

Children of Nature in an Untouched Wilderness: Jens Andreas Friis's *Lajla* (1881) and the European Imagination of the Sámi and the Cap of the North

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Introduction

The regions of Norway, Sweden, and Finland located above the Arctic Circle—today collectively known as *Nordkalotten*, *Pohjoiskalotti* or ‘Cap of the North’—stand out in the geocultural imagination of nineteenth-century Europe for at least two reasons. First, the diverse landscape of majestic fjords, alpine peaks, and unending mountain plateaus—illuminated seasonally by either the midnight sun or the northern lights—was considered one of the continent’s last true wildernesses.¹ Second, this rough and pristine natural landscape offered another unicum in that it was, and still is, home to the reindeer-herding Sámi, Western Europe’s last nomadic people. The very nature of the reindeer-herding economy, which requires the unobstructed crossing of state borders, along with the presence of a region-spanning Sámi culture, contributes greatly to typifying the region as inherently transnational. Contemporary accounts, be they fictional or non-fictional, of what in the English language is popularly called ‘Lapland’, generally stereotyped the local population as ‘happy savages’ and portrayed the region as a kind of fairy-tale land that, besides its awe-inspiring natural splendour, offered the (male) traveller plenty of opportunity for wholesome adventures in unspoiled surroundings, far from the hustle and bustle of modern life.²

A key text in understanding the dissemination of such images in a transnational European context is Jens Andreas Friis’s (1821–96) popular novel *Lajla* from 1881, which was initially published under the title *Sketches from Finnmark* (*Fra Finnmarken. Skildringer*).³ The romantic story of a Norwegian girl growing up in a Sámi family and finding love with a Norwegian merchant found a large international audience. The original Norwegian version has appeared in fifteen editions and, over the course of the 1880s and 1890s, was translated into Swedish, German, English, Dutch, Finnish, and

1 Peter Fjågesund and Ruth A. Symes, *The Northern Utopia: British Perceptions of Norway in the Nineteenth Century* (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2003), 335–45.

2 Fjågesund and Symes, *The Northern Utopia*, 196–207.

3 Finnmark is the name of Norway’s northernmost county.

Russian.⁴ In Norway, individual chapters were regularly included in reading curricula for primary and secondary schools, thus forming a primary source of knowledge about Sámi culture for generations of Norwegians.⁵ The text's canonicity was cemented further through its adaptation into an opera (1908) and no less than three films, of which George Schnéevoigt's (1893–1961) silent movie from 1929 was particularly popular. A drastically adjusted sound version by the same Danish director, but featuring a different cast of actors, came out in 1937. A final Swedish production followed in 1958. All three films were distributed internationally. Last but not least, the procreativity of Friis's novel shaded over into the tourism market: postcards with a picture of a woman in traditional Sámi dress habitually had the name 'Lajla' as a caption.⁶ Indeed, the very name Lajla (not of Sámi provenance, it should be noted) became a widely popular first name in Norway after the novel's first publication.⁷ Owing to its incredible popularity, Hans Lindkjølen in 1983 likened *Lajla* to *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, describing its titular heroine as "perhaps the most important ambassador for the Sámi people in the world."⁸ Already in 1948, the literary historian Thor Frette had claimed that the fact that the average European knew of the existence of the Sámi at all was thanks to the popularity of *Lajla* alone.⁹

More recent studies have taken a more critical–postcolonial–approach, however. Taking Homi Bhabha's concept of ambivalence as a starting point, both Anne-Kari Skarðhamar and Cato Christensen have pointed out that in both book and films there is fundamental tension between admiration and fascination on the one hand, and an ethnically biased attitude on the other, which ascribes an inferior position to the Sámi vis-à-vis the Norwegian majority.¹⁰ There is a bitter irony here in that Friis had intended his novel

4 Owing to the large number of translations and its rich afterlife, *Lajla* stands out from a small wave of novels dealing with the Sámi appearing around the same time, most notably Laura Kieler's (1849–1932) *André from Kautokeino* (1879, translated into Swedish and Finnish) and Magdalene Thoresen's (1819–1903) *Pictures from the Land of the Midnight Sun* (1884–86). Several novels by the Sámi author Matti Aikio (1872–1929) were translated into different European languages at the start of the twentieth century.

5 Hans Lindkjølen, *J.A. Friis og samene* (Trondheim: Sámi varas, 1983), 70–71.

6 Sigrid Lien, "Assimilating the Wild and the Primitive: Lajla and other Sámi Heroines in Norwegian Fin-de-siècle Photography," *Openarts* 3 (2007): 208–24.

7 Troy Allan Storfjell, "Colonial Palimpsest: Tracing Inscriptions of Sápmi and the Sámi" (PhD diss., University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2001), 216.

8 Lindkjølen, *J.A. Friis og samene*, 68. Orig.: "[...] kanskje den viktigste ambassadør for samene i den store verden." The translations in this chapter are my own, unless indicated otherwise.

9 Quoted in Storfjell, "Colonial Palimpsest," 215–16.

10 Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994); Cato Christensen, "'Overtroen er stor blant viddenes folk': Om religion og koloniale relasjoner i samisk filmhistorie,"

as a critique of the Norwegian government's unrelenting assimilation policies directed at the Sámi.¹¹ At the end of the day, however, *Lajla* did little else than perpetuate romanticised and even derogatory stereotypes, not least through its multiple remediations, which all lacked the critical overtones of the original. As Christensen argues, contrary to Friis's intentions, *Lajla* actually contributed to harnessing the state's 'Norwegianisation' policies.¹² Furthermore, the fact that Friis, himself a 'southerner', was the founder and first professor of 'Lappology' in Norway, and indeed the world, and had a long list of scholarly publications to his name, granted exceptional authority to the stereotypes circulated throughout his fictional works.

Nonetheless, others have taken a more balanced view of Friis's work. While acknowledging the discriminatory aspects at play, Annegret Heitmann has directed attention to different notions of mobility in both the novel and the silent film, which she interprets as negating boundaries between different ethnic groups.¹³ Sigrid Lien employs a feminist reading of the visual representations of Lajla, seeing her as a role model for Norwegian middle-class women who paired notions of feminine beauty and sensuality with intelligence, refinement, activity, and sportiness.¹⁴ Lars Ivar Hansen and Einar Niemi, finally, paint a tragic picture of Lajla's spiritual father, who indeed had good intentions and an indispensable impact on the professionalisation of Sámi studies, but who was unable to truly challenge the discriminatory categories dictating the ethnographic sciences in his day.¹⁵

Admittedly, this chapter will regrettably further contribute to this interpretation of the novel as a failed political intervention. Through an imagological analysis of *Lajla* and its reception in both Norway and Germany, Great Britain, Denmark, Sweden, and the Netherlands, it will be argued that, contrary to Frette's and Lindkjølen's claims, the novel taught its foreign readers little new about the Far North and its indigenous population, while it did not change popular perceptions of the Sámi in Norway either. The fact that the novel (and indeed its many remediations) met with general

Tidsskrift for religion og kultur 2, no. 1 (2012): 5–26; Anne Kari Skarðhamar, "Changes in Film Representation of Sami Culture and Identity," *Nordlit* 23, no. 1 (2008): 293–303.

11 Annegret Heitmann, "Zwischen zwei Welten: Aspekte der Mobilität in J.A. Friis' and G. Schnéevoigt's *Lajla*," *Journal of Northern Studies* 8, no. 2 (2014): 73; Lindkjølen, J.A. Friis og *samene*, 30.

12 Christensen, "Overtroen er stor," 13.

13 Heitmann, "Zwischen zwei Welten," 71–87.

14 Lien, "Assimilating the Wild and Primitive," 221.

15 Lars Ivar Hansen and Einar Niemi, "Samisk forskning ved et tidsskifte: Jens Andreas Friis og lappologien – vitenskap og politikk," in *Vitenskap, teknologi og samfunn: en innføring i vitenskapens teori og praksis*, ed. Eli Seglen (Oslo: Cappelen Akademisk Forlag, 2008), 350–377.

acclaim and found a well-willing international audience is exactly because it resonated with images of the Sámi already widely extant in a European middle-class culture characterised by a growing interest in ‘exotic’ peoples. Romantic imagery of the Sámi could, for instance, with irregular intervals, be found on the pages of the *Illustrated London News*.¹⁶ At the same time, *Lajla*’s more critical aspects were all but ignored, and sometimes even actively removed. Comparing the representation of the Sámi and their transnational homeland in this seminal novel with the images already circulating in a number of European countries will go a long way to showcase the viscosity and selectivity characteristic of ethnotypes: the iconoclastic potential of a single text, however popular, in this case stranded on the affective power of the intertextual tradition as well as Social-Darwinist ideas about human evolution typical of European culture in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.¹⁷

***Lajla*: Critiquing Assimilation and Confirming Stereotypes**

Lajla is not so much a novel as a collection of novellas, or indeed ‘sketches from Finnmark’, some of which had earlier been published in the daily *Morgenbladet*. In his foreword, Friis writes that he had received such positive feedback on these episodes that he decided to piece them together, add a couple of new ones, and tie everything together through an overarching plot line that concentrates on the triple rescue of a Norwegian girl by the rich reindeer herdsman Laagje. The first time the girl needs saving, she is lost by her parents while on the run from a menacing pack of wolves. The childless Laagje finds the baby child in her basket, decides to raise her as his own daughter and names her *Lajla*. He, however, returns her when he finds out who her real parents are. Not long after, *Lajla*’s parents die from plague, and Laagje and his wife take her in again. *Lajla* grows up, unaware of her roots and convinced that she is a ‘Finn girl’ (the Sámi were, in Norwegian, generally called ‘Finns’ at the time). She is destined to marry her adoptive half-brother Mellet, but she feels more attracted to the Norwegian merchant Anders Lind. After some trials and tribulations, *Lajla*’s true identity is revealed (including the fact that Lind is her full cousin), and she and

16 Iver Tangen Stensrud, “‘Europe is becoming dreadfully used up’: Travelling Images of Norway in the Illustrated Press,” in *Nordic Travels*, ed. Janicke S. Kaasa, Jakob Lothe and Ulrike Spring (Oslo: Novus Press, 2021), 125–28.

17 On the analytical trinity of text-intertext-context in the critical study of ethnotypes, see Joep Leerssen, “Imagology: History and Method,” in *Imagology: The Cultural Construction and Literary Representation of National Characters. A Critical Survey*, ed. Manfred Beller and Joep Leerssen (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2007), 27–29.

Lind are wedded in a scene that can be regarded as Friis's imagination of the ideal Northern-Norwegian society, with the region's three ethnic groups harmoniously assembled in the local church: Norwegians, Sámi, and Kven, the descendants of Finnish immigrants from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Lajla needs Laagje's helping hand a third and last time, when she and her husband are forced to move to Bergen after his business has gone bankrupt as a consequence of the harsh economic policies of the 'south' directed at northern Norway. A financial injection from Laagje provides Lajla and Lind with the means to leave the unhealthy environment of the big city and return to the invigorating nature of Finnmark.

The oppositions between urban and rural, culture and nature, south and north, centre and periphery reflect the criticism Friis wove into his novel, pinpointing the ignorance and even the cruelty of the authorities concerning the northernmost parts of the country. Although the story is set in the late eighteenth century, it becomes clear that Friis takes issue with the assimilation policies which the Norwegian government had set in motion from about 1852, and which had as their goal the creation of a culturally and ethnically homogeneous Norwegian population; counteracting the threat of Russian expansion in the north provided an ulterior motive for the stringent minority policies.¹⁸ In explicit passages, Friis objects to the ousting of the Sámi languages in favour of the forced use of Norwegian in education, administration, and religious life, as well as to the dispossession of Sámi lands and the closing of state borders. It is from the outset made clear that the Norwegians are basically strangers in the Cap of the North, which is emphatically imagined as a transnational space, where the indigenous people should be free to travel from the Russian coast on the one end to the Norwegian on the other: "Unlike today, crossing the border was not prohibited in those days [...] This was beneficial to all parts and did not disadvantage anyone."¹⁹

The boundaries between different ethnic groups are equally porous in the novel, as Heitmann argues.²⁰ Although Lajla marries another Norwegian in the end, other possibilities are not dismissed as implausible or undesired. Lajla does not reject Mellet because of his ethnicity; she is sim-

18 Knut Einar Eriksen and Einar Niemi, *Den finske fare: sikkerhetsproblemer og minoritetspolitikk i nord 1860-1940* (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1981), 26-86.

19 Jens Andreas Friis, *Fra Finnmarken: Skildringer. (Lajla)* (Kristiania: Alb. Cammermeyer, 1881), 40. Orig.: "Der var nemlig ikke dengang, saaledessom nu, noget Forbud mod at flytte over Grænsen [...] Dette var til Gavn for begge Parter og ikke til Skade for Nogen."

20 Heitmann, "Zwischen zwei Welten," 78-81.

ply more attracted to Lind. Similarly, Lind upholds that he would have married Lajla even if she had been Sámi.²¹ What is more, the Norwegians are far from always in a dominant position in the novel. Most notably, the affluent Laagje has a higher economic position than Lajla and Lind, who are, in the end, saved by his material wealth and kind-heartedness. It is also suggested several times that Norwegians might be well-advised to take over certain aspects of the Sámi lifestyle in order to thrive in the harsh Arctic environment. To illustrate, all the way at the beginning of the novel, Lajla's mother is advised to breastfeed her child 'the Sámi way' in order to withstand the biting winter air. Indeed, at the time of writing his novel, Friis propounded a 'three-race-model', which envisioned the harmonious mixture of Norwegians, Sámi, and Kven.²²

Yet Friis's critique of the Norwegianisation process is at the same time highly ambiguous. While on the one hand in his scholarly publications he repeatedly objected to the widespread belief that the Sámi were a 'dying race', his work, both scholarly and fictional, was on the other hand also meant to record Sámi culture for posterity, as he could also go along with a deterministic vision on human evolution that foresaw the disappearance of cultures that were deemed weaker than others.²³ These colliding perspectives can perhaps be reconciled through the observation that Friis had nothing against Norwegianisation as a natural process, but that he objected to all forms of "coercion or strong measures" that, according to him, would lead to "nothing but dissatisfaction and ignorance."²⁴ It was exactly therefore that making the Bible unavailable in the local tongue was so harmful, as becomes clear in the novel: this policy formed a serious hindrance for the spreading of God's word, the primary step in raising the Sámi to Norwegian standards, before "the cultural and the linguistic, if possible, would follow after."²⁵

A similar ambivalence, to return to Bhabha's concept, can be detected in Friis's portrayal of his Sámi characters. On the one hand, the novel has

21 Friis, *Lajla*, 168, 194.

22 Hansen and Niemi, "Samisk forskning ved et tidsskifte," 367–68.

23 He expressed this critique for example in his *En Sommer i Finmarken, Russisk Lapland og Nordkarelen: skildringer af Land og Folk* (Christiania: Cammermeyers, 1871). See also, Hansen and Niemi, "Samisk forskning ved et tidsskifte," 372–373; Kristin Kuutma "A Sámi Ethnography and a Seto Epic: Two Collaborative Representations in Their Historical Contexts" (PhD diss., University of Washington, 2002), 92–93.

24 Friis, *Lajla*, 114. Orig.: "[...] uden Tvang eller voldsomme Forholdsregler, der kun havde avlet Misnøje og Uvidenhed."

25 Friis, *Lajla*, 114. Orig.: "[...] og saa overlade det folkelige eller sproglige til, om muligt, at følge efter."

a strong didactic approach through its long ethnographic and historiographic passages that are meant to raise awareness among a Norwegian readership of the Sámi and their culture, customs, crafts, beliefs, myths, and language, which are described, mostly, in a documentary or even appreciative manner. The reindeer-Sámi lifestyle in closeness to nature is presented as wholesome and invigorating, and as something from which the Norwegians could learn a thing or two: "Nomadic life has its attractions, not only for the Mountain-Finn, but I think for all of Adam's children, on whichever step of the evolutionary ladder they may find themselves."²⁶ Here, Friis connects back to the other half of his authorship: the promotion of outdoor activities (hiking as 'nomadic life') as a popular pastime, in which he can also be considered a pioneer and also reached an international audience through the translation of his *Sporting Life on the Norwegian Fjelds* (1876) into English.

On the other hand, however, that referencing of the "evolutional ladder" already points to the fact that the novel regurgitates prevailing stereotypes of the Sámi that pin them down as primitive and inferior. At best, this means that they comply with the cliché of the 'noble savages' who, in their naivety, have remained uncorrupted by modern society and have maintained their authentic national character (Friis saw the Sámi as forming their own nation). At its worst, the Sámi are likened to animals—in other words, degraded to the lowest rung on evolution's ladder. These negative stereotypes concentrate in the figure of Jaampa, Laagje's most seasoned servant and next to Lajla the most prominent character in the novel. He is described as being "of true Sámi blood and true Sámi appearance," meaning that "he didn't look good, not even in the eyes of Sámi girls."²⁷ When excited, "he was no better than a wild animal."²⁸ Later on, he is called "half a wolf himself," "a dog," and he screams and cheers "as a complete savage."²⁹ He is furthermore illiterate, a heathen, and an alcoholic, who "lives two lives: a drunken one, and a sober one."³⁰ But he also has his redeeming qualities, the reader is assured, and he is in highly paternalistic terms described as a diamond in the rough who softens up through his taking care of the infant Lajla.

26 Friis, *Lajla*, 56. Orig.: "Nomadelivet har sine Tillokkelser ikke blot for Fjeldfinnen, men jeg tror for alle Adams Børn, hvilketsomhelst Kulturtrin de end indtage."

27 Friis, *Lajla*, 15. Orig.: "Jaampa var af ægte finsk Blod og ægte finsk Udseende. [...] Han saa ikke godt ud, ikke engang i en Finnepiges Øine."

28 Friis, *Lajla*, 17. Orig.: "[...] da var han ikke bedre end et vildt Dyr."

29 Friis, *Lajla*, 17, 181, 139. Orig.: "Halvt en Ulv selv [...] Hunden [...] hujende og skrigende som en fuldstændig Vild."

30 Friis, *Lajla*, 138. Orig.: "[...] førte saaledes en Slags dobbelt Tilværelse, en drukken og en ædru."

Lajla indeed serves as the contrast agent that brings out the stereotyping of the Sámi characters. Although she has internalised these stereotypes herself (“I have no talents, I understand nothing, I know nothing, I’m just a simple Sámi girl from the mountains”), it is repeatedly made clear that she stands out from her environment because of her exceptional beauty and intelligence: “Those who understood something about the particularities between the different races of people, easily would detect that there was something finer, more noble or in the whole essentially different from an ordinary Sámi child.”³¹ Yet she is equally often, like her Sámi fellows, described as a ‘child of nature’, who combines the best qualities of both groups. Lajla as such answers to a recognisable trope from colonial literature—Natty Bumppo from Fenimore Cooper’s *Last of the Mohicans* comes to mind—of the westerner growing up ‘among the natives’, often functioning as a double-edged sword used to both chastise western decadence and reaffirm the superiority of western civilisation at the same time.

One last, and very important, aspect of the literary representation of the Sámi, both in *Lajla* and more generally, is that it is concentrated almost entirely on the most exotic group: the nomadic reindeer herdsman, who in fact formed just a small minority of the Sámi population. Members of other Sámi groups only feature as nameless extras in the story; the same goes for the Kven, despite a longer passage recounting their migration to Norway. As we shall see, the popular imagination of the Sámi in Europe likewise exclusively focused on the Sámi involved in (semi-)nomadic reindeer-herding.

***Lajla*’s Reception and Remediation at Home and Abroad**

Lajla received exclusively positive reviews, both at home and in the many countries where it was published in translation. The reasons for this general praise were also the same everywhere. First of all, the novel’s subject was deemed interesting in its own right, as the sketches transposed the reader to a distant, exotic, little-known place in the company of “one of the most interesting races in Europe,” as the British periodical *The Academy* would have it.³² Even Norwegian newspapers (most of which, of course, appeared in the more populous south of the country) highlighted the remoteness of

31 Friis, *Lajla*, 96. Translation by Lien is: “Assimilating the wild and primitive,” 216. Orig.: “den, der forstod sig noget paa forskellige Folkeraasers Ansigtssdannelse, let vilde se, at der var noget usædvanligt ved dette Barn, noget finere, noblere eller i det Hele grundforskjelligt fra et almindeligt Finnebarn.”

32 *The Academy*, 1 Dec. 1883.

Finnmark, “where life is completely different from what we are used to.”³³ The novel was furthermore highly appreciated for its successful merging of different genres—part travelogue, part ethnography, part romance—which nonetheless formed a coherent whole that managed to both entertain and educate. Almost all reviews underscored Friis’s authority on the subject to assert the truthfulness of his representations. Finally, Friis was generally commended for the simpleness of his style, which, according to one Swedish newspaper, was “very well-suited for the depiction of the naivety one always finds among primitive peoples.”³⁴ Because of this, as well as its “chaste”, “correct” storyline, the novel was deemed especially suitable for children and Christian readerships, something which was explicitly mentioned by the Dutch, English, and German press.³⁵

The simplicity of style and story, in combination with the idyllic, romantic setting, were furthermore taken as a welcome escape from the recent turn towards realism and naturalism in European literature. As such, *Lajla* traded on the success of naturalistic Scandinavian authors like Ibsen, Bjørnson, Strindberg, and Bang in a paradoxical way. On the one hand, *Lajla* had certainly shown up on the radar of foreign publishers owing to the breakthrough of Scandinavian literature on the global stage. On the other hand, as a Hamar newspaper put it, “these sketches, easy and exciting, and morally pure as they are, distinguish themselves in a particularly pleasant way from the more than questionable things our so-called great writers have offered us recently.”³⁶ The German *Konservative Monatsschrift für Politik, Literatur und Kunst* drew a similar conclusion: “Here there are no far-fetched ‘psychological problems’, no ethical or social conflicts that need to be overcome.”³⁷ At the same time, the customary emphasis on the exoticness of the location betrays that *Lajla* appealed to the general popularity of local colour

33 *Kongsberg Adresse*, 15 Dec. 1881. Orig.: “[...] hvor Livet vistnok former sig helt anderledes end det, vi er vant til.”

34 *Nya Dagligt Allehanda*, 19 Dec. 1882. Orig.: “[...] lämpar sig särdeles väl för at skildra den naivitet, som man alltid återfinner hos ett naturfolk.”

35 See for instance, Anonymous, “Kroniek,” in *Nederland: Verzameling van oorspronkelijke bijdragen door Nederlandsche letterkundigen*, ed. Jan ten Brink, C.E. Broms, H.J. Schimmel, and F. Smit Kleine (Amsterdam: J.C. Loman Jr., 1885), 130–31; Anonymous, “Litterarische Neuigkeiten,” *Das Magazin für die Litteratur des In- und Auslandes* 55, no. 27 (1886), 430; Anonymous, “Notices,” *The Literary Churchman* 15, no. 6 (1884), 121.

36 *Hamar Stiftstidende*, 23 Dec. 1881. Orig.: “Kvik og spændende, samt sædelig ren, som denne Skildringsrække er, adskilder den sig paa en særdeles behagelig Maade fra hine mere end betænkelige Sager, som vore saakaldte store Forfattere i den senere Tid byder os.”

37 *Konservative Monatsschrift für Politik, Literatur und Kunst*, July 1887. Orig.: “Da sind keine mühselig zusammenphantasierte ‘psychologische Probleme’, keine ethische oder gesellschaftliche Kollisionen zu überwinden.”

fiction of the time as well, forming an additional explanation for the book's exceptional reception.³⁸

This judgment is somewhat perplexing, considering the sentence that came just before it: "It is moving to read about the encounters between the Finns, who tenaciously hold on to their language and customs, and the Norwegians."³⁹ The majority of the reviews indeed take note of the problematic nature of these 'encounters,' but do not seem to consider Friis's depiction of them a form of social criticism. Especially the Norwegian and Swedish papers—whose readers must have been most aware of the current state of affairs—take the historical setting of the novel as a kind of 'get-out-of-jail-free-card' for the present-day Norwegians (and Swedes). *Stockholms Dagblad*, for instance, emphatically described the linguistic repression as a thing of the past.⁴⁰ Similarly, the Norwegian *Kongsberg Adresse* writes that "the Lapps used to suffer a great deal of inconvenience" and that "a satisfactory solution has yet to be found, but from both the Norwegian and the Swedish side one works hard to find one and there is good hope that this goal will be reached soon."⁴¹ Such remarks sit uneasily with the actual situation in Norway at the time, which, for instance, saw the implementation of ever stricter regulations regarding the use of Sámi in education.⁴²

Alternatively, "the history of the Finns and their struggle for national liberty," as the *Pall Mall Gazette* phrased it, was understood within a Social-Darwinist framework, undercutting the critical potential of the novel as it went along with the idea that Sámi culture was destined to disappear no matter what.⁴³ This is most obvious in the short review in *The Nation*, which speaks of the Sámi's "meek acceptance of their position as an inferior race, and their pathetic opposition, notwithstanding, to a merging of their language in that of the 'haughty Daro'."⁴⁴ The notion of inferiority is a recurring trope throughout. The Norwegian *Akershus Amtstidende* is surprised to encounter

38 This point is most bluntly made in the review in *Nederland*, which simply states that there is "[a] lot of local colour in this book." Anonymous, "Kroniek," 130. Orig.: "Er is veel locale kleur in dit boek."

39 *Konservative Monatsschrift für Politik, Literatur und Kunst*, July 1887. Orig.: "Es is ergreifend zu lesen, wie diese an Sprache und Sitte zähe festhaltenden Finnen den Norwegern gegenüber getreten sind."

40 *Stockholms Dagblad*, 24 May 1882.

41 *Kongsberg Adresse*, 15 Dec. 1881. Orig.: "[...] Lapperne vistnok i ældre Tid har lidt megen Overlast. [...] Nogen tilfredsstillende Løsning af dette Forhold er endnu ikke naaet, men der arbeides naa fra baade norsk og svensk Side at hidføre en saadan, og man har godt Haab om at naa Maalet."

42 Hansen and Niemi, "Samisk forskning ved et tidsskifte," 363–64.

43 *Pall Mall Gazette*, 15 Aug. 1888.

44 *The Nation*, 9 Aug. 1888.

“a good heart, even among a people we normally consider as inferior.”⁴⁵ *The Academy* speaks of “those good-natured, harmless little beings” and a “complication of adverse circumstances that might well have cowed a stronger and more enlightened race.”⁴⁶ Only the reviewer in the Danish *Randers Amtssavis*, while still coming from this paternalistic position, expressed a ringing condemnation of modern life with its “many bad things,” and accordingly wished that the local population “may never reach the standard of modern culture.”⁴⁷

What prevails above all in the reception of *Lajla* is a romantic fascination for the local colour of the high north, represented by the magnificent wild and primitive landscape (though called “shrill and dreary” by the *Pall Mall Gazette*) and the figure of the nomadic reindeer herder, who, as is revealed by the quote from *The Academy*, is stereotyped as harmless, innocent, naïve, simple, wild, primitive, inferior, and kind-hearted—in short, a ‘child of nature’. Several reviews present Jaampa as the archetypal Sámi and, in fact, the most interesting character of the book. One Swedish newspaper even posits his name as a better, more representative title, had it not “sounded so unpleasant to the common ear.”⁴⁸ The Danish *Fredericia Dagblad*, in typical fashion, describes Jaampa’s character as “wild and pugnacious,” while remarking that he does not “differentiate between man or animal when encountering a stranger,” thus ascribing animal-like qualities to his figure, and the Sámi as a people as a whole, as well.⁴⁹

The novel further contributed to the spreading of romantic imagery of the Sámi through the inclusion of illustrations. The original Scandinavian publications had just one: a portrait of Jaampa in traditional dress, betraying the contemporary obsession with human physiognomy already reflected in Friis’s description of Jaampa. The review in the *Nya Dagligt Allehanda* describes his face as “rugged, weathered,” which inadvertently, through its invocation of the third line of the *de facto* Norwegian national anthem “Ja, vi elsker dette landet” (“Yes, we love this country”), tied Jaampa directly to the Norwegian landscape.⁵⁰ The English and American editions

45 *Akershus Amtstidende*, 20 Dec. 1890. Orig.: “[...] ogsaa blandt de Folk, som vi gjerne vil betragte som staaende udenfor Civilisationen, ogsaa findes Hjertelag.”

46 *The Academy*, 1 Dec. 1883.

47 *Randers Amtssavis og Adresse Contours Efterretninger*, 4 Jan. 1882. Orig.: “[...] mange slette Ting [...] forhaabentlig heller aldrig kommer paa Høiden af Nutidskulturen.”

48 *Nya Dagligt Allehanda*, 19 Dec. 1882. “[...] ej klingat alltför stötande för vanliga öron.”

49 *Fredericia Dagblad*, 3 Oct. 1882. “[...] vildt og stridigt [...] og overfor Fremmede gjør han liden eller ingen Forskjel paa, om det er Dyr eller Mennesker, som der staar for ham.”

50 *Nya Dagligt Allehanda*, 19 Dec. 1882. “fårade, väderbitna.”

were more richly illustrated, with one image for each of the twelve chapters. These were made by the Norwegian painter Wilhelm Peters, who was well-versed in ethnographic pictures of the Sámi, and usually showed either the most dramatic moment of the chapter in question or Sámi and their reindeer in the imposing Arctic landscape.

All in all, this swift overview of *Lajla*'s reception shows that the novel helped consolidate ambivalent notions of the Sámi as exotic, fascinating, and authentic on the one hand, and culturally inferior and primitive on the other. The critical aspects of the novel were either ignored or rationalised away. In some cases, 'unwanted' information had been removed beforehand. The German translation omitted the passage in which Laagje saves Lajla and Lind from financial ruin.⁵¹ Later remediations of Friis's novel steadily move away from the relatively complex representation of the relation between Norwegian and Sámi in the original. Ole Olsen's opera from 1908 promotes Norwegianisation rather than challenging it. The plot shows how Lajla gradually Norwegianises over the course of the play, culminating in the revelation of her Norwegian birth; this development is reflected in the musical accompaniment, which to an increasing degree makes use of motifs from Norwegian folk music.⁵² Similarly, Heitmann has demonstrated how the silent movie from 1929 still maintains a fluent vision on identity as it highlights how Lajla is beneficially formed by her environment; by contrast, the remake from 1937 primarily focuses on the strangeness of the Sámi, whose wild and erratic behaviour contrasts with the rationality of the Norwegian characters.⁵³

Tourism and Human Zoos: The Mobility of Sámi Images

The Sámi and the Cap of the North fascinated readers because they were *little* known, not because they were completely *unknown*. By the 1880s, the advent of modern tourism had also done much to unlock this remote part of the continent in the popular imagination. Two reviews, in fact, made this link with tourism explicit. The *Berliner Tageblatt* welcomed the German translation of *Lajla* because of the recent enthusiasm for Scandinavia as a tourist destination: people, therefore, naturally wanted to read more about the place.⁵⁴ *The Academy* even appealed to the familiarity of the Sámi: "Every traveller in the northern parts of Norway must have seen something of the

⁵¹ Heitmann, "Zwischen zwei Welten," 80.

⁵² Egil A. Gundersen, *Ole Olsen: Mennesket, musikken, majoren* (Skien: Eget Forlag, 1997), 108–9.

⁵³ Heitmann, "Zwischen zwei Welten," 82–85.

⁵⁴ *Berliner Tageblatt und Handels-Zeitung, Abend-Ausgabe*, 10 Dec. 1886.

Mountain Lapps.”⁵⁵ Of course, the number of readers that would indeed be struck by recognition was admittedly low, as travelling was still a privilege of the happy few, and the Cap of the North hardly topped the list of favourite destinations.⁵⁶

Yet, helped by the opening of new steamship connections, tourism northward seriously picked up in the second half of the nineteenth century, with Norway as the more popular destination. The country and its splendid nature were regarded as the ideal opposite of the more developed and urbanised parts of the continent, as well as other typical holiday destinations that were deemed “dreadfully used-up.”⁵⁷ Norway, by contrast, was still uncovered ground and, in the words of H. Arnold Barton, “fondly envisioned as the land of simple living and primitive innocence.”⁵⁸ Mainly Brits and Germans, but many other nationalities as well, flocked to the north to enjoy the dramatic landscapes and the picturesque countryside, which in addition offered ample opportunity for such activities as hunting and fishing. Popular notions about human evolution form part of the picture here as well: many Brits and Germans, again, as well as Americans, regarded a visit to Norway as a visit to the land of their ancestors.⁵⁹

Although most tourists would stay south of Trondheim, a trip further north was not uncommon. Guidebooks usually supplied their readers with plenty of information on these parts of the country as well. Especially *Murray's Handbook for Travellers in Denmark, Norway and Sweden* (first edition published in 1871) contained a thorough description of the Sámi and their culture, not least through long excerpts from an earlier travel account from 1841 by one John Milford. The reader of *Lajla* encounters a familiar imagery: “the scenery [...] is exceedingly wild and grand”, and the Sámi are “honest, simple, and hospitable people.”⁶⁰ As in later travel accounts, it is highlighted that despite their good nature, “the Lapps are a despised race amongst the Norwegians, whose feeling towards them is very much akin

⁵⁵ *The Academy*, 1 Dec. 1883.

⁵⁶ Jakob Lothe, Jannicke S. Kaasa and Ulrike Spring, “Introduction,” in *Nordic Travels*, ed. Janicke S. Kaasa, Jakob Lothe, and Ulrike Spring (Oslo: Novus Press, 2021), 11–12.

⁵⁷ Stensrud, “Europe is becoming dreadfully used up,” 121.

⁵⁸ H. Arnold Barton, “The Discovery of Norway Abroad, 1760-1905,” *Scandinavian Studies* 79, no. 1 (2007): 30.

⁵⁹ The English-speaking tourist was serviced by the travel agency which Thomas Bennett had opened in Christiania (presently Oslo) in 1851. Next to transportation, equipment and good advice, the agency sold a rich selection of travel literature, as well as the English translation of *Lajla*.

⁶⁰ *Murray's Handbook for Travellers in Denmark, Norway, and Sweden* (London: William Cowes and Sons, 1871), 130, 132.

to that of the people of the United States to persons of colour.”⁶¹ The guidebooks are usually more benevolently inclined towards the Sámi, but in all their admiration still generally strike a condescending tone, as this statement by Milford can testify: “These Lapps, although ‘dwellers in tents’ all the year round, are in many respects far from uncivilised.”⁶²

The armchair tourist, it should be clear by now, could thus likewise transport themselves to these faraway tracts and get a mediated experience of Sámi life: in Britain alone, close to two hundred travel accounts were published over the course of the nineteenth century; the German book market did not lag far behind.⁶³ Arguably, the most popular of these was *The Land of the Midnight Sun* (1882) by the French-American anthropologist Paul Belloni du Chaillu (1831–1903), which would have had an impact on the popular perception of the Sámi that was at the very least on a par with that of *Lajla*. Du Chaillu provides a very detailed insight into the Sámi and their history, customs, culture, and occupations that has much in common with that of Friis, owing to the fact that Du Chaillu cites Friis’s academic work as an important source. Like Friis (and Milford) before him, he stresses that the Norwegian prejudices against the Sámi (“murderers and thieves”) are unfounded. His account also stands out by highlighting that reindeer herding is just one means of livelihood available to the Sámi, and that the nomadic Sámi actually form a minority. And yet, more narrative passages in this two-volume work focus strongly on reindeer and the “Mountain Lapps,” and especially his descriptions of the Sámi physique betray a tendency for scientific racism (“the old women [...] are certainly among the most hideous specimen of humanity”).⁶⁴ Again agreeing with Friis’s standpoints, interracial marriage is seen by Du Chaillu as something beneficial: “the mixed offspring of the three nationalities [Norwegians, Kven and Sámi] form an excellent race.”⁶⁵

The familiar stereotype of the Sámi reindeer-herding family was disseminated further by the tourist industry. As stressed by the many available guidebooks, a visit to the ‘Lapp encampment’ in Tromsdalen near Tromsø was a staple of every tourist’s visit. This was a highly staged exhibition of authenticity in which the Sámi families themselves played no passive role, as becomes clear from the commendation in *Bennett’s Handbook for Travellers in Norway*:

61 Murray’s *Handbook*, 130.

62 Murray’s *Handbook*, 131.

63 Barton, “The Discovery of Norway Abroad,” 26–27.

64 Paul Belloni Du Chaillu, *The Land of the Midnight Sun: Summer and Winter Journeys Through Sweden, Norway, Lapland and Northern Finland*, vol. 2 (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1882), 93.

65 Du Chaillu, *The Land of the Midnight Sun*, 145.

The Lapps of the Tromsødal [*sic*] are accustomed to tourist visitors and fully alive to the advantages of trafficking with them in their native productions. They expect a fee for bringing the reindeer down to an enclosure near their huts, and for displaying, the driving, and general mode of management of these animals. This performance is perfectly genuine and very interesting.⁶⁶

In this era of burgeoning mass tourism, Sámi culture was rapidly turned into a touristic commodity. The interested tourist could buy Sámi souvenirs—including those picture postcards featuring ‘Lajla’—not only in Tromsø, but indeed throughout the country. Paradoxically, during the exact time that the assimilation policies were intensified, Sámi culture was turned into something closely resembling a national symbol, or at the very least an emblematic feature that tourists expected to encounter when visiting the country. The tourist industry was keen to supply. After 1897, tourists could even spare themselves the expensive and cumbersome trip to the far north when a Sámi encampment was opened in Bjørndalen, close to Bergen. Many hotels, some of them as far south as Lillehammer and the Hardangervidda, even employed Sámi families—complete with tents, reindeer, and traditional dress—in order to attract tourists.⁶⁷

But Europeans interested in the Sámi needed not even travel to Scandinavia, or Finland, or Russia. From the 1870s, the fascination with ‘exotic’ peoples found expression in the increasing popularity of so-called ethnographic expositions, or ‘human zoos’. Responsible for popularising this phenomenon was the German animal trader Carl Hagenbeck (1844–1913), who claimed that his expositions offered something new in comparison to older traditions by showing the natives in a recreation of their ‘natural environment’. The very first such expositions concerned Sámi from the Tromsø area, who agreed to a paid position at Hagenbeck’s zoo in Hamburg. The ‘show’ these Sámi employees performed included that they broke up their tents, packed them on their reindeer, walked a couple of meters and reassembled them in order to demonstrate their nomadic lifestyle.⁶⁸ Hagenbeck would not limit himself to his own zoo but would also tour the continent with massive success. Ethnographic expositions would soon become a sta-

66 Bennett’s *Handbook for Travellers in Norway* (Christiania: T. Bennett, 1896), 226.

67 Cathrine Baglo, “Sameleire i Tromsø som turistmål, fotmotiv og møteplass,” *Ottar*, no. 306 (2015): 35.

68 Nigel T. Rothfels, “Bring ‘Em Back Alive: Carl Hagenbeck and Exotic Animal and People Trades in Germany, 1848-1914” (PhD diss., Harvard University, 1994), 50–53.

ple of the World Fairs. The Sámi, for instance, gave *acte de présence* at the Fairs of 1872 in Vienna and 1878 and 1889 in Paris. Pairing education with entertainment, the ethnographic expositions served to affirm the superiority of Western society, but the Sámi in this case should not be exclusively understood as passive victims; they often had economic motives to cooperate or had a genuine ambition to spread knowledge about their culture.⁶⁹

Lajla thus appeared on the European book market at the back of a decade in which several Sámi families had toured Europe's main cities in the employment of men like Hagenbeck. This book market, moreover, already contained dozens of titles on the Sámi and their home region. An increasing number of tourists had been to these far-off places and brought back stories, images, and souvenirs. Stereotypes about the Sámi, in short, were already in heavy circulation throughout the continent before the novel came out. *Lajla* accordingly did little to raise awareness or change perceptions. Quite the contrary: the novel's exceptional success can in part be attributed to the fact that it resonated so well with already existing notions. These concentrated on the stereotype of the nomadic reindeer-herder, a noble, tough, and kind-hearted character, who nonetheless was inferior to Western civilisation and whose culture, therefore, was destined to become extinct. The fact that Friis had reproduced this stereotypical character in the figure of Jaampa drowned out the more subversive elements of his novel, such as his portrayal of the complex socio-economic relations in the north, the (misleading) depiction of the Norwegians as strangers in this part of their own country, the desirability of interracial marriage that had the potential to negate the otherness of the Sámi, and his criticism of language suppression.

As Einar Niemi has shown, Friis's fictional and academic output would mainly serve to strengthen the state's stringent minority politics in the end. Case in point are the two sequels Friis wrote to *Lajla*: *The Monastery in Petchenga. Sketches from Russian Lapland* (1884) and *Sketches from Finnmark* (1891), both of which were also translated into English and German. In these books Friis has exchanged his three-race-model for a binary one in which the Kven, in Niemi's words, have been 'sacrificed' in order to 'save' the reindeer or mountain-Sámi from further encroachment by the authorities, while the mountain-Sámi, who answered best to Friis's notion of the 'noble savage', in turn

69 Cathrine Baglo, *På ville veger? Levende utstillinger av samer i Europa og Amerika* (Stamsund: Orkana Akademisk Forlag, 2017), 21–25.

are placed hierarchically above the so-called Sea-Sámi.⁷⁰ The ideal Norwegian society sketched by Friis is a highly segregated one that further romanticises the mountain-Sámi, now firmly set apart from the Norwegians (there is no more talk of mixing and mingling) as well as the Kven and Sea-Sámi, who are stigmatised and repudiated. Through the authority of their author, the *Lajla* sequels would have a harmful impact on both minority politics and the popular perception of minority groups among the majority population. It was only in the 1950s that the Norwegian government started to take serious action against the discrimination against ethnic minorities. A Truth and Reconciliation Committee was appointed by parliament in 2018, which submitted a detailed report on the experiences and consequences of the Norwegianisation policies in June 2023.

Romantic Norway moves to the Arctic

It would take just a few decades before also holiday-Norway, much like the rest of Europe, moved dangerously towards its saturation point. The many travel books wearing down the bookshelves in British and German libraries already point in this direction. Hunting, to mention one other indication, quickly needed to be seriously restricted as many species, wild reindeer among them, were headed for extinction before the smoking guns of mainly British tourists.

This fatigue affected the less-travelled north of the country to a lesser degree. And whereas the romantic image of a country of simple peasants living in harmony with nature clashed with the reality of increasing industrialisation and urbanisation, this image could still be upheld in the northern parts of the country with relative ease. One could very well argue that the romantic image of Norway slowly shifted northwards, while the stereotypes of simplicity and primitivity were projected on the Sámi instead: something that many a Norwegian, keen to be taken seriously as a modern European nation, might have welcomed with enthusiasm. This might also offer a clue as to why Sámi culture was so eagerly deployed and commodified as a touristic unique selling point: it made it possible to still advertise Norway as a country of wholesome pre-modern primitivity, while simultaneously cultivating a confident self-image as a developed nation. The northernmost regions of the country, in other words, accommodated the

70 Einar Niemi, "Vitenskap og politikk: Lappologen Jens Andreas Friis og de etniske minoritetene 1860–1890," in *Veiviser i det mangfoldige nord: utvalgte artikler av Einar Niemi: festskrift*, ed. Fredrik Fagertun (Stamsund: Orkana Forlag, 2014), 203–7.

contemporary ambivalence toward modernity perfectly; the local colour of the pastoral Sámi lifestyle offered a release from the anxieties of modern life, while the great economic opportunities the transnational region had on offer, owing to its abundance of natural resources, promised a bright future for the Norwegian nation.

This study of the transnational reception of *Lajla* has brought this complex interplay between regional and national identities to light. The various reviews almost without exception describe Finnmark, or the Cap of the North, in terms of primitivity, exoticism, wilderness and adventure, terms that previously had been reserved for Norway in its entirety. This transfer of romantic Norway to the Far North occurred under the influence of the external gaze represented by these reviews, as well as travel literature and the tourism industry. In one thing, then, Friis did succeed: Northern-Norway and the Sámi at long last had become part of the national narrative, something in which they had scarcely featured before. Yet, this new role was that of a largely passive internal Other that preserved an alluring and illusive core of what modernised Norway once had been.

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