboration of Sámi consultants with Walt Disney Studios in the making of *Frozen 2*. Anne Lajla Utsi, the managing director of the International Sámi Film Institute, and part of the team that consulted with Disney, expresses this clearly: “when someone from the outside is using or being inspired by our culture, it’s always a big issue.” Speaking about *Frozen 2*, Utsi says, “It’s a good story [...] It will give us visibility internationally, and that’s a good thing” (Last).

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## Notes

1 In colonial discourse, the Sámi were referred to as "Lapps," now considered a derogatory term. It is used here to reference that now abandoned concept and where its use is consistent with the intent of the original material.

2 The d'Aulaires were immigrant American children's book illustrators. Ingri, however, had grown up in Kongsberg, Norway, and a significant number of their books were about Norway. They traveled to Kautokeino in 1934 in preparation for their 1935 *Children of the Northlights*, depicting the life of two children in Kautokeino.

3 Literal translation of these titles requires explication: *Den långa rajden* could be inaccurately rendered "the Long Caravan," but *rajd* specifically refers to a "lång rad av renar som är bundna efter varandra för slädtransport" (long line of (Sámi) reindeer tied one after the other for sleigh transport, "Rajd"). *Hemma på Vidda: med renfloken på flyttfot* could be rendered

“At Home on the Range: with the Reindeer Herds on Migration,” but *vidda* is specific to the high plateau of Sápmi. It is a Norwegian noun but is also used in Swedish when referring to those areas in north Sápmi with migratory reindeer herds. The titles are significantly changed when “translated” into Norwegian, when *Den långa rajden* becomes *Barna i Kautokeino* (The Children in Kautokeino) shifting the emphasis from the reindeer migration to children in a specific location.

4 In the translations “Plupp” is rendered “Bluppe,” as the hard aspirated “p” does not occur in Sámi languages, thus again illustrating the disconnect between Borg’s representations and reality.

5 The apparent emphasis on Sámi children’s books from Norway in this article needs some additional context. The largest concentration of Sámi in Sápmi is in Northern Norway, and of these, the majority speak North Sámi. This, in combination with the much more robust response of the Norwegian State to meet Sámi demands for cultural and linguistic self-determination in comparison with neighboring Nordic states, translates into more state funding for publishing and for research. Only Norway, for example, has recognized the indigenous status of the Sámi under ILO 169 (1990) and furthermore, *Finnmarksloven* (the Finnmark Act) of 2005 has transferred 95 % of Finnmark to local control, split evenly between the Sámi and non-Sámi communities, thereby increasing the self-determination of the Sámi in these areas over issues of language, culture, and also (in a more limited sense) to land use (“Finnmarksloven”). That said, Sápmi is a multicultural area in which many different Sámi languages and cultures are consolidated across national borders. The Sámi publishing houses in Norway routinely translate books from North Sámi into other Sámi languages, and many of the authors and illustrators hail from Sámi areas in Sweden and Finland. Nonetheless, the use of North Sámi, and the representation of Sámi culture as based in and typified by reindeer-herding dominates publications.

6 There are varying accounts of the total number of Sámi publishers across Sápmi – six per Hirvonen, ten per Gaski, but there is consensus on the dominance of the three major houses in Northern Norway. This is not only dominance in output, but also cultural and linguistic dominance of North Sámi. This is further institutionalized and legitimated by the Nordic Council, whose Children and Young People’s Literature Prize nominations from 2013 to 2019 have only been from these three publishers.

7 The concept of “orality” as it conflates with “authenticity” is a problematic one, but it continues to be invoked in Sámi children’s literature. To have heard a story as a child from a parent or grandparent also locates and naturalizes storytelling in childhood, a conceit of the 19th century romantics. Anna L. Guttorm and Liisa Helander’s 1996 collection *Áhkku, Muital Munnje* (Grandmother, Tell Me) demonstrates the challenges to claims of such a direct line of transmission. Although many of the stories derive from Sámi tradition, others, such as “Bártnáš, gii borai gilvvu stáluin” (The Boy who Had an Eating Match with a Troll) and “Rukesgahpiras” (Little Red Riding Hood) are well known international tale types. These tales have been in circulation so long as to make any claim on authorship or orality impossible.



8 Original quote: “viktigst å kjempe for barna og deres rettigheter, for det er de samiske barna som ugjør fremtiden for oss.”

9 The distinction often made that these women are from Norway or Finland is misleading. All were born in the far North, where the two countries are divided by the Tana River, and were born on either side of that boundary, within 60 miles of one another. That they were born in Sápmi is a more significant description. The distinction further falls away because they write in North Sámi and most often publish with Davvi Girji, in Karasjok.

10 Somby published the book in Norwegian as *Ámmul og den blå kusinen* in 1977 with the explicit recognition that many of the Sámi children she was writing for did not speak Sámi. She also publishes with Norwegian publishing houses in order to reach Sámi children who live outside of Sápmi.

11 In Christiansen’s index it is migratory legend ML 5090, “Married to a Fairy Woman”; in Klintberg’s typology it is J73, “The Strong Wife”; and in Jauhiainen’s Finnish typology it corresponds to M301–M326 involving the Maahiset.

12 *Ulda* (pl. *uldat*) was from the Kautokeino dialect of North Sámi, and is cognate with the Norwegian *huldra*, whereas *gufihttara* (pl. *gufihttarak*) is the equivalent in the Karasjok dialect, but the two are now conflated and most often used interchangeably. Somby does not use the word *ulda*, referring to the girls as “magic girls” (*ganeš-nieidat* in Sámi and *gani-jentene* in Norwegian), but the plot line is a well-documented *ulda* narrative.

13 In the folklore record, the effect of drawing blood is variously to make the *ulda* human, make her visible, or make her no longer able to be in her own group out of shame and contamination.

14 Included in this analysis are: no. 14: “Goveiter-Pige” (Ulda Girl) collected in Nesseby, in Friis, 1871 (39–41); and three versions from Qvigstad’s *Lappiske eventyr og sagn*, vol. 2., no. 117, “Giftermål med en underjordisk pike” (Marriage to a Girl from the Underground Folk): 1. Collected from Elen Ucce in 1926 in Kautokeino; 2. Collected from Erik Mikkelsen from Tana in 1893; and 3. Collected in Balsfjord in 1890. Ucce’s and Mikkelsen’s stories in particular, coming from areas close to where Somby was raised and lives, and collected from members of the generation of Somby’s parents, suggest not only that this story was in circulation, but that also Somby accessed Qvigstad’s collection, as some of the wording in Somby replicates that in Qvigstad.

15 Sources include Bäckman; Lundmark; Westman.

16 Fjellner was highly influenced by the ethos of the times and was inspired by other masculinist and nationalist quests to “discover” national epics and create a national mythology, an origin story, almost all of which pervert the female generative principle.

17 Switching the gender of the sun to male also displaces the female principle “demoting” her to the status of “Mother Earth” a concept not prevalent in Sámi tradition but very popular in the hegemonic humanistic universalism that has typified the discourse of Western Humanities.