

# Writing Sámi Memory and Trauma into Swedish History: Linnea Axelsson's *Ædnan. Epos* (2018) and Elin Anna Labba's *Herrarna Satte Oss Hit. Om Tvångsförflyttningar i Sverige* (2020)

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**Abstract:** After Sweden and Norway signed the reindeer grazing convention agreement in 1919, reindeer-herding Sámi families selected by the Swedish authorities were forced to migrate from the Karesuando area in Norway to more southern regions within the reindeer husbandry area in Sweden. These relocations at the beginning of the twentieth century are the source of memory and trauma in both Linnea Axelsson's *Ædnan. Epos* (2018; *Ædnan. An Epic*) and Elin Anna Labba's *Herrarna satte oss hit. Om tvångsförflyttningar i Sverige* (2020; *The Masters Put Us Here. On Forced Relocations in Sweden*). Furthermore, the two works contain paratextual fragments that express the desire to make the silenced past of the Sámi audible in Swedish history. Each text transmits memories and traumas from different genre perspectives: those of poetry and partly autobiographical non-fiction. The texts reveal processes of colonization and oppression within national borders, with scientific racism as an underlying ideology. In this contribution also a methodological issue will be discussed. How should we study texts that deal with writing about trauma and memory of a minority people such as the Sámi? An indigenous methodology, as presented by authors such as Jelena Porsanger in "An Essay about Indigenous Methodology" (2004), should be an important guide, as it concerns a respectful approach to the study of indigenous minority people.

"Urfolks ärvda sår finns nästan aldrig i historieböckerna" [The inherited wounds of indigenous peoples almost never appear in history books] (Labba 2020, 181). This statement serves as a motto for the two works discussed in this article: Linnea Axelsson's epic poem, *Ædnan. Epos* (2018;

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*Ædnan. The Epic*) and Elin Anna Labba's non-fictional work, *Herrarna satte oss hit. Om tvångsförflyttningar i Sverige* (2020; *The Masters Put Us Here. On Forced Relocations in Sweden*),<sup>1</sup> and refers to the position of the Sámi people in Swedish history.

After Sweden and Norway signed the reindeer grazing convention agreement in 1919, reindeer-herding Sámi families selected by the Swedish authorities were forced to migrate from the Karesuando area in Norway to more southern regions within the reindeer husbandry area in Sweden. These relocations at the beginning of the twentieth century are the source of memory and trauma in both *Ædnan* and *Herrarna satte oss hit*. Furthermore, the two works contain paratextual fragments that express the desire to make the silenced past of the Sámi audible in Swedish history. Each text transmits memories and traumas from different genre perspectives: those of poetry and partly autobiographical non-fiction. The texts reveal processes of colonization and oppression within national borders, with scientific racism as an underlying ideology. They teach us that the Sami have experienced the universal fate of indigenous peoples: "Sverige följer här ett mönster som gäller för ett urfolk världen över" [Sweden follows a pattern here that applies to indigenous peoples around the world] (Labba 2020, 181).

*Ædnan* and *Herrarna satte oss hit* can be regarded as twin texts. *Ædnan* tells us, in poetical form and with references to historical events, about the effects of forced relocations: the pressure to give up language, culture and identity and adopt another. *Herrarna satte oss hit* is based on interviews and ego documents such as letters that convey a lot of trauma, fear and pain. The testimonies of forced relocations express trauma and memory and the desire to be included in history: "Sätt den bara i boken, vår historia. Den är sann" [Just put it in the book, our story. It is true] (Labba 2020, 121). In this way, the non-fictional work, *Herrarna satte oss hit*, provides important context for Linnea Axelsson's *Ædnan*.

### *Ædnan* and *Herrarna satte oss hit*

The 760-page epic poem, *Ædnan*, tells the story of Sámi families in the twentieth century and at the beginning of the twenty-first century, with

<sup>1</sup> In the rest of the article, I will refer to Axelsson's epic poem as *Ædnan* (Land) and to Labba's book as *Herrarna satte oss hit*. All translations from the Swedish into English are mine, unless indicated otherwise. *Herrarna satte oss hit* has been translated by Fiona Graham (forthcoming from University of Minnesota Press). *Ædnan*, translated by Saskia Vogel, will be published by Knopf Doubleday.

the reindeer-herding families driven from their territories. The protagonists tell the story of the loss of land and the process of assimilation, resulting in the loss of culture and language.<sup>2</sup> The three parts of *Ædnan* describe various forced migrations and the responses of the characters. In the first part, “Ædnan” (Land), the first forced migration after the treaty in 1919 is an important theme. The main protagonists in this part are Ristin and her husband Ber-Joná, who are part of the first generation that experienced forced emigration. The couple have two sons; however, one dies at a young age, while the other has a mental disability and ends up in an asylum. In the second part, “Ædno” (River), the main theme is a second forced migration due to the building of hydroelectric power plants and industrialization in the second half of the twentieth century. Lise, who comes from another Sámi family, is the representative of the second generation and has chosen to assimilate. The third and last part, “Ædni” (Mother), describes the mobilization of members of the Sámi and their regaining of language and cultural identity. Lise’s daughter Sandra represents the third generation and becomes an activist fighting for Sámi identity. She marries a Sámi reindeer herder and begins to learn Sámi with her three children. In this final part, the Girjas court case, a historical event that actually took place in 2016, plays an important part in the mobilization of the third generation. In this epic poem, the word “memory” recurs throughout the text. What needed to be remembered is the forced migration, the political, economic and ideological reasons behind it, and how it changed the lives of generations of Sámi families.

Labba’s book, *Herrarna satte oss hit*, deals with the same topic: the forced migration and how it influenced the lives of the generation that experienced it first hand and those of the next generations. In *Herrarna satte oss hit*, the word “memory” is also often used. As stated above, Labba compiled her book on the basis of interviews and ego documents, and she is also one of the protagonists. She adds historical facts and her own reflections on the forced migration and the effects that it had on the people involved, including her own grandparents. *Herrarna satte oss hit* also includes photographs, drawings, documents, newspaper articles and phrases in Sámi. To define its genre is challenging: it might be considered a mix of genres, of autobiography, manifesto, journalism and history. The structure of the book also reminds us of the journalist-style

2 See Broomans 2022, for the effect of forced migration on the main characters in *Ædnan*.

reports and politically engaged novels appearing in Sweden in the 1960s and 1970s, such as the “rapportbooks” by Sara Lidman and Jan Myrdal.

### **Memory studies, trauma and indigenous methodology**

Memory in these two books by Axelsson and Labba is connected with trauma and pain. As the two texts show, remembering itself is a painful process. Moreover, the events that are remembered and transmitted are related to the Sámi, who are indigenous to Norway and Sweden. This leads us to ask: How should we study texts that deal with writing about trauma and memory of a minority people such as the Sámi? To begin with, an indigenous methodology, as presented by authors such as Jelena Porsanger in “An Essay about Indigenous Methodology” (2004), should be an important guide, as it concerns a respectful approach to the study of indigenous minority people. This is even more relevant when reading texts that deal with writings about trauma and memory.

Within cultural memory studies – part of a field expanding so rapidly that it is referred to as the “memory boom,” which started in the 1990s (Huyssen 1995, 9) – to date little attention has been paid to memory studies and indigenous people. Since the 1990s, the humanities have studied cultural and collective memory, with many scholars studying the meaning of memory and the difference between memory and history writing. These insights have been applied in the fields of politics, the social sciences, cultural and literary studies, with *Memory Frictions in Contemporary Literature* (2017), edited by Mária-Jesús Martínez-Alfaro and Silvia Pellicer-Ortín, giving a good overview of this development.

While Holocaust theory forms a paradigmatic framework for the study of traumatic memory – with Pierre Nora famously stating in *Les lieux de mémoire*: “Whoever says memory, says Shoah” (qtd. in Martínez-Alfaro and Pellicer-Ortín 2017, 4) – the volume also deals with “conflictive memories of minority groups and non-Western cultures” (Martínez-Alfaro and Pellicer-Ortín 2017, 6). The authors advocate moving beyond Eurocentric perspectives on trauma and memory, in line with the work of scholars such as Irene Visser (2015) on decolonizing trauma theory. *Memory Frictions* also deals with “literary works that give voice to minority groups, silenced memories and their struggles to escape the exclusion and alienation that have traditionally been imposed on them by hegemonic Western forces” (Martínez-Alfaro and Pellicer-Ortín 2017, 14).

For example, several chapters contain analyses of literary texts about Native Americans and demonstrate how they dealt with traumatic pasts and developed survival strategies.

Furthermore, studies such as *Postcolonial Witnessing: Trauma Out of Bounds* (2013) by Stef Craps and *Memory as Colonial Capital: Cross-Cultural Encounters in French and English* (2017), edited by Erica L. Johnson and Éloïse Brezault, equally show that trauma and remembering in a postcolonial context have now become important themes. In a study from 2021, *Languages of Trauma. History, Memory, and Media*, edited by Peter Leese, Julia Barbara Köhne and Jason Crouthamel, there is no explicit discussion of trauma among minority or indigenous peoples, but they do make some relevant observations, such as “traumatic memory never leads entirely to silence” (Leese et al. 2021, 3). The authors also define three categories of language through which trauma can be conveyed. The first is the “medicalized, clinical, and institutionalized reading of trauma” (Leese et al. 2021, 3). The second category concerns personal encounters with trauma, which is expressed by “writing culture” (Leese et al. 2021, 4). This is regarded as a way of healing mentally, “via letters, diaries, poetry, hybrid fiction-memoirs as well as ephemeral fragments of text” (Leese et al. 2021, 4). The third language of trauma is expressed by those who “do not necessarily have ‘direct’ experience of trauma but may be connected to it indirectly via relatives or community or through the wider conditioning of a particular cultural and social inheritance” (Leese et al. 2021, 4). Both the second and third categories apply to the work of Axelsson and Labba.

Trauma among the Sámi people and how it is expressed in cultural writing has not been widely investigated. Returning to Jelena Porsanger’s essay on indigenous methodology (2004), she argues that regarding indigenous ethnic minorities such as the Sámi, scholars, whether or not they belong to an indigenous community, should use indigenous methodology. Porsanger describes this as:

a body of indigenous and theoretical approaches and methods, rules and postulates employed by indigenous research in the study of indigenous peoples. The main aim of indigenous methodologies is to ensure that research on indigenous issues can be carried out in a more respectful, ethical, correct, sympathetic, useful and beneficial fashion, seen from the point of view of indigenous peoples. (Porsanger 2004, 108)

Indigenous methodology is another way of overcoming a number of biases and blind spots of trauma theory. Porsanger points to the relationship between research on ethnic minorities, especially indigenous people, on the one hand, and colonialism, on the other. Porsanger, herself Sámi, refers to Maori scholars such as Linda Tuhawei Smith, who refuse to be reduced to research *objects* or sources of information. These research practices can be labelled “colonial,” in the sense that they take indigenous knowledge from indigenous people and give very little or nothing back. Collecting information about indigenous peoples may be seen as a contribution to knowledge from a Western academic perspective, but from an indigenous perspective, the same act could be regarded as “stealing” (Smith quoted in Porsanger 2004, 107). Therefore, a shift in the research paradigm is needed. In this regard, Porsanger promotes “the use of indigenous approaches and the development of indigenous methodologies that are suitable for both indigenous and non-indigenous researchers” (Porsanger 2004, 108). Moreover, the position of the scholars involved should be defined as insider or outsider researchers (Porsanger 2004, 109).<sup>3</sup>

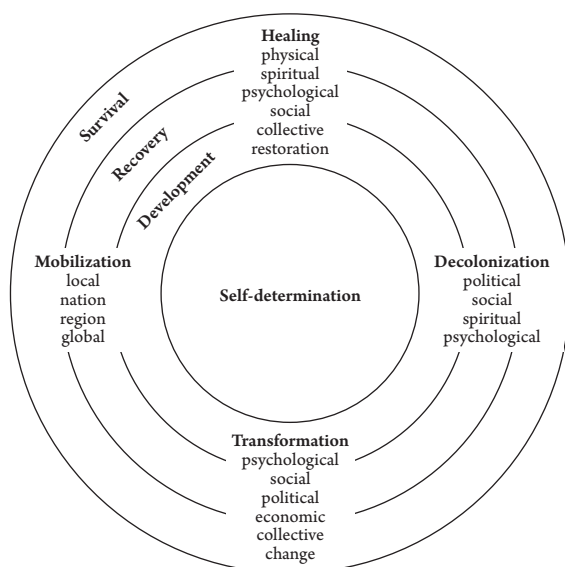
Indigenous scholars have their own aims for their research and use different terms to the outsider. They aim to:

preserve, maintain and restore indigenous traditions, languages and cultural practices; to revitalize, to regain physical, psychological and spiritual health, to cultivate economic, social and governing systems, and to maintain sovereignty and preserve nationhood. (Crazy Bull 1977, qtd. in Porsanger 2004, 113)

Porsanger presents models of possible approaches. The model of a research agenda developed by Smith (in Porsanger 2004, 114) contains the relevant notions; for example, healing (at the top), and then clockwise, decolonization, transformation and mobilization, while after mobilization follow survival, recovery and development. These terms are visualized in circles with self-determination in the centre.

The trajectories of mobilization, followed by survival, recovery and development have similarities with the process of development of small nations, as described by Miroslav Hroch in his seminal work, *Social*

3 I do not belong to the Sámi minority myself. Thus, my position will be that of an outsider.



**Figure 1:** The indigenous research agenda according to L. T. Smith (Porsanger 2004, 114)

*Preconditions of National Revival in Europe. A Comparative Analysis of Patriotic Groups among the Smaller European Nations* (1985) (see also Broomans 2015). As Hroch also pointed out, literature and storytelling are important instruments in the development of a small nation. The Sámi people can also be seen to be mobilizing in order to revitalize their history and traditions and regain their language. For them, stories are a way to remember the past, to recover, to survive and develop as a group. Thus, remembering and recounting old stories is important (Cocq 2015, 33). As many of the Sámi people have lost their language, telling stories in the majority language has become a way of translating those stories and engaging in cultural transmission.

The transfer and transmission of memory and trauma serves two goals: to create awareness among the people themselves and among their compatriots. What is not mentioned by Porsanger is that storytelling, remembering and mediating can function as a way to heal, decolonize, mobilize, survive, recover and develop towards self-determination both as a point of departure and a goal in itself. As an intersectional approach using several

theoretical perspectives and methodologies such as memory and trauma theory, cultural transfer studies will also benefit from applying an indigenous methodology.<sup>4</sup> Thus, the model presented by Porsanger in her essay on indigenous methodology will be used in the analysis.

The trauma of not being able to speak or write in Sámi is discussed in writing on the Sámi in the majority language. The works by Axelsson and Labba are good examples, being written in Swedish, but describing the Sámi situation. The issue of not feeling rooted in Sámi identity has also been described by others, such as Ann-Helén Laestadius in her youth novels about Agnes, a young girl with a Sámi mother and a Swedish father: *Sms från Soppero* (2007; *Sms from Soppero*), and Annica Wennström in her novel about a family saga, *Lapps katteland – en familjesaga* (2006; *Lapps katteland. A Family Saga*). All of these works are written in Swedish because not every writer of Sámi descent is able to write in one of the nine Sámi languages.

### Modern Sámi writers

Axelsson and Labba can be regarded as part of a Sámi revival which brings a new dimension to Nordic literature. Artistic expressions that deal with the trauma of lost language, culture and identity of the Sámi have now become visible in a prominent way. The film, *Sami Blood* (2016), directed by Amanda Kernell, was shown at festivals around Europe. Axelsson's epic poem was awarded the prestigious August Prize in 2018 for the best fiction book, while Elin Anna Labba received the same prize for non-fiction in 2020 for her semi-autobiographical history.

Scholars such as Vuokko Hirvonen, Anne Heith and Kaisa Ahvenjärvi have worked intensively on Sámi literary history. Hirvonen's study of Sámi women writers, *Voices from Sápmi. Sámi Women's Path to Authorship* (1998/2008), takes a gendered approach, discussing the roles of foremothers, grandmothers, mothers and daughters. Heith (2016) focuses on the effects of colonialism on minorities such as the Sámi in the North, while Ahvenjärvi has analysed the works of modern Sámi writers such as Sigbjørn Skåden. Regarding modern Sámi literature, I have previously proposed a division of Sámi writers into three groups based on the

4 In 2021, the promising project, The New Sámi Renaissance: Nordic Colonialism, Social Change and Indigenous Cultural Policy (NESAR), was started at the Arctic University of Norway (UiT). At this moment, the project has not yet resulted in publications (see The Arctic University of Norway, n.d).



different political perspectives that can be observed, as well as who they address their stories to and the aim of their literary works (Broomans 2022, 130–131).

The first type includes authors such as Sigbjørn Skåden (1976), writing in Norwegian and North Sámi, who reflect on and mirror both their own and the global world in their Sámi literary works. The second type, writers such as Hege Siri (1973), intend to awaken their own people by urging resistance and, at the same time, they present the Sápmi homeland as a safe and isolated biotope (Broomans 2022, 131). Linnea Axelsson can be considered as belonging to the third type of writer in modern Sámi literature. These authors write in a major language and want to inform their compatriots – the majority – about the position of the Sámi people. Elin Anna Labba could be regarded as a combination of the second and the third types. Her intention is to awaken her own people and urge them to resist, although she does not present the Sámi homeland exclusively as a safe biotope. In addition, she writes both for the Sámi community and to inform the majority about the Sámi. Labba also uses short Sámi texts in her book.

All of these writers have to make decisions from the perspective of a minority writer. In this respect, Iban Zaldúa has written an inspiring essay, “Eight Crucial Decisions (A Basque Writer Is Obligated to Face)” (2009), in which he described the decisions that such writers have to make before they start writing; for example, whether they want to write in their own minority language or in the language of the majority (Broomans 2015). Zaldúa’s insights might also be applied to the situation of Sámi writers; although, Axelsson has stated that she is only able to understand and read some Sámi, so there was apparently no choice for her as she would not have sufficient skills to write a literary work in a Sámi language (Broomans 2022, 131).

### **Ideology and forced migration**

Ideologies are an important part of political decisions and the treatment of the other. Eagleton relates ideology to “identity thinking.”<sup>5</sup> Most definitions of ideology are connected to politics and dominance; for example, one definition Eagleton mentions is “ideas which help to

<sup>5</sup> Terry Eagleton, *Ideology. An Introduction* (2007). The book was originally published in 1991. In this article, I use the second edition.

legitimate a dominant political power” (Eagleton 2007, 1). Over time, groups have used discourses “to legitimate their ideologies and political power” (Broomans and Klok 2019, 11). Scientists in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries started to use discourses that subject the Sámi people to theories of racial science, while Swedish authorities used these discourses to enable and justify forced migration without using weapons. These attitudes and approaches towards the Sámi are visible in both *Ædnan* and *Herrarna satte oss hit*.

The development of racial science in Sweden has been researched by scholars such as Lennart Lundmark (2002). In 2015, Maja Hagerman published a biography of one significant figure, Herman Lundborg, entitled *Käraste Herman: Rasbiologen Herman Lundborgs gåta* (“Dear Herman: the enigma of the racial scientist Herman Lundborg”). Lundborg became the director of the Statens institut för rasbiologi in Uppsala, the first State Institute for Race Biology. Lundborg was against interracial relationships between the Sámi, the Finns and the Swedes, arguing that this would result in degeneration (Lindskog 2005, 187). More recently, Martin Ericsson (2021) has written an illuminating article, in which he provides a clear description of the context of Lundborg’s work. He argues that Lundborg’s work, undertaking measurements of the Sami, could “be accused of being based on racist presumptions and reproducing ideas of racial hierarchies” (Ericsson 2021, 128). Ericsson also shows how research into peoples such as the Sámi became racialized: “The Nordic race, it was claimed, was especially prominent in the Scandinavian countries, and ideal Nordic individuals were long-skulled, blue-eyed, blonde and fair-skinned” (Ericsson 2021). Lundborg and his predecessors regarded the Sámi minority as not belonging to the “ideal” Nordic race. In addition to this scholarly work, racial science, as it was practised in Sweden in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, is one of the topics that has been taken up in the arts and literature more broadly. Amanda Kernell’s movie, *Sami Blood*, for example, brought these ideas about race to the fore, while both Axelsson and Labba include references to the devastating effects of racial science in their work.

### ***Ædnan*: Paratexts and historical intertextuality**

In Sweden, young writers of Sámi descent are taking up a new role as authors. They play the role of cultural transmitters and activists in making

various aspects of Sámi history visible in Swedish history. The trauma of the forced migration was silenced for a long time, and combined with the interruption of the intergenerational transfer of the Sámi language, memory was erased. However, the desire to write about the trauma, to write this history, could not be suppressed forever, as demonstrated by the works analysed in this article.

I chose the texts by Axelsson and Labba precisely because they show the re-emergent desire to write the history of the forced migration of the Sámi people and to make a forgotten past visible. This also comes to the fore in paratexts related to the works of Axelsson and Labba. The term “paratext,” introduced by Gérard Genette, refers to texts by authors that are separate from the main body of a literary text but are still linked to the work. Paratexts offer the reader more knowledge and understanding of the text, and they can be divided into peritexts and epitexts. According to Genette, forewords, introductions, afterwords and epilogues are peritexts, while interviews with the author and public lectures by the author are epitexts (Genette 1997, 2). In this article, along with these kinds of paratexts, the concept will be broadened to include actual expressions and statements by characters in *Ædnan* and *Herrarna satte oss hit* – as well as those by the author – which can be linked to the forced migrations and their effects, such as loss of language and culture. These utterances can be considered to mark the works’ historical intertextuality.

While Axelsson uses the poetic form to describe the oppression of the Sámi, with racial science as the underlying ideology in the twentieth century, it is also apparent that she has another aim – to make the forgotten history visible to her compatriots. In various interviews, Axelsson has explained the background of *Ædnan*:

När historieläraren talade om kolonialism eller förvisningar, sådana typer av övergrepp, var det så aningslöst. Det är ändå djupt tragiskt att samerna ensamma är kunskapsförmedlare om det här som är en sådan komplex och allvarlig del av landets historia. (Axelsson in Josefsson 2018)

When the history teacher talked about colonialism, banishment, or such types of abuse, it was so clueless. Nevertheless, it is deeply tragic that only the Sámi people have the knowledge of that which is such a complex and serious part of the country’s history.

In *Ædnan*, historical intertextuality can be observed throughout the text, describing the consequences of the forced migration for three generations. *Ædnan* starts chronologically in 1913 but in the verses set prior to 1920, the poems describe the time before the forced migration. This could be interpreted as the author intending to depict the life of the Sámi in their normal environment, without borders and in their own right. After 1920, the verses in *Ædnan* deal with oppression by the Swedish authorities, starting with the autumn in which the Sámi “guardian” arrived with the verdict of the authorities – they had been selected to migrate to Sweden with their reindeer. He speaks Swedish words that “are impossible to pronounce. They pushed in through our clothes, coated our skin” (Axelsson in Vogel 2019, 133). In the same year, the female protagonist, Ristin, one of the first generation of Sámi who were forced to migrate, was confronted with racial science. In these parts of *Ædnan*, the examinations of the Sámi by racial scientists are described from Ristin’s perspective. The feelings of shame and inferiority are striking in her expressions (Broomans 2022).

During the second half of the twentieth century, industrialization and the building of hydro powerplants changed the lives of the Sámi once again, with the second generation also forced to move. The poem, situated in 1945, tells the following story:

Vilda älvar som  
Strömmande orörd  
i sina djupa fåror

Och starka män  
sändes upp genom skogarna

–

De skulle tämja  
älven och hämta  
Forsarnas kraft  
(Axelsson 2018, 172)

Wild rivers  
rushing untouched  
in their deep grooves

And strong men  
 were sent up through  
 the forests

—

They were to tame  
 the river and yoke  
 the power of the rapids<sup>6</sup>

At this time, the landscape was changed and this affected Sámi rights concerning fishing and their use of the land. Since then, this pattern has been repeated, reminding us of the unchallengeable law of the colonizer. Rivers were tamed and mines were opened for the sake of industrialization and modernization. As mentioned above, in addition to the forced migration and the loss of land, the Sámi gradually lost their language and identity, especially in the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, while the rise of racial science ideology in the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries had negative effects on the relative autonomy of the Sámi people. In *Ædnan*, the characters of the first two generations experienced nostalgia, resignation and mimicry; however, the third generation started to mobilize (Broomans 2022).

The model that Porsanger presents is illustrative of the phases the third generation go through, represented by Lise's daughter Sandra: decolonization, transformation, mobilization and, subsequently, survival, recovery (healing) and development, with the ultimate goal of self-determination. Self-determination and autonomy can be realized by forming a state within a state, as Hroch showed in his study, or by attaining a relative degree of autonomy within state borders.

In the verses about the third generation, the regaining of language, identity, activism and politics are recurring topics. We learn that the activist, Sandra, could not learn the Sámi language because her mother did not want to transmit it to her children. Lise had been traumatized and internalized the shame of being Sámi; moreover, she did not want to tell her daughter about the conditions in the boarding school where Sámi children were forbidden to speak their mother tongue (Axelsson 2018, 274).<sup>7</sup> Lise did not want to talk about it because she did not want to remember the trauma.

<sup>6</sup> English translation by Saskia Vogel. See Vogel 2023.

<sup>7</sup> Anne Heith has written an insightful piece about shame in minority women's literature in *The History of Nordic Women's Literature* (2016).

Sandra takes lessons in Sámi together with her children. She is also active in politics and follows the Girjas court case, which actually took place between 2015 and 2020. This case concerns the Sámi village of Girjas, which went to court in order to clarify whether or not the villagers had the sole rights to fishing and hunting in their region. The Swedish state disagreed and the case went on for five years before the Swedish Supreme Court decided in January 2020 “that the Sami district retains the sole right based on possession since time immemorial.”<sup>8</sup>

The language used by the lawyer representing the Swedish state is discussed from the perspective of the protagonist, Sandra. The lawyer denigrates the Sámi by calling them “Lapps,” a term the Sámi perceive as an affront. Furthermore, the lawyer dismisses the use of oral storytelling as a credible form of argument. The written documents of the Swedish state are found to be reliable but not the oral sources, the archaeological sites or the traces of land use (Axelsson 2018, 577). Thus, symbolically, memory is regarded by the state as unreliable.

For the state, the memories of the land that the Sámi had to leave, as well as the trauma experienced in doing so, must be silenced and forgotten. Regardless of the arguments, however, memory remains and can have different expressions and meaning. In one passage, Lise and Sandra reflect on the meaning of memory and remembering at the gravesite of Sandra’s grandmother:

Men hon har  
Varit hemma och  
Inte hemma  
hon har varit  
där hennes  
minnen var  
(Axelsson 2018, 750)

But she has  
been home and  
Not been home  
she has been  
where her memories  
were

8 See “The ‘Girjas’ Case – Press Release” (The Supreme Court of Sweden, n.d.).

Linnea Axelsson took up the role of mediator and guardian of Sámi memory in the fictional work, *Ædnan*, through historical intertextuality, as well as in her statements in interviews – paratexts in which she argues for greater awareness of the consequences of the forced migration: “en sådan komplex och allvarlig del av landets historia” [a complex and serious part of the country’s history] (Axelsson in Josefsson, 2018). In the same interview, Axelsson reflects on language loss:

Jag förstår verkligen att man tappade eller övergav samiskan, och jag vet många som fick höra av sina föräldrar att “det är lika bra att du slutar tala samiska, det är bättre att prata svenska och du ska ändå existera i ett svenskt majoritetssamhälle.” (Axelsson in Josefsson 2018)

I understand why people abandoned the Sámi language, and I know that many were told by their parents that “it would be better to stop speaking Sámi language and that it is better to talk Swedish, because you have to live and function in the Swedish majority society.”

In another interview with Saskia Vogel in 2019, Axelsson stated that:

The book is free in that way – it isn’t a documentary – and it circles around the feelings and relationships between these people. At the same time, there are parts of the book that I’ve snapped up from my environment – someone I’ve seen or things I’ve heard on the radio. Sometimes things like that have gone straight into the book. (Vogel 2019)

Such comments strengthen the observation that *Ædnan*, although it is not a non-fiction document, is marked by historical intertextuality.

### *Herrarna satte oss hit*

The non-fiction work, *Herrarna satte oss hit. Om tvångsförflytningar i Sverige* (2020), provides important context for Linnea Axelsson’s *Ædnan*, adding to and explaining the poetical representation of the forced migration. It also confronts the reader with the forgotten history of forced migration in Scandinavia. The material that Labba uses includes stories, interviews, documents and letters. The book contains testimonies, stories of interviewees and commentary by the author. The stories in *Herrarna satte oss hit* contain elements of fiction. As such, it is reminiscent of what

Hayden White demonstrated in his study, *Metahistory. The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-century Europe* (1973) – that every historian uses narrative structures such as plots and metaphors, even if they have a scholarly and objective attitude. Labba, although not a historian, needed to supplement the information provided in letters and interviews with personal accounts in the parts in which she describes the memories and emotions of the protagonists. Furthermore, Labba did not intend to be objective; she wanted to amend Swedish history by transforming the objects of study into subjects who transmit the memory and trauma of the forced migration passed down through the generations.

Labba is visible as the author throughout the book. Many parts can be defined as historical intertexts, while in the paratext on the back cover of *Herrarna satte oss hit*, taken from the first introductory chapter of her book, Labba formulates the purpose of her book in a nutshell. Referring to the Sámi poet, Áillohaš (Nils-Aslak Valkeapää, 1943–2001), who stated that every person carries their home in their heart, Labba wonders how this is possible when the Sámi have been driven from their homeland. She informs the reader that it was one hundred years ago that the first forced migrations took place and that: “Då tog vår släkt för sista gången renarna över strömmen mot fastlandet” [Then, for the last time, our family took the reindeer over the water to the mainland] (Labba 2020, back cover). Labba reflects on the Sámi history concerning the changes in the landscape and what happened to the Sámi “kåtor” – the typical tents used by the Sámi when herding reindeer – which were burnt by the authorities. She then reminds us of the place of this history within traditional Swedish history: “Vår berättelse är kapitlet som aldrig ryms i historieboken, skylten som ingen sätter upp” [Our history is the chapter that has never been included in the history books; no signs can be seen] (Labba 2020, back cover). The Sámi history remains silenced, and Labba observes that another generation of the old Sámi people are also becoming silent, meaning that this generation is disappearing. Before that happens, she says: “Jag vill väva deras röst” [I want to weave their voice] (Labba 2020, back cover).

In the first chapter, Labba writes about the difficulties of finding material – pictures and people who wanted to share their memories with her. Her grandparents and parents did not want to talk about the time after the forced migration, and Labba now knows that her family was not the only one that suffered and was traumatized: “det Sápmi jag har vuxit upp i är fullt av människor som har bundit om sina sår med tystnad.” [the Sápmi I grew up in, is full of people who bound their wounds with



silence] (Labba 2020, 11). Thus, she could only write about issues people wanted to talk about, or what had been recorded and stored in archives, and whatever photos could be found. She mentions that she was grateful for all the stories, no matter how short they were; for everything that the interviewees and others shared with her: “I deras historia kan vi ana vår. Ord för ord skriver jag fram min egen familj” [In their history, we can trace ours. Word after word, I record my own family] (Labba 2020, 12).

What she means by “to weave their voice” also becomes clear in the first chapter, where she weaves, interweaves and combines stories and fragments of stories, memories and yoiks.<sup>9</sup> Sometimes the material only comprises silence and gaps, and here she needs to add her own words and sentences, exactly like a nineteenth-century historian, as White has demonstrated. Labba notes that to speak in this way is a form of healing, just as in Porsanger’s model, for whom the first stage in healing from trauma comes by speaking. Unlike Axelsson, Labba can speak and write in Sámi. In the language she loves most, she writes that to speak and to remember is almost the same word in Sámi. The book contains many words and phrases in Sámi: “Muitit är ordet för att minnas och att berätta är muitali. De vi berättar om minns vi” [Muitit is the word for “to remember” and “to tell stories” is muitalit. Those we tell stories about, we will remember] (Labba 2020, 12).

### Memories and trauma

As in *Ædnan*, memories of the sea and the summer pastures of the reindeer before the forced migration, when there still were no borders, are recalled. After the forced migration, the border was closed. In *Herrarna satte oss hit*, Sire Omma, the granddaughter of Ánne Márjá Omma, tells us about her grandmother’s longing for home: “Minnena fanns kvar där. Hon väntade på att hon skulle få fara hem. [...] Bara att hon ville hem” [The memories remained there. She waited until she was allowed to travel home. [...] It was just that she wanted to go home] (Labba 2020, 28). In this section, Labba is quoting from an interview with Sire Omma, while the previous section, in which the grandmother tells her story, is fiction. This is typical, with Labba basing her work on documents, history and the interviews. One fine example is “Meaararlikkas. I havslandet” [In the Land at the Sea]

9 Yoiking is the typical Sámi way of singing and storytelling. See for example Stoor (2007).

(Labba 2020, 21–27), which is a section about Anna Maria Omma based on an interview with her granddaughter (Labba 2020, 28).

From another interview, we learn that the parents did not want their children to see their tears while thinking about the lost land: “Deras ö hade fastnat i minnet som den vackraste platsen på den här jorden” [Their island had been etched in memory as the most beautiful place on this earth] (Labba 2020, 30). So, the grandparents did remember but did not want to talk about it. Despite this reluctance to speak, their grandchildren remembered how objects from the lost land – “our land” – were cherished and called by their original names: “Landet där långt borta, det var det hon tänkte på” [The land far away, she was only thinking about that] (Labba 2020, 67).

The interviewees stressed the need to document what happened to their grandparents and parents: “Sätt den bara i boken, vår historia. Den är sann” [Just put in the book, our story. It’s true] (Labba 2020, 121). Others observed how traumatized their ancestors were and that they did not want to speak or remember: “Men de ville aldrig berätta. De var som chockade, chockskadade människor” [But they never wanted to tell. They were in a state of shock] (Labba 2020, 154).

Labba alternates stories constructed on the basis of memories with sections using historical documents and information from interviews and letters. As mentioned above, she also includes her own family in the book, at one point with reference to racial science. She recounts how she investigated the catalogues of the Swedish State Institute for Racial Biology because she wanted to know “om de har min familj, och jag hittar dem” [if they had my family; and I found them] (Labba 2020, 142). She makes other statements that can be regarded as providing historical intertextuality. For example, she contextualizes the Sámi politics of the Swedish state: “Sverige följer här ett mönster som gäller för ett urfolk världen över.” [Sweden follows a pattern that applies to indigenous people around the world.] (Labba 2020, 181). She compares the situation of the Sámi with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in Australia and the Inuit in Greenland and Canada. She mentions the forced displacement of the Cherokee and other First Nations peoples in the US, known as the Trail of Tears. Labba concludes with the sentence with which I began this article, which serves as a motto for *Herrarna satte oss hit* as well as for *Ædnan*: “Urfolks ärvda sår finns nästan aldrig i historieböckerna.” [The inherited wounds of indigenous people are not included in history books] (Labba 2020, 181).

The last testimony in the book comes from Inga Idivuorna, who transmits the memories of her parents from the last autumn before they had to migrate. She tells us that they remembered that, after they had sent the reindeer towards the Swedish side of the border, they were yoiking and engaging in some festivities, although some had cried. In their songs, they had thanked Norway and the high mountains, the sea, the boats and the people: “Vi tackade allt. Och vi kommer nog aldrig mera hit igen ... Norges klippor ska eka våra jojkar, eka våra tack till kommande generationerna” [We thanked everything. And we probably will never return ... The cliffs of Norway will echo our yoiks, will echo our gratitude to the next generations] (Labba 2020, 183).

While this memory recounts trauma and pain, at the same time, a nostalgic undertone and a hymn to the place, to nature and the people can be heard. Other stories in Labba's book describe the cruel measures of the Swedish authorities, who put pressure on families who refused to migrate. In the case of the Kemi family, they were told that if they did not migrate, the reindeer would be slaughtered (Labba 2020, 143). Other families wanted compensation from the state because their reindeer had been lost, as they had returned to pastures that the families could not access. The state declined the request because they had spent the money on the forced migration. Three hundred people were forced to migrate between 1919 and 1932. However, these families were not the only ones affected. The Swedish state also forced other families to move in order to provide housing for the newcomers and this caused conflict between these families and the Sámi (Labba 2020, 181).

Labba succeeded in writing this forgotten history: “I tomrummet i Sveriges historia finns gott om plats för att väva egna mönster, med en röst som de som gått före oss aldrig fick” [In the empty space of Sweden's history, there is enough room to weave our own design, with a voice that those who came before us never had] (Labba 2020, 182). Winning the August literary prize in 2020 for the best non-fiction book, she reached many readers and made the history of forced migration visible.

## Conclusion

*Ædnan* and *Herrarna satte oss hit* are complementary works that approach the history of the forced migration of the Sámi from different genre perspectives. Both texts describe the different generations involved: the first generation is characterized by silence and shame, while the second

generation experiences the loss of language and identity as well as the shame, with the intergenerational transfer of language and Sámi identity clearly being interrupted. The third generation became activists and chose a Sámi identity. Their goals now are to “re-emigrate” to their Sámi identity by regaining their language and territory. As discussed above, in *Ædnan*, the first generation looked back in nostalgia after being forced to leave the territories; the second generation chose the strategy of mimicry, assimilation and forgetting the mother tongue; while the third generation has chosen the strategy of activism, and is now striving to regain their lost language, culture and Sámi identity.

Axelsson and Labba, in their own ways, are represented by the characters that form the third generation in the works. The two authors represent a new type of Sámi writer, with both having the intention of writing the forgotten history into the Swedish canon, but in a new way: by writing about the trauma using living memories. Thus, it could be argued that a fourth type of writer, or dimension of writing, can be added to the division of Sámi writers into three types discussed earlier. This type lays bare the consequences of ideological, political and economic decisions for a minority people and the fragility of the collective identities of minorities in the face of these interests.

The Sámi were defined as the “Other” by racial science, and consequently they were not regarded as ideal citizens. Thus, in the process of Swedish nation-building they were denied a “common destiny” (Hroch 1985). For the first and second generations, the choice was to assimilate or to remain the Other, and in this way the ideology of racial science determined their post-migration lives and self-identities. However, the third generation has taken up a new role, as does Sandra in *Ædnan*, and have become transmitters of the lost Sámi identity.

By attempting to redefine Sámi identity and to add this forgotten history to the incomplete history of the majority, *Ædnan* and *Herrarna satte oss hit* are, as well as being twin texts, also manifestos of politically self-aware authors. They show how important the desire to write the history of trauma is in connection to memory and identity, unveiling the underlying ideologies of racism and othering. By doing so, Axelsson and Labba deliberately transfer the trauma undergone by their own minority into the history of the majority. A wound that everyone must acknowledge. The fact that both works were awarded the August literary prize, *Ædnan* in 2018 for fiction and *Ædnan* and *Herrarna satte oss hit* in 2020 for non-fiction, could be read as a sign that there is a broader

will to recognize this forgotten past, albeit within the cultural realm. Nevertheless, Axelsson and Labba have demonstrated that the traumatic memories of the Sámi people no longer have to remain silenced.

This leads back to the question asked earlier in this article: How should we study texts that deal with writing about trauma and memory of a minority people such as the Sámi? The indigenous methodology approach proposed by Porsanger, among others, adds an essential perspective that furthers an intersectional use of trauma theory, cultural memory and cultural transfer studies. From this point of view, we can understand that Axelsson and Labba are active forces in healing the trauma. However, we now know that this only begins by writing and transmitting the forgotten history and acknowledging that the language of trauma is part of collective memory.

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