

GUNNAR GJENGSET

# Citizens and Nomads

The Literary Works of Matti Aikio  
with Emphasis on *Bygden på elveneset*

**ABSTRACT** The Sami author Matti Aikio from Karasjok made his debut in 1904 in Copenhagen with *Kong Akab* ['King Akab']. He was one of the world's earliest indigenous authors, and presented his first novel to the Norwegian public with *I dyreskind* ['In Hide'] in 1906. The last of a total of six novels was *Bygden på elveneset* [The Parish on the Riverbank], launched posthumously in 1929.

In this article I present a post-colonial reading of this last novel of his. My hypothesis is that he wrote his first Norwegian novel anew, but this time social success amongst the Sami population is dependent upon the conduct of Sami culture. All of his novels reflect upon different strategies at hand for members of an ethnic minority in times of an advancing European industry, economy and culture, heavily influenced by a social-Darwinist political and anthropological cosmology.

Being the first registered Sami student of Norway, while writing his novels in Norwegian, Matti Aikio developed skills as a master of mimicry. Having experienced the importance of hybridity, he studies the limits of mimicry in his novels. This is the main project of his literary work, and with tools from post-colonial literary theories, this essay discusses the author's attitudes to the possibilities of his own ethnic culture's survival in the future.

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**KEYWORDS** indigenous author, Matti Aikio, master of mimicry, hybridity, post-colonial reading, survival of Sami culture

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In this article I seek to demonstrate that Matti Aikio in his time was engaged in restoring ethnic self-esteem on behalf of the Sami people. Through both his literary production and actions, Aikio evolved from seemingly serving as an alibi for the greater society's hard-handed assimilation policy to launching a long-term and what I would call ex-

tremely cunning strategy that we can now recognise as *hybridisation*: in terms of appearances one conforms to the authorities' requirements for submission, while using one's bastardised position to establish the foundation for acceptance of a distinctive Sami character and Sami self-determination.<sup>1</sup>

### Hybridity vs. Class Differences

This duality with which Matti Aikio had chosen to live is reflected in the title that he personally selected for his posthumous manuscript, namely *Borgere og nomader* ['Citizens and nomads']. The author Regine Normann edited this book and proposed *Bygden på elveneset* ['The parish on the riverbank'] as a better title. She might have misread the title as *Citizens or nomads*, as this was the general picture of the Sami people held by contemporary Europeans. While Aikio's idea might have been to underline that in spite of this all-colonialistic idea of any indigenous culture, contemporary Sami were, in fact, both *Citizens and nomads*. That was the whole idea! This assertion can be made on the ground that Aikio always was both smart and clever in the titling of his novel. With this change of title he lost the signal effect about Sami self-awareness that the original title contained: it does not refer to the contradiction between Sami (as nomads) and Norwegians (as citizens), but to the fact that Sami people can be simultaneously *both* nomads and citizens. Matti Aikio's last book does not address the contradictions or co-existence of the Sami and Norwegian peoples, but rather the superior features of hybridity as a long-term strategy for one culture under pressure from another. And in this last book: Sami supremacy in their own habitat.

This will be the further progression of the article: first I will present some biographical information on Matti Aikio. Then there follows an introduction to the main concepts of the post-colonial literary theories, before I lay out the analytic highlights of the novel being scrutinized. In conclusion, I will discuss the evolution of the author's ethnic awareness, as demonstrated in his handful of novels.

Matti Aikio, or Mathis Isachsen as he originally called himself, was born in Karasjok on 18 June 1872. His parents were the parish clerk and mayor Mathis Isachsen (1827–1904) and Ragna Heimo (1835–1912) (Blix 1987: 24 ff.). Aikio died on 25 July 1929 in Oslo; his grave was moved to the Vestre Gravlund cemetery for artists and celebrities in 1991. He was a Sami author who wrote in Norwegian at a time when the Sami people's position in Norway was threatened, and his books and descriptions of the Sami life and customs were perceived by many as caricatures of the Sami people. This article will challenge such a perception.

In 1890 Matti was granted one of the two places reserved for Sami stu-

dents at the teachers' training college in Tromsø. This was his first encounter with the Norwegian language in a learning situation and it was also here that he took his teaching certificate exam in 1892. As Norway's first registered Sami student, he took *anneneksamen*<sup>2</sup> in the autumn of 1896. He started out as an author with the novel *Kong Akab* ['King Akab'], which was published in Copenhagen in 1904.

He made his Norwegian debut with *I dyreskind* ['In hide'] in 1906.<sup>3</sup> It was on the occasion of this publication that he took the pen name of Matti Aikio. He chose a paradoxical position, in that he "came out" as a Sami during a particularly assimilation-friendly period. He dressed in the traditional tunic from Karasjok and adopted the Sami-sounding name of Aikio. Already the following year, *Ginunga-Gap* ['The Ginunga Gap'] was published, but his fourth book, *Hebræerens søn*, ['The son of the Hebrew'] was not published until 1911. In 1914 Aikio published a collection of articles entitled *Polarlands-breve og andre* ['Letters from the Arctic'] which included two articles about Lars Levi Læstadius and a more extensive article about the Kautokeino uprising in 1852. The year after the first Sami National Congress in 1917 (which opened in Trondhjem on 6 February, which is why this date was later chosen as the Sami people's national holiday), *Hyrdernes kapel* ['The shepherds' chapel'] was published. In 1919 the second Sami National Congress was held in Östersund in Sweden. And in 1929 his last novel was finally published, *Bygden på elveneset*. This was translated into Sami by Harald Kåven with the title *Márkannjárga* in 1994. *I dyreskind* was translated by the same man as *Náhkehasat* in 2003.

Throughout the course of his life Aikio was a freelance writer for the Norwegian newspaper *Tidens Tegn*. In addition, he made his debut in 1916 as a pictorial artist and was a well-known silhouette cutter. For many years he struggled to have a play accepted by the Norwegian National Theatre and finally succeeded in having the farce *Under blinkfyret* ['Beneath the light-house'] staged at the Centralteateret in 1926. In his time he was an active editorialist and debater. And this will be my overriding task with this paper: hopefully demonstrating the slowly growing manifestation of Aikio's belief in the Sami people's supremacy in the realms of its own culture in the circumpolar regions.

Matti Aikio's long-term goal was the autonomy of the Sami people in all areas, though not territorially. Today, all of his aspirations have been fully realised: the Sami people in Norway have their own Sami parliament, they are educated in their own language and the Sami culture has acquired considerable visibility in both the Norwegian and global public sphere. In the first book that Matti Aikio had published in Norway, *I dyreskind*, he described a Sami people *In Hide*, while his own people in the author's post-

humorous manuscript are depicted as both citizens and nomads at the centre of Aikio's universe: *The Parish on the Riverbank*. In short: the history of the Sami associations parallels the development of a Sami consciousness in Aikio's novels—with Aikio one generation ahead.

The plot of *Bygden på elveneset* begins in 1882. The central plot is about two love relationships: Andijn's and Elle's. Andijn Hooch is the daughter of the village merchant. Like her father, she was born in the village, but has been spending time in Kristiania (the name of the Norwegian capital before 1925, written as *Christiania* up to the 1880s), in order to experience European culture and refinement. The primary objective of this visit is to find an affluent Norwegian suitor of an appropriate age. The objective is fulfilled: when Andijn returns, she is engaged to the attorney Einar Asper.

But they have just become (pre-)engaged without thinking about what the culmination of such a contract will entail. It quickly turns out that the young attorney has problems with even getting to the village. He does not attend the wedding and returns to Kristiania to straighten out some dubious business before settling down in "the city there in the east," that is, a small city on the coast of Finnmark. He there renews a liaison with a former girlfriend from Kristiania, Miss Signe André. She has taken a position as a telegraph operator in the same city and is romantically involved with the circuit judge Ludvig Mæhre. He has, for his own part, fallen in love with Andijn Hooch, who has feelings for nothing but the circuit judge's social status. On the other hand, she makes amorous advances to the stalwart Sami youth Halle Johanas.

All the threads of this tangled web come undone when Signe André marries Ludvig Mæhre and washes her hands of Einar Asper. He is also rejected by Andijn, and in the end dies, allegedly from a brain tumour. While Andijn has been waiting for a clarification of her relationship to the two Norwegian lawyers, she accordingly enters into an affair with Halle Johanas, who is a settled Sami farmer. She goads him into driving his horse so hard that it collapses during a sleigh ride, and is later directly responsible for Halle Johanas destroying a valuable riverboat. Her father disapproves of any close contact between Halle Johanas and Andijn, and demonstrates this by refusing to compensate for the damages that his daughter inflicts upon Halle Johanas. After the affair has ended and Andijn has left for Kristiania, Halle Johanas settles the score with the merchant Hooch. Halle Johanas is not a suitor for Andijn, and marries a Sami girl. Andijn is thereby left as an unmarried Norwegian woman in a Sami village.

The Sami girl Elle is the book's other main female character. She is a Sami nomad from the regions surrounding the parish on the riverbank, in other words, from Karasjok. She is in love with Mikkal who was born in

“Vestviddesognet” [‘the Vestvidda parish’], in other words, the Kautokeino district. As is the case in all of Aikio’s books containing subject matter from inner Finnmark, there is antagonism between these two districts where the author’s sympathy is obviously on the side of the Karasjok residents. This complicates the Elle/Mikkal relationship. Mikkal is condemned for reindeer theft and is therefore sent to prison in the city of Trondhjem.

In the meantime, Elle’s feelings for him cool down. She has an erotic relationship with her father’s herdsman Gonge, who also comes from Vestviddesognet. A relationship between them is completely unacceptable to Elle’s father Sire Andaras, who tries to find other suitors for her when she proves to be pregnant. But Elle sends both the wooers, farmer Andi Piera and the wealthy Mikkal home again, and her father is reluctantly obliged to marry her off to the herdsman Gonge.

Two other relationships are apparently more peripheral to the plot: the bailiff Jørgensen’s marriage with the Norwegian-Sami Anga, and Andijn’s brother Fridtjof Hooch’s with the Finnish woman Lisa Bergström. The bailiff is hated by the Sami people and disliked by the Norwegians in the town. He marries Anga, the daughter of the “shaman” Ågall. Jørgensen behaves like a tyrant in relation to his wife and in-laws, and simultaneously strives to improve his own social and commercial position in the district. He runs a retail business on the coast and sets up a wine cellar in the town, but in the end dies from blood poisoning. His father-in-law suddenly loses all the magical powers believed to reside in a *noaidi* [‘shaman’], and therefore cannot intervene.

Andijn’s brother Fridtjof is sent to Arkhangelsk to learn commerce. But he learns for the most part to speak and drink in Russian, and is blinded in a suicide attempt. This event brings him self-knowledge and he refuses to enter into the family business. Instead he seeks company among those below his social status, and marries a Finnish girl who, to add to the bargain, is the daughter of a suspected spy and a bankrupt Finnish merchant. They settle down in a small Norwegian town near the Russian border and are perfectly happy together.

These two chains of events are smaller in scope but broader in their implications: they are in fact distortions of the two main plots. The relation between ‘Norwegian’ Andijn (her family is actually Dutch) and the Sami Halle Johanas cannot be realised within the Sami core region of Karasjok. Although the Sami character is in the upper echelon of society, it becomes clear that a marriage with Andijn would be hubris. This is depicted symbolically by his over-working his horse and destroying a riverboat when in her company. The situation is further complicated by the fact that she is the daughter of the merchant Hooch. But the son of the same merchant

can marry below his station, with the Finnish woman Lisa Bergström. She was “mørkøiet og mørkhåret [...] var ellers ofte ute med kvenfiskerne ute på sjøen—hun som på sett og vis var dame” [‘dark eyed and dark haired [...] was otherwise often out at sea with the Finnish fishermen—she who, in a manner of speaking, was a lady’] (192). They are both affiliated, in a sense, with the “white settled locals” and their relationship is therefore more acceptable—also due to their settling down in the mixed-town of Neiden. Their mixed relationship becomes thereby a success.

The mixed relationship between Sami Anga and the Norwegian bailiff Jørgensen, on the other hand, develops into a tragedy. Through his behaviour Jørgensen challenges the established cooperation between the Sami people and the Norwegian elite in Karasjok; he demands among other things that Anga appears to be fully Norwegian. *Mimicry* is not a game for Jørgensen, who challenges his environment with brutish power and oppression. He thereby dies, when a self-proclaimed hybrid, his father-in-law Ågall who is Norwegian but lives *like a Sami*, fails to help him. Neglecting to perform active assistance in relation to the bailiff is portrayed as passive resistance.

But Aikio has thereby made his point: ethnicity sets limits to mixed relationships—these are most easily realised in the areas outside of the text’s core regions, in a kind of a spacial *in-between*—among several different cultures: “The non-synchronous temporality of global and national cultures opens up a cultural space—a third space—where the negotiation of incommensurable differences creates a tension peculiar to borderline existences” (Bhabha 1994: 218). Another strategy open for individuals living in areas of mixed cultures is to practise what Homi K. Bhabha calls *mimicry*. The word itself is adapted from biology: “a superficial resemblance of one organism to another.”<sup>4</sup> Transposed into postcolonial terms, however, *mimicry* is the sign of a double articulation, a complex strategy of reform, regulation and discipline, which “appropriates the Other as it visualizes power” (Bhabha 1994: 86). At the same time *mimicry* is also the sign of the inappropriate, a difference that “intensifies surveillance, and poses an immanent threat to both ‘normalized’ knowledges and disciplinary powers” (Bhabha 1994: 86). The situation between the bailiff Jørgensen and his father-in-law demonstrates how *mimicry* works: Ågall is a success as a Sami shaman, although he is a Norwegian, whilst Jørgensen who marries his half-breed daughter, and later mocks both Anga and her father, meets with a painful death—“the Other [...] visualizes power” (Bhabha 1994: 86).

Class differences also make it difficult to arrange relationships, but do not render them impossible: Elle, the daughter of the parish’s richest reindeer owner, marries the reindeer owner’s herdsman, who even comes from the competing neighbouring parish. For this young couple a full and sensi-

ble Sami life is at hand. For Aikio himself life did not add up as easily, he was obliged to endure a hybrid existence in a country that was more preoccupied with its own independence and nation building, and in such a climate he had asked in vain for mercy for his people. That had put him into a position where he was viewed as a suspect individual, both by his own people and by the greater society, like the intellectual Indians with Bhabha: “a class of persons Indian in blood and colour, but English in tastes, in opinions, in morals and in intellect” (Bhabha 1994: 87), in other words *a mimic man* (cf. Naipaul 1967). Or, as Bhabha puts it very precisely: “colonial mimicry is the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, as a *subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite*” (Bhabha 1984: 126).

Aikio therefore rewrote *I dyreskind*, his Norwegian debut. He wanted to cast off the animal hides—he wanted to show that “Livet kan gro sammen der en minst venter det skal kunne gro sammen” [‘Life can heal where one least expects that it will be able to heal’] (231). He is back in the same environment and in the same era, the same young people are all searching for partners in a typical colonial environment, and here too a young person must find a living space in the wasteland, outside of the text’s social dimension. But on this occasion, this is the case for *Norwegians*. In this text, the colonised individuals are those who without doubt best resolve the ethnic contradictions of colonial Finnmark in the 1880s. With this book the author seeks to get even, particularly with his own people. It was therefore no coincidence that he wanted to call the book *Borgere og nomader* [‘Citizens and nomads’]. With such a title, he wanted to tell the Sami people that this was a book *for* Norwegian society, but which first and foremost was *about* Sami people. With this book, Aikio was carrying out nation building on a modest scale: “The identity of a nation is something narrated [...] but at the same time the national subjects are inventing the nation at every moment, changing the ideas of itself as well as its institutions” (Bhabha 1994: 121).

He had been speaking of the idea of a separate Sami nation ever since 1910, when he visited the Jewish congress in Hamburg (Elster 1910).<sup>5</sup> Now in 1928–1929, in a pre-fascistic period, the possibilities of a Sami nation looked even more remote than ever, but Aikio could at any rate write about it, so that Samiland was launched as something narrated, at the very least. Reading this book therefore becomes a question of how we perceive ourselves, how we perceive others and are perceived by others: “To us, the man who adores the Negro is as ‘sick’ as the man who abominates him. [...] Conversely, the black man who wants to turn his race white is as miserable as he who preaches hatred for the whites” (Fanon 1967: 8 f.).

## The Parish on the Riverbank

My analysis of *Bygden på elveneset* starts with the love affairs that Aikio outlines in this novel: “Andijn Hooch var blitt forlovet med ham nu siste vår nede i Christiania” [‘Andijn Hooch had become engaged with him the last time she was down in Christiania’] (8), “him” being Einar Asper. He simultaneously reveals a serious character flaw. He violates the rules in effect for *mimicry*, and he cannot handle the surroundings. Einar Asper is a cheat who cannot adapt to Norwegian or Sami social codes. He dies allegedly of a brain tumour, although nobody really believes this. It is therefore more productive to view Asper’s tumour as a simile for the Norwegian presence in Samiland, as “the alien life form, which burgeons out of its proper place and destroys the cultures it infiltrates” (Newman 2004: 16). Asper never even reaches Samiland. He would never be accepted there, because he committed an offence against the unwritten pacts with the subaltern, and was made thereby ‘impure’ in the text’s universe: “People in a marginal state, homeless and outside of the social structure become ‘soiled,’ a source of impurity and danger, because their status is indefinable” (Newman 2004: 14). His sudden death thereby becomes a natural consequence of his dissembling already at the time of his very first meeting with Sami people.

Halle Johanas is on the other hand an articulate fellow. He brings Andijn along on a sleigh ride on Christmas Day. He is Sami and Andijn is Norwegian. But Halle Johanas masters the requisite *mimicry*, and he was “alltid i lag med storkarsfolket!” [‘always on good terms with the gentry!’] (54). She goads him into driving the horse too hard, so that it collapses and dies from the harsh treatment. “Men Hoo’ka hadde ikke nevnt noe om, at han ville gi Halle Johanas erstatning for hesten” [‘But Hoo’ka hadn’t mentioned anything about his wanting to give Halle Johanas compensation for the horse’] (55).

The balance between Halle Johanas and Hooch is hereby disrupted, and will move from *mimicry* to *mockery*. The main ingredients of *mimicry* being repetition, variation and inversion and thus resembling parody, irony and satire—until it ends up in *mockery*, according to Bhabha:

It is from this area between mimicry and mockery, where the reforming, civilizing mission is threatened by the displacing gaze of its disciplinary double, that my instances of colonial imitation come (Bhabha 1994: 86).

But first Andijn will inflict one more loss upon ‘the farm Lapp’ Halle Johanas. She accompanies him on the log driving down to Langnes, and at Storfossen she waits so long to ask to be brought to land on the light craft



that it is destroyed. Neither on this occasion will he blame Andijn for the damage: “Men vi behøver ikke å snakke til andre om det. La det være et uhell!” [‘But we need not speak about it with anyone. Let it be an accident!’] (155). This can appear altruistic but in the long term Halle Johanas is actually buying shares in Hooch’s colonial conscience: “there is an element of negotiation of cultural meaning. [...] colonizer and colonized depend on each other” (Huddart 2006: 3). And for the time being, it is Halle Johanas who has the upper hand. On the other hand, he does not improve his holdings with Andijn, for this time she offers financial compensation.

Halle Johanas is therefore prepared to make a claim for some respect from the shopkeeper Hooch. He shows up when Halle Johanas returns and gives him a scolding for not having delivered the mail more quickly. When Halle Johanas retorts: “men husk ellers at vi møtes igjen, og da skal vi gjøre op, Hoo’ka” [‘But remember otherwise that we will meet again and then we will settle things, Hoo’ka’] (199).

Andijn continues on to the capital city after a brief visit home. She does not return until the other chains of events in the text have been brought to their conclusions. She cannot bring her Norwegian suitors into Samiland, and a relationship with a well-standing Sami cannot come about outside of the village. She finds herself in the same situation as Adele Qusted in *A Passage to India*, who is never able to find a comfortable position: “Generations of invaders have tried, but they remain in exile” (Forster 1924: 97).

Nor is Andijn’s brother Fridtjof able to resolve the situation. The intention is for Fridtjof to take over the grandfather’s business in Vadsø “og derfor hadde han tatt en volontør-stilling i Arkhangelsk for å lære russisk” [‘and he had therefore accepted an apprenticeship in Arkhangelsk to learn Russian’] (233). “Arkhangelsk er pomorenes hovedstad,” [‘Arkhangelsk is the pomor capital’]<sup>6</sup> and the city was therefore important for the Hooch business. For Fridtjof the city name Arkhangelsk, meaning ‘Archangel,’ has a double significance, since he meets with a profound theological conflict here with regard to his life’s existential meaning.

Fridtjof goes into an alley with a clear intention of shooting off his manhood, but is stopped in the act by a constable. Whether he intended to shoot off his manhood or was going for a more complete castration is not stated explicitly. He hits at any rate his face. And he has thereby come home from Arkhangelsk “uten syn, begge øieplene var tatt ut” [‘blind, both eyeballs had been taken out’] (170). But paradoxically, also with a more clarified view of existence.

In a *mapping* of the text, the regions around the Russian border acquire the character of being a social and national no-man’s land.<sup>7</sup> This impression is reinforced by the presence here of a chapel from a foreign country’s reli-

gion: "Til naboriket hørte et lite stykke land på den for øvrig norske siden av elven, og her var et gresk-russisk kapell" ['A tiny parcel of land on the otherwise Norwegian side of the river belonged to the neighbouring nation, and here there was a Greek-Russian chapel'] (235).

In this no-man's land, the voluntarily de-classified Norwegian Fridtjof can settle down with the Finnish woman Lisa Borgström. In the topography he is situated halfway between the Sami village and the Norwegian dominated areas in Eastern Finnmark. Liberated from all of the requirements that ethnic descent and social class have imposed, Fridtjof has found his way into the text's *third space*, a kind of contemporary Parisian everyman's land, in the border region's no-man's land, where Skolt Sami, Finns, destitute Norwegians and lifeless Russian theologians live together in an international and cultural mix. The paradox of his situation is that he cannot assume the role of a hegemon after having lived in a situation as a common minority in a foreign culture. He had learned the technique of *mimicry*, and the kind of cooperation without expectations that he could thereby experience in humble living conditions: a peaceful co-existence, the establishment of which was rarely possible within the text's universe.

On the way from *Bygden på elveneset* to the coast, Aikio makes a small detour in the text to the parish on the border from *I dyreskind*: "Deroppe i den lille dalen er Otsejok-kirke" ['Up there in the little valley is the Otsejok church'] (152 f.). Aikio wrote here about Jussa, the Sami youth who became a Finnish clergyman and followed his vocation in a parish on the border, which in the book *I dyreskind* was situated outside of the social sphere, in Finnish Utsjok. In *Bygden på elveneset* Neiden has taken over this role as the topographical periphery, but here the periphery acquires another function. The place is no longer the topos for banishment, but instead the site of liberation from the social and ethnic conflicts permeating the remainder of the topography. The geographic location surrounding the Russian/Sami chapel becomes therefore the text's *post-colonial room*, outside of all of the other places where the social structure and ethnicity impose their limits.

The other spaces are "Bygden" and "Vestviddesognet," and the territories around and between them—and the factual town of Langnes and the Norwegian-dominated cities along the coast. In *Bygden på elveneset* and the Norwegian cities and towns, Norwegian culture's social ranking dominates. In the mountain plateaus and regions between the urban spaces, the traditional Sami culture is dominant. In the first space we find Norwegians at the upper social level, but only as long as they adhere to the implicit, unstated rules of the game between the coloniser and the colonised. Here ethnicity becomes a decisive qualifying criterion. In the mountains there are also clear rules for social superiority and inferiority with corresponding possi-

bilities for ascent and descent. But here anyone at all can qualify. We do not however find the most important roles within these spaces at the top rung of the social ladder. These roles are held by the attorney Toddy-Jacobsen and the reindeer herdsman Gonge.

In the novel's second plot we find Elle, who belongs to the mountain. She is the daughter of the wealthiest reindeer owner in these parts, Sire Andaras. She is engaged to Mikkal who is even richer; he is namely the son of the wealthiest reindeer owner in the "Vestviddesognet," in other words, the area surrounding Kautokeino. In the text's *mapping* both are found in the space where reindeer nomadism and the affiliated culture are normative.

While Mikkal is serving his time, Elle goes out and gets pregnant with Gonge. He is, like Mikkal, originally from Vestviddesognet: "Gonge hadde engang selv været Hoamma" ['Gonge himself had once been *Hoamma*']<sup>8</sup> (108). He should therefore have been even less appropriate as a suitor, in that he was also a herdsman for Elle's father. Gonge personally therefore perceives marriage between them as impossible. In a comment Aikio has already made it clear that one's native soil does not bear social stigma for a Sami: "man kan godt være fattig og hedersmann samtidig, for om man er født og opvokset i Vestviddesognet—det er mange hedersmenn der" ['one can very well be poor and a gentleman at the same time, if one were born and raised in Vestviddesognet—there are many gentlemen there'] (119). In addition to this, the author makes an investment on Gonge's behalf; he has Gonge slaughter one of his own few reindeer instead of stealing one from his employer. In the reader's mind, Gonge becomes thereby the honest character from Vestviddesognet, while Mikkal is dishonest.

But the social dimension imposes certain hindrances. Sire Andaras prefers, in spite of everything, the son of a wealthy reindeer owner, "den av ham før så foraktede Mikkal" ['the one he previously despised so, Mikkal'] to his own herdsman (209). He must yield when Elle insists on marrying the father of her child. The author makes sure that everyone takes notice of Gonge:

Gonge, Gonge var synet! Opstaset fra topp til tå, skinnende renvasket og med klippet hår og skjegg—i snehvite finnsko, bukseben av sortglinsende, korthåret skinn fra forskankene på renen—og buksebenene var om ankelen forlenget med et bredt skarlagensklæde, omvundet med kunstvevet bånd—pesken av fineste sort renkalvskinn—og skarlagensklædet langs den opprettstående kraven forlenget med to lange sløifer nedover brystet. Oterskinnsluen med den stjerneformede pullen med dun i, var splitterny—og nederst kantet med hvitt røskattskinn. Og gullbelte om livet! Han vakte den rene bestyrkelse! (216)

[Gonge, Gonge was a vision! Dressed up from top to toe, shingly clean and with his hair and beard trimmed—in snow white finnesko reindeer boots, trouser legs of black glossy, short-haired reindeer hide—and the trouser legs were at the ankles lengthened with a broad scarlet material, fastened by braided ribbon—the reindeer jacket was of the finest calfskin—and a scarlet trim along the standing collar extended with two long sashes down the chest. The otter skin down-filled cap with the star-shaped crown was brand new—and at the bottom edging of white ermine. And the gold belt around his waist! He aroused a great commotion!]

The author allows us to acquire a new perspective of Gonge, who with an impeccable Sami appearance qualifies for the upper echelon of the Sami social scale. The author thereby makes Gonge the foremost agent for Aikio's new message with regard to the Sami people: respectability in Sami cultural practice has an importance superior to any other social and occupational/geographical differences within the ethnic group. And this is the clue of the novel, the nave that Aikio's new cosmology evolves around: the Sami are superior inside the boundaries of their own culture, but they have to prove their supremacy by showing excellence in Sami handicraft such as the construction of *pulk* ['sledge,' Sami fashion], and the proper driving of such—with a reindeer; the making of knives, the embroidering of the costumes, the know-how of *yoik*, the Sami chanting—and so forth. Gonge's appearance is an eclatant example of such supremacy in Sami cultural practice.

It is first of all in association with the Norwegian hegemony that situations fraught with difficulties can arise. The rejected suitor Mikkal is represented in the reindeer theft trial by attorney Toddy-Jacobsen. He does a good job, and suggests that the bailiff Jørgensen has harassed the accused while he was incarcerated. Jacobsen insists, and this is the reaction from the public: "Toddy-Jacobsen hadde gjort noe uhørt: vendt sig mot sine egne, mot myndighetene, [...] hvad ialverden gik der av Toddy-Jacobsen?" ["Toddy-Jacobsen had done something unheard of: turned against his own, against the authorities, [...] what in the world was the matter with Toddy-Jacobsen?"] (94). Nothing else but that "a partial and double force disturbs the visibility of the colonial presence and makes the recognition of its authority problematic" (Bhabha 1994: 111). Hybridisation is a two-way street, with the result that the colonised objects sneak away from the hands of power, which in turn becomes "an 'empty' presence of strategic devices" (Bhabha 1994: 113). That is why the public reacts, because it "[k]unde såmenn være at han hadde rett, men slikt pleide da myndighetene å greie op med sig imellem, man hadde ikke opvask midt for almuens øine" ['It could thus be that he was right, but this was how the authorities usually settled things

among themselves, dirty laundry was not washed in public'] (94). In this manner the colonised would develop techniques to avoid surveillance and punishment: "If discriminatory effects enable the authorities to keep an eye on them, their proliferating difference evades the eye, escapes that surveillance" (Bhabha 1994: 112).

Gonge and Toddy-Jacobsen hereby become, each within his respective ethnic group, the most important cog wheels in this novel—because they indicate the manner in which the events will unfold in this universe. The Sami people can certainly claim their rights, but this would require devoted participation on the part of representatives of the colonisers: devotion bordering on martyrdom. No wonder the reading public stared open-mouthed, there were few like this in Aikio's time.

But there are other sensational episodes in this text: the merchant Hooch violated the same unwritten contract between colonisers and their *subalterns* when he offended Halle Johanas on three occasions: first when he refused to replace a horse that he drove to the point of collapse, under pressure by Hooch's daughter Andijn, subsequently when the same daughter's behaviour led to the wreckage of the light craft, and finally when he reprimanded Halle Johanas without reasonable cause in front of his crew. Halle Johanas had warned that this injustice would have to be rectified: "–Jeg er, som du vet, Hoo'ka, ingen farlig mann. Men ett er uundgåelig: jeg må gi deg ris" ['I am, as you know, Hoo'ka, not a dangerous man. But one thing is unavoidable, I must give you a beating'] (210). And Hooch was spanked, because, "jeg begynte å forstå at jeg vilde ende med å bli et dårlig menneske i mitt hjerte og sinn og i andres øine, om jeg ikke fikk gjort et kjennelig oprør" ['I began to understand that I would end up becoming a bad person in my heart and mind, and in the eyes of others, if I did not protest in an unmistakable manner'] (212). And more so: "Jeg må også fortelle det til andre, og jeg må råde dig til ikke å nekte det—for ellers må jeg gjøre det samme op igjen i andres nærvær" ['I must also tell others about it and I must advise you not to deny it—because otherwise I will have to do the same thing again in the presence of others'] (212).

Halle Johanas was able to restore the balance and Aikio has him state that this was to be understood as an "unmistakable manner" of protest. Norwegian critics did not notice this (see Gjengset 2004). One may then ask where the critics have focused their gaze? Presumably on arctic Orientalism, while they were reconnoitring for "an Asian shadow [...] behind the Northern lights" (Hauge 2004: 244). And possibly they caught a glimpse of it when they saw the shaman Ågall. He and his daughter Anga are true hybrids. She is half Sami and accordingly *almost the same, but not quite* (*white*) (Bhabha 1994: 86). For Ågall this is less certain: "faren var jo efter all sansyn-

lighet helt norsk av fødsel; moren var nok lapp” [‘the father was after all in all likelihood pure Norwegian by birth; the mother was certainly Lapp’] (241).

Ågall behaves like a true hybrid, and his behaviour emphasises that “[h]ybridity liberates one from official constructions and constructions of otherness” (Hauge 2004: 246). But in terms of ethnicity, Ågall could “godt ha vært i slekt med folk i ægypternes land der Gosen var” [‘easily have been a descendant of the people of the land of Egypt where Gosen was’] (41). In other words, one of the twelve tribes of Israel, of whom some in Aikio’s time believed that the Sami people were descendants (see Gjengset 1980). At any rate, he was a shaman and evil humans could risk meeting with “dødninger, utsendt av Ågall” [‘ghosts, sent out by Ågall’] (40). His half-Sami daughter Anga is more closed; it was difficult to discern “hvad der bodde bak Angas lukkede ansikt” [‘what went on there behind Anga’s closed face’] (103).

The bailiff Jørgensen, who had haunted Mikkal while he was in custody and was chastised for this by attorney Toddy-Jacobsen, takes on Ågall. When Jørgensen holds a compulsory auction and he knocks over the poor, grieving widow, Ågall demands: “–Reis henne op, du Jørgensen lensmannsdreng” [‘Pick her up, you bailiff Jørgensen’] (101). But Jørgensen breaks all the rules of good communication and replies: “–Dra til helvete med dig, Ågall” [‘To hell with you Ågall’] (101). The reaction is in any case poor *mimicry*: “Mimicry, according to Bhabha is in principle a strategy on the part of the colonizer for acquiring power over the colonized” (Thisted 2004: 106). But the violation of these rules has the result that it is Ågall who appropriates power over Jørgensen: “du har intet annet å gjøre enn ... ja, gjør forresten som du vil—du har fritt valg for så vidt” [‘you have no other option but to ... yes, after all, do what you want—you are, for the most part, free to choose’] (102).

Ågall has thereby cast a spell over the bailiff Jørgensen, who must suffer through hellish anguish while staying in the arrest-room, where he had formerly spooked Mikkal. As such, Ågall becomes a kind of spiritual sheriff in this colonial landscape where the colonisers must behave decently in order to gain the trust of the district’s subalterns. The bailiff Jørgensen breaks these implicit rules for hybridity: “The presence of colonialist authority is no longer immediately visible” (Bhabha 1994: 114). The shaman Ågall’s ambiguous ethnicity is thus suitable—as a Norwegian who has elected to live as a Lapp—when a Norwegian coloniser must be punished for violating the rules for cultural collaboration in a district of mixed ethnicity. Following his punishment, he marries off his daughter Anga to none other than Jørgensen, who immediately demands that she “helt og holdent skulle bli norsk” [‘become wholly and fully Norwegian’] (240). The bailiff reinforces the image of himself as a classic hegemon—he sets up a wine cellar in the midst of Samiland: “Jørgensen hadde virkelig det man kalder kulturinstinkt

i så måte” [‘Jørgensen really had what one calls a cultural instinct in this regard’] (241). It was like a fort in enemy territory and it was off limits for Sami: “Og ingen annen enn han selv skulde komme ned i den kjeldereren—det skulde han sørge for” [‘And none other than he personally would be permitted to go down into the cellar—he would make sure of that’] (241). Nonetheless he has forebodings of a Sami conspiracy and of his wife he suspects: “at hun på en eller annen måte hadde fått lirket sig inn i vinkjelleren for å få fatt i brennevin til Mikkal” [‘that she in one way or another had succeeded in worming her way into the wine cellar to get hold of some aquavit for Mikkal’] (242).

If setting up a wine cellar in the Sami village seems foolish, there is no shortage of irony in connection with the bailiff’s sudden death. The direct cause is a bite in his finger that is inflicted while he is arresting a Sami resident: “Balto Hansa bet fast i fingeren og slapp den ikke” [‘Balto Hansa bit deep into his finger and would not let go’] (242). He lives too far away from the closest doctor, and his father-in-law the shaman is suddenly unable to do anything. The Norwegian person of authority has been injured by a Sami resident, and it becomes doubly ironic when a potential Norwegian who lives like a Sami and who has criticised another Norwegian for his lack of ability to devise hybrid conduct, contributes to Jørgensen’s death precisely by *not* doing anything. Jørgensen is injured in Samiland because he does not do as he should and dies because another person does not do what he was able to.

The fact that the wine cellar is more than merely a collection of bottles of wine for Jørgensen emerges in the scene of his dying—where the only thing he is concerned about is exactly the wine cellar: “Men da rettet den døende sig op med et uhyggelig uttrykk i ansiktet: –Jeg spør ennu en gang: hvor har dere tatt denne champagnen fra?” [‘But then the dying man straightened up with a sinister expression on his face. “I am asking you again: where did you get this champagne from?”’] (246). It is the sheriff’s wife who has taken the bottles; Sami Anga does not dare stand up to her husband even when he is on his deathbed. But it is Anga who afterwards leaves this expression of European cultural imperialism in ruins: “Og en for en knuser hun flaskene, idet hun hver gang sier: jeg spør ennu en gang. Og hun vasser i alt dette hellige fluidum på gulvet” [‘And she smashes the bottles one by one, as she says with each one: I am asking you again. And she wades in all of this holy fluid on the floor’] (245). The scene could have been taken from the short story *The day they burned the books* by Jean Rhys (Rhys 1968), where Mrs. Sawyer burns her husband’s books in revenge for his harassment. Both actions may be understood as reactions to “the reductionism inherent in imperialist representation of the ‘Other’” (Bjørhovde 2001: 169).

The bailiff Jørgensen's death is Matti Aikio's warning to Norwegian society—we can stir up a lot of commotion just by being who we are, without having to resort to action. The story of the rise and fall of bailiff Jørgensen is actually an account of the merits of hybridity. He sets out to defy the game of *intermediaries*: “Mimicry conceals no presence or identity behind its mask” (Huddart 2006: 65). Jørgensen lets the mask fall away and he is revealed as a coloniser. He stares at Anga: “Jørgensen lennsmansdrengeens øine står på stilker” [‘the bailiff Jørgensen’s eyes bulged’] (42) and thereby challenges her father Ågall. But he “returns the coloniser’s gaze” (Huddart 2006: 66). Jørgensen dies, “[o]g Ågalls ry tok til å stige påny” [‘and Ågall’s reputation was redeemed’] (246). The balance is restored; in *Bygden på elveneset* neither the bailiff nor the merchant can establish themselves as hegemon in relation to the local subaltern’s reigning culture.

### Evolving from *In Hide* to *The Parish on the Riverbank*

This analysis of *Bygden på elveneset* was introduced by the assertion that Matti Aikio rewrote *I dyreskind*, that he looks back. *I dyreskind* was a document in defence of the preservation of the traditional Sami way of life and culture. A young Sami, who attempts to qualify himself within Norwegian culture by studying theology so as to thereby certify for an official posting, is dispatched to an outlying parish on the Finnish side of Finnmark. A love affair with the Norwegian daughter of the Karasjok merchant cannot be realised.

This defeatist attitude has been completely abandoned in *Bygen på elveneset*. There are more love affairs here and Aikio is thereby able to show how social and ethnic boundaries function in Samiland: an incredible feud is still going on between Karasjok and Kautokeino, where we can hardly assume that Aikio is unbiased. But they can wed one another, although the fiancée is from the wrong parish and the bride is the daughter of the wealthiest reindeer owner in the right parish. As I have already mentioned: the showing off of traditional Sami handicraft and cultural excellence was made crucial by the Sami author Matti Aikio, in order to demonstrate Sami supremacy in their own rights. And therefore cross-county marriages are made possible. Just as long as they are respectable Sami! Marriage across ethnic boundaries is on the other hand more problematic. But here it is *Norwegians* who reap the negative consequences. When Norwegian Andijn cannot realise a relationship with Sami Halle Johanas outside of their own village, she remains an unmarried spinster, while he marries a Sami girl. When the Norwegian bailiff Jørgensen marries the Sami Anga, he runs into difficulties when he ignores the transcultural rules for cooperation that are thereby activated.



But ethnicity thereby sets certain limits that must be respected, although their transgression is possible. The situation is not as inflexible as Spivak (1999) describes, more in the direction of “an element of negotiation of cultural meaning [...] colonizer and colonized depend on each other” (Huddart 2006: 3). It is accordingly the Sami roles that emerge reinforced from situations that appear to be too transgressive. *Bygden på elveneset* demonstrates quite openly that 56 years after Member of Parliament Johan Sverdrup proclaimed absorption of the Sami people,<sup>9</sup> they continue to live and prosper and have come into an assertive position 23 years after Aikio wrote *I dyreskind*. Aikio simultaneously has Norwegians lose in the conflicts that arise in the text, he is saying that it is the Sami culture that is eternal here, while intruders must adapt—or lose.

In this way Norwegian Fridtjof got lost in the Norwegian cultural space, but regained his balance in a third space in the text's topos, an ethnic and cultural *in-between* in a village in the border regions between Russia, Norway and Finland. *Bygden på elveneset* hereby becomes a visionary text about a post-colonial society where “cultures cannot be fully present: they are not a matter of being, but of becoming” (Bhabha 1994: 148). For the one who raises his eyes and voice things go badly in *I dyreskind*, “[g]apet slukte ham” [‘the gap swallowed him’] (Aikio 1906: 130). “Norwegian” Fridtjof in *Bygden på elveneset* loses his gaze completely: “Men nu var Fridtjof tross alt blitt en lykkelig mand” [‘But now Fridtjof had after all become a happy man’] (248). His sister Andijn does not dare to make the multicultural leap, but she becomes the godmother of Halle Johanas’ “lille barn som hun også hadde holdt over dåpen” [‘tiny baby whom she also had held during the christening’] (248). Now and then she perhaps regrets that she did not dare: “Men da pleide hun å gå til Halle Johanas og få ham til å spenne for og kjøre henne en lang tur langs med elveneset” [‘But then she would go to Halle Johanas and have him hitch up the team and take her for a ride along the riverbank’] (249). On the basis of this one might say that Matti Aikio made a number of bold moves in *Bygden på elveneset* that were not acknowledged by contemporary society.

With his last book Aikio confirmed this rising of Sami self-awareness: it is we Sami who are “Us” and Norwegians in the Norwegian greater society and all other ethnic groups on the continent who are “the Others.” Here, where we live, it is the Norwegians who are the minority. Who is it then that defines who is “Us” and “the Others?” Aikio’s message was: it doesn’t matter! Because it is the one with the power of definition who decides who is “Us.” And it is the way we speak, how we behave and how we dress that determines who “Us” is. But we are simultaneously a part of “the Others.” Aikio therefore insisted throughout his life that the Sami people had to

learn Norwegian, because mastering the language of those in power was a prerequisite for claiming power of their own. And Aikio wanted a separate Samiland, in a remote, utopian age. But then as a region with cultural and linguistic self-determination—not as a separate national territory. He was certainly therefore continually misunderstood and misinterpreted, both by his own people and by society at large.

The easiest manner of tracking Aikio's development in his literary work is by following the development of his ethnic consciousness. This we can determine by measuring the status of hybridity among the main persons of the novels, and the reach for possible post-national in-between spaces. (These conditions are outlined in my monography on the author.)<sup>10</sup> In the debut novel *Kong Akab* (1904), the main character Falk is granted his Norwegian girlfriend, who is the daughter of a member of the honourable classes. This is only possible because the hero's true ethnicity as a Sami is concealed. The floor is not yet open neither for hybridity nor for mimicry.

It was not until the year after the independence in 1905 that he had his debut in Norway, with *I dyreskind* (1906). The hero is the Sami boy Jussa who is in love with Elna, daughter of the local Norwegian merchant. He believes that an upgrading of his own social status will serve to qualify him as a suitor for the Norwegian woman and he therefore studies theology. As the title *I dyreskind* indicates, this book is about *otherness*. The Sami author enables us to view our Sami minority with our Norwegian gaze and in so doing the Sami people appear just as in hide—*I dyreskind*. A Sami suitor for a Norwegian woman in the midst of Samiland is unthinkable and even if the suitor has qualified himself as a Norwegian high-ranking official, he is sent to a desolate district outside of the text's topography. The author does not here provide any third space for cooperation between colonisers and the subaltern. The hero assumes a hybrid position, but it does not help him. But still there is some process: a Sami from Karasjok is fully educated as a Norwegian civil servant. So the Sami is partly throwing away his hide.

It was only in his posthumous novel *Bygden på elveneset* that things turn out badly for those Norwegians who challenge the limits that the subalterns set for the hegemony's execution of power in the context of an asymmetric power structure. Both in Sami core regions and in the Norwegian-dominated coastal towns, intricate rules prevail for cultural cooperation and violations have consequences. As maintained above, this book is a rewriting of *I dyreskind*, but here it is the Norwegians who suffer if their actions are in conflict with cultural customs.

Matti Aikio shared his claims on behalf of the Sami with the Sami organisations: the preservation of the Sami languages, the teaching of those languages in their own schools, the right to have their say in their own re-

gions, their own register of people of the Sami population—and their own parliament. These claims are today granted the Sami of all the Nordic countries, and are met with rising sympathy in Russia. In that respect one can allege that all of Aikio's long-term claims have been met—eventually. And therefore his visionary position in Norwegian literature has been acknowledged also by the Sami—both *I dyreskind* and *Bygden på elveneset* have recently been translated into Sami (2003 and 1994 respectively).<sup>11</sup> They both ought to be translated into English, in order to reach an international audience of indigenous readers—and Others.

Aikio returns in his last book the hegemony's gaze, as Bhabha describes this in his essay "Of Mimicry and Men:"

...the look of surveillance returns as the displacing gaze of the disciplined, where the observer becomes the observed and "partial" representation reactivates the whole notion of *identity* and alienates it from essence (Bhabha 1994: 86).

While in the process of working on this book, Matti Aikio must have felt that the Sami culture will survive. Justice had a prominent position in Aikio's life, and in his last book, injustice is punishable by death, as with the fate suffered by the Norwegian bailiff Jørgensen. But those Sami people who exhibited proper behaviour and excellence within their own Sami culture would find pleasure and prosperity in their lives. Matti Aikio's posthumous message was thereby that the Sami people would have to create their own justice within the borders of what was, at least in part, a hostile nation state. Claiming the right to a separate Sami nation state across the national borders of the North Calotte was certainly somewhat utopian, although Aikio publicly expressed his sympathy for the Zionists' demand for a separate Palestine (see above). It was far more pragmatic to fight for a peaceful and equal co-existence within the established national borders. In this manner the Sami people could create their own space, where the Sami culture in the midst of greater society could become *Bygden på elveneset*.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> "The term hybridity has been most recently associated with Homi Bhabha," in Laragy 2006, <http://www.qub.ac.uk/schools/SchoolofEnglish/imperial/key-concepts/Hybridity.htm>; access date 4 March 2010.

<sup>2</sup> A preliminary exam in Philosophy and Latin, mandatory to obtain status as a student.

<sup>3</sup> A second edition appeared in 1922, and a third edition in 1975, illustrated by Iver Jåks. Translated into Finnish in 1912, and translated into North Sami by Harald Kåven in 2003: Aikio, M. 2003. *Náhkehasat*, Karasjok: ČálliidLágádus.

- <sup>4</sup> <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/mimicry>; access date 9 July 2008.
- <sup>5</sup> Aikio had attended a Zionist congress in Hamburg, headed by Theodor Herzl, the author of *Der Judenstaat* (1896) and *Altneuland* (1902).
- <sup>6</sup> <http://www.ub.uit.no/northernlights/nor/pomor.htm>, access date 6 November 2006.
- <sup>7</sup> *Mapping*. Initially inspired by Antonio Gramsci's writings on the history of subaltern classes, the Subaltern Studies authors adopted a "history from below" paradigm to contest "elite" history writing of Indian nationalists, from the left and right. Later this project shifted away from its social history origins by drawing upon eclectic thinkers such as Edward Said, Roland Barthes, Michel Foucault, and Jacques Derrida. In his reading of Naipaul's *The Mimic Men*, Bhabha suggests that "Naipaul 'translates' Conrad from Africa to the Caribbean in order to transform the despair of postcolonial history into an appeal for the autonomy of art" (Bhabha 1994: 110). Thus this literary *mapping* "is the question that brings us to the ambivalence of the presence of authority, peculiarly visible in its colonial articulation" (Bhabha 1994: 118).
- <sup>8</sup> *Hoamma* means 'coming from the Vestvidde parish.'
- <sup>9</sup> "Den eneste Redning for Lapperne er at absorberes med den norske Nation" ['The only solution for the Lapps is their absorption into the Norwegian nation'] (Johan Sverdrup in *Norsk Retstidende* 1863: 39). Sverdrup was the leader of the left-wing opposition in the *Storting*, the Norwegian national assembly, in the 1860s. He was one of the founders of *Venstre*, the Left party, Norway's oldest political party, in 1884. He became Norway's prime minister at the same time.
- <sup>10</sup> Gjengset 2004. This monography is designed for the commercial market, and the analysis of each novel is somewhat superfluous. This partly fictionalised monography is, however, based on research for my scientific monography that will be presented as a PhD-thesis in Literature at Umeå University in 2010.
- <sup>11</sup> A second edition of *Bygden på elvenesset* appeared in 1976, illustrated by Iver Jåks. In 1994 it appeared in North Sami, translated by Harald Kåven: Aikio, M. (1994). *Márkannjárga*, Karasjok: ČálliidLágádus.

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