REVIEW

Je suis la mer, by Elin Anna Labba

by Estelle Normand

July 1, 2026 · On *Je suis la mer (Éditions Rivages)*

Through three women, a brilliant and necessary novel about the Sámi people, whose lands and villages are swallowed up in the name of progress.



Novel by Elin Anna Labba (2026), Éditions Rivages, 430 pages.

“Siivujávri, Siivujávri, stay, people still sing, but I didn’t know those songs. I drowned them.”

It is a people, a village, a language. A land that belongs to no one. A lake that no longer knows what it is, a lake turned sea, filled and emptied so many times, enslaved, transformed at the whim of “civilized” men.

Year after year, protected by a law made by them and for them, these men invaded, colonized, methodically destroyed the forest, built a dam, swallowed up the villages, drove ever farther away the peoples living in harmony with nature, tolerating them only on condition that they take part in their great enterprise of appropriation.

Je suis la mer tells, through the lives of Ingá, her mother Rávdná and her aunt Ánne, the terrible reality of the Sámi people, forced to watch their homes endlessly devastated by profit-hungry people who forbid them to build houses, contrary to their nomadic way of life, so they say.

This story overwhelmed me in more ways than one: the beauty and poetry of the language, the author's choice to keep many passages in Northern Sámi, the courage and strength of the three women at the heart of this collective tragedy, the cynicism, of unheard-of cruelty, of those who decide to erase ancestral cultures in the name of energy progress and capitalism, and of those meant to report the news, unable to grasp how serious the situation is.

Elin Anna Labba delivers a brilliant and necessary novel about the condition of an oppressed nature and people, the question of these people's memory and heritage, but also the inevitable detachment of new generations from their own history.

— Estelle Normand

HOW TO CITE THIS ARTICLE (MLA)

Normand, Estelle. "Je suis la mer, by Elin Anna Labba." French Press, July 1, 2026, https://frenchpress.media/publications/je-suis-la-mer-elin-anna-labba.