

‘We Already Carry Out a National Assignment’: Indigenous Performance and the Struggle for a Sámi National Theatre in Sweden¹

DIRK GINDT

Since the early 2010s, the arts and culture in Sweden have taken a stand against the prevailing epistemic ignorance of the country’s Indigenous Sámi people by confronting majoritarian society with the realities of settler colonialism. This article suggests that theatre and performance form part of this Sámi cultural activism and highlights the decolonial labour of Giron Sámi Teáhter, the oldest professionally driven touring company in the Swedish part of Sápmi. Taking one specific production as a springboard, the article demonstrates the larger, structural issues at stake. Giron Sámi Teáhter deploys the stage as a vibrant, decolonial forum where the history of settler colonialism and the Sámi people’s struggle toward self-determination is performed, celebrated and encouraged. The company has long striven to gain official status as the national theatre for Sámi performing arts in Sweden and the article therefore also outlines the financial and political impediments encountered by Giron Sámi Teáhter.

Concentrating on contemporary Indigenous performance in Sweden, this article unfolds within a seemingly paradoxical historical conjuncture whose outcome is hard to predict. While issues pertaining to the Sámi people’s rights have progressively impacted mainstream cultural agendas and political discourses, the twin mechanisms of ignorance and discrimination remain deeply engrained in majoritarian society, which seems unwilling to genuinely engage with Sweden’s legacy as a settler colonial nation. Political opposition to Sámi self-determination is palpable, best symbolized by the country’s decades-long refusal to ratify the Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention from 1989 (ILO 169) and the staggering economic interests of trans/national mining, forestry and hydroelectric power industries in the rich natural resources of Sápmi, the home territory of the Sámi.² Two recent events, however, hint at a decolonial shift. On 24 November 2021, the Archbishop of Sweden, Antje Jackelén, apologized on behalf of the national Lutheran Church of Sweden for its historical complicity in colonizing the Sámi people and its attempts to eradicate their languages, culture and spirituality.³ This apology, articulated in a specially organized solemn service at Uppsala Cathedral, came only a few weeks after the Swedish government announced the launch of a national truth commission (*sanningskommission*) to investigate the crimes and abuses committed against the Sámi and propose ‘measures that contribute

to redress and promote reconciliation'.⁴ The commission will submit its final report in December 2025.

A national truth commission is long overdue, not least because, despite efforts by Sámi activists, artists and scholars, a severe lack of knowledge of the Indigenous people and the history of settler colonialism persists among the majoritarian Swedish population. In a collection of interviews with Sámi activists published in 2020, the editor, Gabriel Kuhn, goes so far as to suggest that 'the majority of people in Sweden – as well as in Finland and, albeit perhaps to a lesser degree, in Norway – simply don't care about the Sámi'.⁵ One of the central impediments is the Swedish educational system, which has long induced a structural amnesia that has actively contributed to erasing the country's own past and present as a settler colonial nation. Although Sámi studies (*Sámi dutkan*) is a vibrant academic discipline, with Umeå University being a leading institution,⁶ secondary and post-secondary education outside Sámi studies keeps reproducing the same old ignorance and indifference. This also includes Swedish theatre historiography, which so far has pushed Sámi performance to the margins.⁷

Norwegian theatre historians have made pioneering contributions to the study of Arctic theatrical cultures. Jon Nygaard has identified rock carvings as the first sites of ancient rituals and prehistoric performances in the North Calotte.⁸ Knut Ove Arntzen discerns spirituality, proximity to nature and a non-linear 'spiral' dramaturgy as key characteristics of Indigenous performance in the Arctic region. Arntzen also highlights the inter-Nordic artistic exchanges and dialogues unfolding across the performing arts in Sápmi, extending into Greenland.⁹ Based in the Finnish part of Sápmi, Sámi cultural historian Veli-Pekka Lehtola suggests that the stage is an excellent forum to promote Sámi languages, allow for positive self-representations and explore cultural identities. Lehtola has also charted the history of Beavvváš Sámi Našunálateáhter, Norway's national theatre for Sámi performance, whose origins can be traced to the large-scale protests against the damming of the Alta river and the construction of a hydroelectric power plant in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Since 1991, the Norwegian state has supported Beavvváš financially and, in 1993, officially gave it the status of a national theatre.¹⁰ More recently, theatre historians have also started to study Greenlandic performance histories.¹¹

Theatre studies in Sweden, however, lags behind the scholarly developments briefly outlined above. This article seeks to make an intervention by following the political science and Indigenous studies scholar Rauna Kuokkanen's call for Western universities to critically review their own mechanisms of discrimination and become more welcoming spaces for Indigenous students, philosophies and knowledge systems:

Epistemic ignorance arises at both the institutional and individual levels and manifests itself by excluding and effacing indigenous issues and materials in curricula, by denying indigenous contributions and influences, and by showing a lack of interest and understanding of indigenous epistemes or issues. Students, faculty, and staff are all guilty of this.¹²

As a marked contrast to the Swedish educational system, the arts and culture have seemingly conspired in recent years to take a stand against this epistemic ignorance,

as high-profile releases are bringing Sámi concerns to the forefront and confronting majoritarian society with the realities of settler colonialism. A key player in this thriving interest in Sámi culture is Giron Sámi Teáhter, a professionally driven touring company in the Swedish part of Sápmi whose mandate encompasses the promotion of Sámi culture and languages and whose history stretches back to 1971.¹³ Giron Sámi Teáhter has its base of operation in the industrial town of Kiruna/Giron, located 150 kilometres north of the Arctic circle and home to one of the largest active iron ore mines in Europe.

Written by a non-Sámi scholar, albeit in close dialogue with the artists and staff at Giron Sámi Teáhter and adhering to research protocols and guidelines formulated by the Sámi Parliament of Sweden (*Sámediggi*),¹⁴ this article suggests that theatre and performance form part of an increasingly growing awareness of the rich offerings of Sámi culture and mark an intervention into the prevailing historical and political amnesia in majoritarian society. To highlight the manifold facets of the labour performed by Giron Sámi Teáhter, I devote specific attention to a recent production, *Ædnan* (2020), which constitutes a representative example of the theatre's high-quality offerings distinguished by their decolonial and pedagogical agenda. The play addresses the forced displacements that hundreds of Sámi families were subjected to throughout the early twentieth century, depicts racial biological abuses by Swedish scientists, demonstrates how many Sámi lost their own language through forced assimilation processes in the residential Nomad schools, and protests the historical and contemporary exploitation of Sápmi by state-owned and transnational corporate industries. By using this one specific production as a springboard, I underscore how Giron Sámi Teáhter deploys the stage as a vibrant, decolonial forum through which the history of settler colonialism and the Sámi people's fight for self-determination can be performed, celebrated and encouraged. The company has long laboured to gain official status as a fully state-subsidized national theatre and, in the last section of the article, I outline the financial and political impediments encountered in a decades-long struggle that remains unresolved to this day.

A Sámi cultural renaissance?

Since the early 2010s, a cultural wave combining Sámi artistic practice and political activism has been flourishing – at least in the eyes of mainstream Swedish society, which has long ignored the rich cultural production of Sápmi. An impressive number of performing artists, film directors, authors, visual artists, designers and musicians have been offering majoritarian Swedes a glimpse into the richness of Indigenous culture and a means to learn about settler colonialism. Sámi scholar Moa Sandström traces these developments back to the large-scale protests against plans for the construction of an iron ore mine in the town of Kallak/Gállok in 2013. She suggests that these protests, which received nationwide media coverage, led to a revitalization of Sámi activism and encouraged artists to harness their craft and stir a renewed public conversation on settler colonialism and the ongoing exploitation of natural resources in Sápmi.¹⁵

The release of Amanda Kernell's film *Sameblod* (*Sámi Blood*) in 2016 marked another watershed moment.¹⁶ Initially it received a limited release, but public interest coupled with rave reviews led to its becoming a success and arguably the most influential cultural representation of Swedish colonialism thus far. Its protagonist, Elle Marja (played by Lene Cecilia Sparrok), is a young reindeer herder who, in the 1930s, seeks to escape the racism and anthropometric observations to which she is subjected at a residential Nomad school where she is also forced to speak exclusively Swedish.¹⁷ Elle Marja moves to the university town of Uppsala where she pursues her studies and cuts off all ties with her family and people. Many decades later, when the older Elle Marja (played by Maj-Doris Rimpi) returns to Sápmi to attend her sister's funeral, she is overcome with regret for having abandoned her culture and sacrificed her Sámi identity. In addition to winning awards at Swedish film festivals, *Sámi Blood* also received illustrious honours in Venice, Seattle and Tokyo.

In the span of five years, three Sámi authors won the August Prize, which is Sweden's most prestigious award for contemporary literature. Ann-Helén Laestadius received the accolade in 2016 for her book *Tio över ett* (Ten Minutes Past One), which describes the terrors of a teenage girl who lives in Kiruna/Giron and is afraid that the nightly underground explosions in the iron ore mine will lead to the collapse of the entire city.¹⁸ In 2018, Linnea Axelsson won the award for her epic poem *Ædnan*, a Northern Sámi word that translates as 'land', 'soil' or 'earth'. The book, which was also turned into a play by Giron Sámi Teáhter, charts Sámi history from the forced displacements (*bággojohitin*) and the scientific racism of the early twentieth century up until the present day when Sámi villages have started to sue the Swedish state for intruding on their hunting and fishing territories.¹⁹ Two years later, journalist Elin Anna Labba received the prize for her non-fiction book *Herrarna satte oss hit* (The Masters Placed Us Here), which assembles interviews to shed light on the forced displacements to which Sámi people were subjected as a result of the closure of the border between Sweden and Norway in 1919.²⁰

Sámi cultural production is also being recognized internationally. In 2017, the pioneering Sámi handicrafts (*duodji*) artist Britta Marakatt-Labba exhibited her work at documenta 14 in Kassel and, in 2022, three Sámi artists (director Pauliina Feodoroff, sculptor and author Máret Ánne Sara and visual artist Anders Sunna) were invited to design a Sámi Pavilion at the Venice Biennale. Far from being exhaustive, this brief overview offers a partial glimpse into the impact of contemporary Sámi cultural production on mainstream society. The notion of a cultural renaissance is skewed, however, as expressed by the yoik artist and singer-songwriter Sofia Jannok.²¹ In her appropriately titled single 'Boom' (2021), she ridicules this false perception, singing 'people talk about me as a trend' and 'people talk about me as a boom', while lamenting the fact that many Swedes have no idea that Sámi song and culture stretch back thousands of years.²²

In a widely disseminated debate article from 2017, Laestadius embraces the increasing amount of Sámi cultural self-representation, but also cautions against the romanticizing idea of a renaissance.²³ She argues that it would be naive to assume that Sámi artists and cultural performers are making a comeback, when in fact their

manifold achievements have been consistently erased from history. Although cultural visibility is important and the arts offer a powerful tool to reclaim Sámi history, the results of such endeavours remain limited unless they are followed up with concrete political actions. Laestadius does not explicitly mention these, but it seems reasonable to assume that she has in mind the missing ratification of ILO 169 and the long-delayed launch of a national truth commission.²⁴ Furthermore, Laestadius maintains, the success of individual artists must not detract from the emotional scars and the psycho-social burden that takes a toll on many young Sámi: 'We have borne a collective shame that the state has placed upon us and now it is your turn to bear a collective responsibility to ensure that no more young Sámi take their own lives because they are constantly struggling with structural and ethnic discrimination.'²⁵ Laestadius here alludes to a report from 2016 that studied the psycho-social health of Sámi people. The findings exposed how the suicide rate among young Sámi people and among reindeer herders in particular was drastically higher when compared to the majoritarian Swedish population. The report suggested that this was often due to a combination of ethnic discrimination; lack of faith in the Swedish-administered healthcare system; and the pressures on reindeer husbandry caused by territorial exploitations, predators and climate changes.²⁶

Sámi theatre as a driving cultural engine

In an interview, the artistic director of Giron Sámi Teáhter, Åsa Simma, ponders the potentially positive side effects of majoritarian society's sudden interest in Sámi culture and narratives:

I think this boom is very important, very good, and it is very important that we Sámi understand that we should use this moment in time, and we should use it constructively. We should not spend too much time complaining, but we should come offering gifts; that is, how we can exist in society.²⁷

Simma is a pioneering performing and yoik artist who received her education at the avant-garde Tuukkaq Teatret in Denmark and, since the early 1980s, has worked as an actor, dramaturg and scriptwriter across Sápmi, as well as in Greenland and Canada. Since her appointment as artistic director in 2015, Simma has manifested her ambitions to make Giron Sámi Teáhter a key agent in the Sámi decolonial struggle by commissioning politically charged plays, training young Sámi performing artists and promoting Sámi languages onstage.²⁸

When planning its repertoire, the creative team actively reaches out to Sámi communities in order to stage plays that are relevant and intelligible to Sámi society. The theatre also runs a mentorship programme designed for young Sámi actors, directors, dramaturges, playwrights and technicians, and collaborates with the Tjállegohte author centre, located in Jokkmokk/Jáhkámáhkke. Tjállegohte seeks to spread knowledge of Sámi literature by reaching out to libraries and schools and organizes workshops for young authors aiming to apply for scholarships and contact potential publishers.²⁹ This collaboration between a theatre and a literary centre is

most organic, since oral culture (including storytelling, mythology and yoik) constitutes a central pillar of Sámi history and precedes the introduction of written language by Lutheran missionaries by centuries.³⁰

Sápmi stretches across four nation states and it is thus not surprising that Giron Sámi Teáhter works in a transnational way across the geopolitical borders implemented by Norway, Sweden, Finland and Russia. Many members of the creative team have ties to the previously mentioned Beaivváš Sámi Našunálateáhter or the Áarjelhsaemien Teatere/Southern Sámi Theatre in the Norwegian part of Sápmi.³¹ Furthermore, the company draws on its rich network among Indigenous cultural organizations in North America, Greenland, Australia and New Zealand to create performances from a global Indigenous perspective. It also organizes public lectures and seminars, not least when it tours southern Sweden and performs for high-school students. During the national tour with *Ædnan*, journalist Elin Anna Labba accompanied the ensemble and explained to audiences how the Swedish government, in the early twentieth century, had administered a process that coerced hundreds of families and tens of thousands of reindeer to move southwards and find new pastures. These forced displacements not only uprooted the affected families, but also led to conflicts with other Sámi communities who were forced to share their pastures.³²

Ædnan onstage

Written in the style of an epic poem, Linnea Axelsson's *Ædnan* stretches over 750 pages. Focusing on two families and three generations, Axelsson's free verses paint an ambitious picture of Sámi history from the early twentieth century to the present. The book is divided into three sections. Part I follows the reindeer herders Ristin and Ber-Joná and, similar to a creation myth, starts with the birth of their two sons, both of whom are struck by tragedy. Aslat dies as a boy after a tragic fall from a cliff and Nila is born with a cognitive disability. Representatives of the Swedish state want to place Nila in a mental institution, which Ristin opposes vehemently. Both mother and son are also subjected to racial biological procedures. When Norway closes its border to Sweden, the family have to move southwards. Eventually, their entire reindeer herd drown, forcing Ristin and Ber-Joná to give up their nomadic lifestyle and move into an apartment. Part II is largely set in the 1970s and follows a generation of Sámi that the Swedish state has tried to assimilate. Lise, who as a child attended a residential Nomad school and no longer speaks Sámi, works as a cleaning lady in one of the hydroelectric power plants that have dammed rivers all over Sápmi. This industrialization process has destroyed nature, flooded sacred sites (*siedi*) and worsened the conditions for fishing and reindeer husbandry.³³ Part III stretches from the late twentieth century to the present. Lise's daughter Sandra is a representative for a young generation of Sámi activists who are proudly reclaiming their language and cultural identity through political activism, education and cultural projects. Sandra takes part in protests against the exploitation of Sámi territories and resources and follows the highly publicized Girjas trial, in which a Sámi village successfully sued the state for intruding upon traditional hunting and fishing grounds, with great interest.³⁴

The book received rave reviews and, as soon as Simma had read it, she reached out to Axelsson to secure the rights for a stage production and suggested the idea of a co-production with the Swedish National Touring Theatre Riksteatern. Riksteatern's managing director, Dritëro Kasapi, was immediately enthusiastic about the proposal and, in an interview, emphasized the potential of theatre to convey historical blind spots, such as the forced displacements, to majoritarian society in a meaningful way:

I really think that this history is not covered sufficiently by the history books. But even if it was, it would be difficult to relate to this history if the experience is not portrayed in an artistic way. To integrate this history into our joint narrative in Sweden, it must be staged and embodied artistically.³⁵

An extended part of the rehearsal process took place in Kiruna/Giron, as opposed to one of the large warehouses in a suburb of Stockholm where Riksteatern usually prepares its productions. Rehearsing in Sápmi added an additional level of cultural and historical comprehension for the Swedish members of the production team, who met with Sámi knowledge holders during the preparation process. Simma explains: 'I took the entire production team to Vaisaluokta to where Linnea's family was relocated, to the place of Linnea's grandmother's *goahti* [traditional Sámi hut or tent]. They talked to ordinary Sámi, over coffee and food, about what the forced displacements had entailed.'³⁶ Playwright Irena Kraus and director Malin Stenberg, who in collaboration adapted Axelsson's book for the stage, confirm this: 'That trip left a huge impression, not only the people we met. We travelled with this small group and spent so much time with each other and absorbed both nature and history.'³⁷

The cast consisted of three Sámi actors (Kristin Solberg, Lene Cecilia Sparrok and Paul Ol Jona Utsi) and three Swedish actors (Per Burell, Nina Fex and Vincent Grahl). *Æednan* opened on 4 September 2020 at Orienteatern in Stockholm before going on a tour that was cut short due to COVID-19 but eventually resumed in February 2022. In their adaptation, Stenberg and Kraus remained faithful to Axelsson's epic poem, but made extensive cuts, merged some characters and deleted others to make the work feasible for the stage. In an interview, they explain: 'We quickly decided on the female perspective and to divide the dramatization into three parts, that we would follow Ristin, Lise and Sandra, that we would follow three generations of women through three eras.'³⁸

The production began with a scratchy recording of a young woman yoiking which the musician and composer Magnus Stinnerbom had located in the archives of Sveriges Radio and which immediately anchored the story in a Sámi context. Stenberg used these recordings as recurring motifs to further enhance the female perspective, denote transitions between scenes and break up the text-heavy parts of the play. Stinnerbom laid contemporary electronic beats and newly composed melody lines on top of the timeworn and slightly distorted tapes, which allowed the actors to perform a rhythmic choreography.

Stenberg approached the entire *mise en scène* as a 'choral work', which affected every aspect of the production. The goal was not to create a realistic production in which each actor played one specific character. The verses were instead divided among the six performers who delivered them directly to the audience, which created the effect of a collective choir of voices that, piece by piece, assembled a testimony of

the multiple traumas that the Sámi people have been subjected to over the last 120 years. The actor and musician Paul Ol Jona Utsi, who has been affiliated with Giron Sámi Teáhter since 2013, explains: 'Many times, we are not in character, but in an intermediate position. We are actors, but not entirely.' Utsi further describes how the director encouraged this individualized approach to the choral work: 'We did not have to be in sync with one another and speak in the exact same way. So we tried to find our own rhythm, react to each other and offer the subtext of what we wanted to convey.'³⁹

Apart from six rectangular cubes made of grey-painted wood which the actors could move and arrange into three-dimensional geometric formations, the set, designed by Helga Bumsch, was completely naked (Fig. 1). The various formations served to symbolize the rocks on the Atlantic coast where Ristin and Ber-Joná used to spend the summer grazing period, a hiding place for Lise and the scared children in the Nomad school or the courtroom during the Girjas trial which Sandra attended. The constant shifting of the cubes lent the production a distinct rhythm and allowed for a variety of movements. The characters could sit on, lean against, climb up on or take cover behind them (Fig. 2). This dynamic was further enhanced by a choreography of abstract rhythmic gestures that were regularly repeated, reminiscent of Meyerholdian biomechanics and its celebration of working-class culture (Fig. 3). An enthusiastic reviewer applauded Dorte Olesen's choreography which had 'its special vocabulary for hard-working women' and emphasized 'their power and sorrow in the dance movements'.⁴⁰ Kraus and Stenberg purposefully avoided turning the play into a 'museum piece' with historically accurate costumes,⁴¹ hence the actors wore loose black



FIG. 1. Nina Fex, Paul Ol Jona Utsi, Vincent Grahl, Kristin Solberg, Per Burell and Lene Cecilia Sparrok in *Ædnan*. Photograph by Sören Vilks. © Giron Sámi Teáhter & Riksteatern.



FIG. 2. Lene Cecilia Sparrok, Nina Fex and Kristin Solberg in *Ædnan*. Photograph by Sören Vilks. © Giron Sámi Teáhter & Riksteatern.

trousers and red shirts, also created by Bumsch, that allowed for greater freedom of movement. Only the metallic buttons on the male characters' vests and the stylized, coloured ribbons on the shirts were reminiscent of traditional Sámi accessories.

Loss of land and language

The Sámi literature scholar Harald Gaski summarizes the often broken link between Sámi language and identity:

Language ... demonstrates our belonging to culture, geography, social class and level of cultivation, or cultural sophistication. For a lot of people, not knowing one's own



FIG. 3. Front to back: Nina Fex, Lene Cecilia Sparrok and Kristin Solberg in *Ædnan*. Photograph by Sören Vilks. © Giron Sámi Teáhter & Riksteatern.

indigenous language feels like a big loss and imperfection, and thus contributes to the psychological aspect of the identity question connected to language competence.⁴²

Axelsson's book – some of whose main characters embody the loss of language – was published in Swedish, but the stage production incorporated extended parts in Northern and Lule Sámi, with a Swedish translation projected onto the backdrop. 'My task is to develop the Sámi language, just as the Dramaten [the Royal Dramatic Theatre in Stockholm] has the task to develop the Swedish language. So sometimes I have to become a real language cop', Simma explains.⁴³ Her insistence on incorporating Sámi into the production offered another dimension to its decolonial agenda. Riksteatern's Kasapi welcomed this decision:

I believe that the presence of Sámi language in the public sphere is very important, because the language and the culture that it represents should form part of our common spaces ... I'd rather the audience understood less and the language got more space, than the other way around.⁴⁴

Kraus and Stenberg managed to organically accommodate these changes in the script. Sámi took over during emotionally heavy moments, such as when Ristin lost her son Aslat and the authorities threatened to take his brother Nila away from her. The pain felt in those moments could only be expressed in Sámi. Similarly, the descriptions of nature and the Lule river that was dammed repeatedly by the power company Vattenfall were all conveyed in Sámi. A scene towards the end of the play further



FIG. 4. Sitting: Nina Fex, Lene Cecilia Sparrok and Kristin Solberg; standing: Paul Ol Jona Utsi, Vincent Grahl and Per Burell in *Ædnan*. Photograph by Sören Vilks. © Giron Sámi Teáhter & Riksteatern.

highlighted the importance of language. To the sound of a funeral melody and accompanied by rhythmic movements made by the male characters in the background, Ristin, Lise and Sandra lamented how the assimilationist forces of the Nomad schools had resulted in the loss of Sámi languages. As they spoke, a Northern Sámi translation of selected verses from Axelsson's book was projected, as if written by an invisible hand, onto a blackboard on the rear wall of the stage (Fig. 4):

Sámi had been sleeping
for a long time in the body
out of shame
in obedience
...
How does a language heal
You have to start somewhere
Find your way letter by letter
Word by word
All the way to the roots
At some point
another voice
grows
But it will be
another

Not the same
 for that voice
 did not become
 The one that's called
 the mother tongue⁴⁵

This visually captivating moment exemplified how many contemporary Sámi people are going back to school to reclaim their own language. Aware of the complexity of *Ædnan*, which illuminates how the losses of land, identity, language and culture through assimilationist mechanisms are connected, Stenberg points out: 'I felt that this was a key scene that really had to viscerally touch the audience.'⁴⁶

Literature scholar Anne Heith notes how the dislocation from their land – regardless of whether the reasons for this were the closure of national borders or the flooding caused by the damming of lakes and rivers – resulted in a loss of identity for many Sámi. She argues: 'From the vantage point of an ontology in which humans are connected to nature and the Earth, which are experienced as sentient beings, repeated forced displacements are a violation.'⁴⁷ In a similar argument, Indigenous scholars Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang criticize the 'profound epistemic, ontological, cosmological violence' committed by the colonial appropriation of Indigenous territories and the ensuing spiritual alienation.⁴⁸ Sovereignty over land and resources is a key goal in the struggle for Sámi self-determination, as is the need to regenerate and bolster cultural expressions, traditions and languages. When it comes to the revitalization of language and culture, the performing arts play a key role. As demonstrated by *Ædnan*, the decolonial labour performed by Giron Sámi Teáhter not only addresses the right to Sámi self-determination, but also takes estrangement from land, language and culture into consideration, with a pronounced Indigenous perspective.

Sámi philosophies are characterized by holistic thinking and the importance of mutually sustained relationships, be it between humans or between humans and the environment. Rauna Kuokkanen explains:

Central to this perception is that the world as a whole comprises an infinite web of relationships, which extend and are incorporated into the entire social condition of the individual. Social ties apply to everyone and everything, including the land, which is considered a living, conscious entity.⁴⁹

In order to understand the richness and complexity of Sámi performance, it is crucial to take this holistic thinking into consideration. *Ædnan* means 'land' and 'earth' in Northern Sámi, but is also etymologically related to the words for 'river' and 'mother', which cleverly hints at how humans and nature are interconnected.⁵⁰ Both the book and the stage production articulate a world view that is remarkably different from the Western-centric drive for economic growth and profit, emphasize humanity's dependence on nature and the environment, and foster mutual relationships, not only between Sámi communities, but also between the Sámi and majoritarian Swedes. The problem, however, is the palpable power imbalances that prevent a genuinely reciprocal commitment and responsibility. Majoritarian society is undeniably becoming more invested in Sámi arts, but this does not necessarily result in adequate or responsible funding.

Financial security and national respect

Sámi organizations continuously draw attention to the lack of more committed and consistent financial support from the Ministry of Culture and the Swedish Arts Council.⁵¹ A couple of days before the Sámi national holiday on 6 February 2020, the network Viermie K, which brings together key agents of the cultural industries across Sápmi, distributed an open letter, co-signed by Simma, to the Swedish media to emphasize the need for Sámi cultural centres, libraries and museums. The demand for cultural self-determination also highlighted the importance of a national theatre to preserve, teach, spread and develop Sámi culture, language, narratives and history: 'We need our own national theatre that can reach all of Sápmi and Sweden with stories that create knowledge, understanding and cohesion.'⁵² Simma accurately summarizes the value of a national theatre in an interview:

We already have a national assignment, we already carry out a national assignment, which is quite similar to Riksteatern, but in a smaller way. We are funded by two regions, two municipalities and the Ministry of Culture via the Sámi Parliament ... We constantly fall between different chairs, when we have so many financiers. Give us the status we already have ... If we receive national status, the little money we ask for is not even close to what the Dramaten gets and yet we tour much more than the Dramaten.⁵³

Giron Sámi Teáhter's mandate, which has a pedagogical, political and artistic dimension, is 'to carry out professional performing arts based on the Sámi culture and identity and to promote the Sámi languages by raising current issues'.⁵⁴ In practical terms, this means that the productions reach both adult and young audiences, contain extended sections in one or several Sámi languages and stimulate public debates of importance to Sámi communities, all of which amounts to a tremendously ambitious undertaking. The theatre is unique since its productions not only tour across Sweden, but also cater to audiences in the Norwegian and Finnish parts of Sápmi (and, occasionally, Greenland).⁵⁵ As such, it de facto constitutes the most transnational theatre in Sweden. What would it entail for Sweden to give the status of a fully state-financed national theatre to a company that works with an Indigenous perspective and whose productions vigorously criticize Swedish settler colonialism?

Theatre scholars have argued that the process of granting a theatre the status of a national institution is politically and ideologically motivated.⁵⁶ King Gustavus III founded the Royal Opera and the Royal Dramatic Theatre in 1773 and 1788 respectively to glorify the nation and its history and to lend Swedish performing arts a lustre comparable to other European cultural centres. In 1933, to manifest its commitment to the labour movement and the decentralization of cultural life, the first Social Democratic government initiated the Riksteatern touring company, which reaches out to audiences outside urban centres. Unga Klara, founded in 1975 in Stockholm by the feminist director Suzanne Osten, who is a leading figure in the field of children's and young people's theatre, was granted the status of a national theatre in 2018, marked by a significant increase of the company's yearly allotted budget. The

government's proposition (drafted after an agreement between the Social Democrats, the Green Party and the Left Party) motivated its decision by highlighting how Unga Klara's 'long-standing pioneering work with theatre for children and young people makes the theatre an institution of national interest'.⁵⁷

The need for a Sámi National Theatre and stable financing go hand in hand, but at issue is also the political question whether Sámi performance constitutes a matter of *national interest* – which, based on only constitutional law, which as of 2011 recognizes the Sámi as a people (*ett folk*), it should.⁵⁸ This designation, as Linda Tuhiwai Smith reminds us, is important because 'it is peoples who are recognized in international law as having the right to self-determination'.⁵⁹ It is precisely with reference to the Constitution that one might justifiably ask why majoritarian society is spoiled with four national theatres and yet no such equivalent exists for the Sámi people, at least in the Swedish part of Sápmi, even though there have been multiple attempts to create one in the last three decades.

In a report commissioned by the municipality of Kiruna/Giron in 1990, Harriet Nordlund, the co-founder of the world's first Sámi ensemble, Dálvadis, in 1971, lamented how economic insecurity had a negative impact on both long-term planning and everyday activities for Sámi performing arts. She suggested that the state take financial responsibility and cover all expenses, including salaries and production costs, with the argument that Sámi performance 'must be regarded as a matter of national interest'.⁶⁰ After Dálvadis dissolved in the early 1990s due to economic pressures, a group of performing artists founded Föreningen Samisk Teater, the Association for Sámi Theatre, a non-profit organization that coordinated a variety of freelance projects. Some of these projects were financed with regional funding and sometimes even EU grants. The association's administrative base was located in Kiruna/Giron, but it did not have its own theatre. In January 1994, a seminar was organized in Kiruna/Giron to discuss strategies to secure a yearly grant from the Swedish Arts Council and a permanent playhouse. This seminar took place less than a year after Beaivváš Sámi Teáhter in Kautokeino/Guovdageaidnu had become recognized as Norway's national theatre for Sámi performance and thus entirely subsidized by the Norwegian government (and, as of 2002, also by the Sámi Parliament of Norway).⁶¹

Initially, discussions in March 1997 between the Association Sámi Theatre, the Sámi Parliament and the Ministry of Culture seemed promising, as then cultural minister Marita Ulvskog officially invited the Sámi Parliament to examine the requirements for establishing a Sámi institutional theatre – provided the state was not required to act as the responsible authority (*huvudman*).⁶² In collaboration with a reference group, then managing director Jens Klemet Stueng produced and submitted an official report to the Sámi Parliament, which in turn forwarded it to the Ministry of Culture in March 1998.⁶³ The report argued for the necessity of a publicly funded Sámi theatre with a national status and highlighted the performing arts' potential to transmit cultural knowledge and linguistic traditions across Sápmi. Stueng and his advisory board underlined the need to conceptualize Sámi performance from a transnational angle and pointed out its contributions to the revival of previously suppressed cultural traditions such as yoik, shamanic rituals and Indigenous mythology.

He also suggested taking the nomadic legacies of Sámi culture into account by creating satellite stages across several locations in Sápmi. Furthermore, he emphasized the employment opportunities for Sámi artists, the benefits of outreach efforts to schools and, not least, the theatre's ability to function as 'a social forum where audiences can experience, narrate and discuss Sámi language, culture and identity'.⁶⁴

Stueng's team's hopes, however, were partially dashed in December 1999. Although the Ministry of Culture augmented its yearly grant from 1.5 million to 5.5 million Swedish kronor, the Sámi Theatre fell victim to political conflict. The Sámi Parliament, which is at once a democratically elected congregation and a government agency that has to implement political decisions made by the Riksdag in Stockholm, decided to withhold a substantial part of the earmarked grant and distribute the money to other, equally underfunded, cultural organizations.⁶⁵ As a result, several planned productions needed to be cancelled at short notice. Eventually, the conflict was resolved and a permanent theatre with its administrative centre based in Kiruna/Giron and a now defunct satellite stage in Tärnaby/Dearna became reality.⁶⁶ This episode revealed how vulnerable the Sámi Theatre was, being caught between several middlemen and without direct communication with or a mandate from the Swedish Arts Council.

In 2009, the theatre changed its name to Giron Sámi Teáhter. Since then, a number of additional reports have been commissioned by the Sámi Parliament to investigate future organizational models, with all them reaching the conclusion that the theatre suffers from a lack of consistent financing and responsible authority.⁶⁷ Since 1999, Giron Sámi Teáhter has been allocated a yearly operating grant from the Swedish Arts Council, which is distributed by the Sámi Parliament. Disregarding inflation, the operating grant has only marginally increased to six million Swedish kronor (c. €600,000) in the last two decades. In addition, the two most northern regions (Norrbotten and Västerbotten) and two municipalities (Kiruna/Giron and Storuman/Luspie) contribute with important financing, which means that the theatre's operating yearly budget is around eight million kronor (c. €800,000).⁶⁸ To function as a national institution would require 25 million kronor (c. €2.5 million) per year – which would be below the budget of a Swedish regional theatre.⁶⁹

A central problem is that Giron Sámi Teáhter is not an independent cultural institution, but a joint initiative by several administrative agents that include the Sámi Parliament, the Ministry of Culture and, at some point, even the Ministry of Rural Affairs in addition to regional and municipal agencies. A report from 2011 succinctly identifies and summarizes the financial and organizational drawbacks of such an arrangement:

The grant allocated by the state is money that, earmarked every year, comes from the Ministry of Culture and is funnelled to the theatre via the Sámi Parliament. Giron Sámi Teáhter's mission has been devised in regulatory letters by the Ministry of Rural Affairs and needs to coexist with issues pertaining to lynx, wolverine and wolf, language centres and the reindeer industry's borders with Norway and more.⁷⁰

For a long time, Giron Sámi Teáhter has thus held a hybrid status by being a distinct theatre company with a concrete mandate and, on the other hand, being classified as a part of broader northern regional and cultural policies, which puts it in a precarious

position. The consequences, including the lack of direct communication with the Swedish Arts Council and the nearly impossible challenge of covering salaries, production and touring costs, have been lamented like a mantra by the various managing directors over the decades.⁷¹ Since 2016, the Ministry of Culture has issued the letters regulating the state support for Sámi culture, including Giron Sámi Teáhter, but the unresolved crux remains that many locally and regionally specific interests and expectations continue to be involved. As legitimate as these might be, they cause a hindrance when the theatre is working on both a national and a transnational level to promote Sámi languages and culture.

In 2015, the Sámi Parliament and Giron Sámi Teáhter consolidated their efforts to work towards the establishment of a Sámi national theatre, a goal that is today explicitly articulated in the cultural policy documents drafted by the Sámi Parliament.⁷² In 2017, the Swedish Arts Council allotted a grant for a three-year pilot project to further investigate these possibilities. In December 2019, both the employers and the industry alliance Swedish Performing Arts Association (Svensk Scenkonst) and the national organization for regional performing arts (Länsteatrarna) officially endorsed these efforts, thus signalling that they were not concerned about any potentially competing interests.⁷³

In March 2020, the board of Giron Sámi Teáhter presented the collected data of the pilot study, which included a detailed breakdown of the artistic endeavours, administrative organization and required budget of a future national theatre.⁷⁴ Financial stability would allow the company to double the number of yearly productions to two for adult and two for young audiences, as well as to extend the touring schedules. The area that Giron Sámi Teáhter covers in the Swedish part of Sápmi alone covers 225,000 square kilometres, which has a significant impact on touring expenses. Currently, Giron Sámi Teáhter can only afford to employ four full-time staff members (an artistic director, an administrator, a producer and a technician) and relies on freelance artists for most of its productions, which affects long-term planning. Permanent contracts would create continuity and nurture young talent (including directors, dramaturges and actors, as well as set designers, sound and light technicians and producers), which in turn would benefit the promotion of Sámi languages. Needless to say, the company's productions for children and young audiences are also of crucial pedagogical and cultural importance.

Giron Sámi Teáhter's plans for a national theatre also take into consideration the nomadic aspects of Sámi history. Instead of advocating for one permanent home, it envisions a continuous collaboration with six different towns, all of which house important Sámi cultural centres or museums.⁷⁵ The 2020 report repeatedly emphasizes the performing arts' potential to be 'a driving agent in the public debate and a driving engine for the entire Sámi culture'.⁷⁶ As Giron Sámi Teáhter has proven on several occasions, its productions distinguish themselves by high artistic quality. Its educational outreach efforts create community bonds and stimulate a dialogue between Sámi and Swedish society. Plays like *Ædnan* stage colonial abuses, help rediscover suppressed cultural legacies, expose young people to Sámi languages and, not least, form part of a process of self-determination that allows the Sámi to be creative agents on their own terms. Michael Lindblad, chairperson of the board,

succinctly summarizes the need for a Sámi National Theatre: 'It is important to build an infrastructure. To own our story, to own our agenda, to write our future. It is extremely important. That's where Sámi theatre functions as an engine and a flagship.'⁷⁷

Conclusion

On 20 September 2021, the hopes for a Sámi National Theatre were once again put on hold when the Swedish government presented its yearly budget to the Riksdag. It soon became apparent that the state funding allotted to Giron Sámi Teáhter was increased by exactly zero Swedish kronor.⁷⁸ The fact that, after thirty years, the theatre remains a marginalized institution in the eyes of the state and thus financially vulnerable illustrates the precarity of Sámi performance cultures – and the Sámi people in general – in Sweden.

The rejection seems at odds with some of the progressive developments that have unfolded over the last decade. The main impediment, I suggest, is political reluctance. The Swedish state remains highly complicit in the exploitation of natural resources in Sápmi, for example by handing out business licences to transnational companies such as Beowulf Mining, which generate jobs and taxes.⁷⁹ The conflict about a potential future iron ore mine in Kallak/Gállok remains unresolved, in spite of both national and international protests. As recently as November 2021, the Social Democratic minister for business, industry and innovation, Karl-Petter Thorwaldsson, outlined his minority government's ambition to expand the mining projects in Sápmi and proudly proclaimed that 'we Social Democrats love mines',⁸⁰ a statement that tripled the stock market value of Beowulf Mining.⁸¹ Also worth pointing out is the fact that the former Social Democratic prime minister Göran Persson is the chairperson of the board of the state-owned mining company LKAB in Kiruna/Giron.

This barely disguised colonial attitude raises the justified question to what extent a Swedish government might actually be interested in endorsing a theatre that protests the manifold abuses against the Sámi people committed over centuries by state authorities and supported by the Church of Sweden and the medical establishment. The impact of Sámi cultural production, including theatre, in the last decade suggests that majoritarian Swedes are willing to listen, learn and, hopefully, take responsibility for the country's settler colonial past and present. But what about the state? Are the Sámi only an inconvenience in the quest for economic growth and industrial exploitation? On the day Giron Sámi Teáhter is officially proclaimed the Sámi National Theatre, Sweden will have taken a crucial step towards recognizing Sámi culture as equal to Swedish culture, as enshrined by the Constitution. In the long term, this endorsement and financial commitment might also represent a pro-active step towards initiating a genuine conversation with Sámi people and Sámi artists about truth and reconciliation.

NOTES

- 1 I would like to extend my gratitude and respect to Åsa Simma for her generous spirit and ethical guidance, and for sharing her rich knowledge. I am indebted to Dritëro Kasapi, Irena Kraus, Malin Stenberg and Paul Ol Jona Utsi, who graciously allowed me to interview them, and to the artists and staff

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- 2 Sápmi stretches across the northern parts of Norway, Sweden and Finland all the way to the Kola Peninsula in Russia. Out of an estimated total of 80,000 to 100,000 Sámi people, roughly 20,000 to 40,000 live in the Swedish part of Sápmi. See 'Antalet samer i Sápmi', at <http://samer.se/samernaisiffror> (accessed 18 September 2020).
- 3 Antje Jackelén, 'Speech of Apology', Svenska kyrkan, 24 November 2021, at www.svenskakyrkan.se/samiska/speech-of-apology (accessed 30 November 2021).
- 4 Government Offices of Sweden, 'Sanningskommission för det samiska folket', 3 November 2021, at www.regeringen.se/pressmeddelanden/2021/11/sanningskommission-for-det-samiska-folket/ (accessed 10 November 2021). All translations from Swedish are mine.
- 5 Gabriel Kuhn, *Liberating Sápmi: Indigenous Resistance in Europe's Far North* (Oakland: PM Press, 2020), p. vii.
- 6 In addition to offering a wide array of courses in Sámi languages, history and cultural studies, the university distinguishes itself as a leading voice through two research units, whose studies range from the detrimental effects of corporate industrialization on reindeer herding and the psycho-social health of the Sámi to Indigenous cultural heritage and environmental change in the circumpolar North. See Várdduo – Centre for Sámi Research, at www.umu.se/en/vardduo-centre-for-sami-research; Arcum – Arctic Centre at www.umu.se/en/arctic-centre.
- 7 The two most influential scholarly volumes on Swedish theatre history ignore Sámi performance entirely: Tomas Forser, ed., *Ny svensk teaterhistoria*, 3 vols. (Hedemora: Gidlunds, 2007); Lena Hammergren, Karin Helander, Tiina Rosenberg and Willmar Sauter, eds., *Teater i Sverige* (Hedemora: Gidlunds, 2004).
- 8 Special issue of *Spillerom*, 1–4 (1998), *Teater som uttrykk for kultur og identitet hos arktiske urfolk*, on Arctic performance, edited by Jon Nygaard.
- 9 Knut Ove Arntzen, 'Sámi and Indigenous Theatre: The Nomadic Perspective and the Notion of a Spiral Dramaturgy', *TRANS: Internet Journal for Cultural Studies*, 19 (2016), at www.inst.at/trans/19/sami-and-indigenous-theatre; Arntzen, 'Arctic Drama to Sámi Theatre – Cultural Clashes Towards Decolonisation: In Shared Dialogic Spaces', *Art History & Criticism / Meno istorija ir kritika*, 17 (2021), pp. 93–100.
- 10 Veli-Pekka Lehtola, 'Beaivváš Sámi Teáhter: Muitaleaddjiid árbbolážžan – Tarinankertojien perillisenä – As an Heir of Storytellers', in Veli-Pekka Lehtola and Sigga-Marja Magga, eds., *Beaivváš: Beaivváš Sámi Našunálateáhter* (Inari: SIIDA, 2011), pp. 7–19; Lehtola, 'Staging Sami Identities: The Roles of Modern Sami Theatre in a Multicultural Context – The Case of Beaivváš Teáhter', in Kajsa Andersson, ed., *L'image du Sápmi: Études comparées* (Örebro: Örebro University, 2009), pp. 436–58.
- 11 Special issue of *Peripeti: tidsskrift for dramaturgiske studier*, 2019, on 'Grønlands Teaterhistorie – på vej', ed. Susanne Andreasen, Knut Ove Arntzen, Annelis Kuhlmann and Birgit Kleist Pedersen.
- 12 Rauna Johanna Kuokkanen, *Reshaping the University: Responsibility, Indigenous Epistemes, and the Logic of the Gift* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2007), p. 67.
- 13 In 1971, the playwright, actor and director Harriet Nordlund and the actor and visual artist Maj-Doris Rimpi founded the first professional Sámi theatre ensemble, Dálvadis, whose productions were rooted in Sámi cultural traditions and expressions, while simultaneously protesting the industrial exploitation of Sámi territories. Cecilia Persson, *Steget mellan gammalt och nytt: En analys av två av Dálvadisteaterns föreställningar* (Umeå: Svenska Samernas Riksförbund, 1997).
- 14 Sámediggi, 'Forskningspolitisk strategi', 2021, at www.sametinget.se/156606 (accessed 23 March 2021).
- 15 Moa Sandström, 'Dekoloniseringskonst: Artivism i 2010-talets Sápmi', PhD dissertation, Umeå University, 2020; see also Svein Aamold, Elin Haugdal and Ulla Angkjær Jørgensen, eds., *Sámi Arts and Aesthetics: Contemporary Perspectives* (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 2017); Marianne Liliequist and Coppélie Cocq, eds., *Samisk kamp: Kulturförmedling och rättviserörelse* (Umeå: H:ström, 2017).

- 16 Amanda Kernell (dir.), *Sameblod* (Nordisk Film Production Sverige AB, 2016).
- 17 Instigated by the 1913 Nomad School Act, *nomadskolor* were nationally regulated boarding schools, either mobile or permanent, which the Lutheran Church of Sweden administered. They were designed to separate the children of nomadic reindeer-herding Sámi from those of settled Sámi, with the latter being sent to regular municipal schools in an attempt to assimilate them into Swedish society. Nomad schools, which were reformed as late as the 1960s, offered the children of reindeer-herding Sámi only a grade-six education, a discriminatory policy that was motivated by a combination of paternalistic, social Darwinist and racial biological arguments that represented the Sámi as inferior and in need of saving from Western civilization. Separated from their families for extended periods of time, children were prohibited to speak Sámi and subjected to shaming, humiliation and corporal punishment by teachers and school staff. Patrik Lantto, 'Från folkspillra till erkänt urfolk: Svensk samepolitik från 1800-tal till i dag', in Kajsa Anderson, ed., *Sápmi i ord och bild I* (On Line Förlag, 2015), pp. 58–83; Daniel Lindmark and Olle Sundström, eds., *De historiska relationerna mellan Svenska kyrkan och samerna: En vetenskaplig antologi. Skellefteå: Artos & Norma* (2016), at www.svenskakyrkan.se/samiska/vitboken (accessed 20 April 2022); Kaisa Huuva and Ellacarin Blind, eds., 'När jag var åtta år lämnade jag mitt hem och jag har ännu inte kommit tillbaka': *Minnesbilder från samernas skoltid* (Stockholm: Verbum, 2016), at www.svenskakyrkan.se/samiska/nomadskoleboken (accessed 30 April 2022).
- 18 Ann-Helén Laestadius, *Tio över ett* (Stockholm: Rabén & Sjögren, 2016).
- 19 Linnéa Axelsson, *Ædnan: Epos* (Stockholm: Bonniers, 2018).
- 20 Elin Anna Labba, *Herrarna satte oss hit: Om tvångsflyttningarna i Sverige* (Stockholm: Norstedts, 2020).
- 21 Yoik (Northern Sámi: *luohiti*; Southern Sámi: *vuelie*) is the traditional Sámi song.
- 22 Sofia Jannok, 'Boom', *LÁVVU* (Gällivare/Jiellevárri: Song to Arvas, 2021). For a study of the history of Sámi oral and written culture see Harald Gaski, ed., *Myths, Tales, and Poetry from Four Centuries of Sámi Literature* (Karasjok: ČálliidLágádus, 2020).
- 23 Ann-Helén Laestadius, 'Sápmi blöder fortfarande', *Svenska Dagbladet*, 25 February 2017.
- 24 In 2020, a preliminary process for a national truth commission was initiated when the Swedish government granted some funding to the Sámi Parliament to investigate the need for such a commission among the Sámi population. Within a year, the Sámi Parliament responded with a detailed report about the colonial abuses that necessitate a truth commission. Marie Enoksson, 'Preparations before a Truth Commission on the Violations of the Sami People by the Swedish State' (Kiruna/Giron: Sámediggi, 2021), at www.sametinget.se/160524 (accessed 19 January 2022).
- 25 Laestadius, 'Sápmi blöder fortfarande', 2017.
- 26 Petter Stoor, 'Kunskapssammanställning om samers psykosociala ohälsa' (Kiruna/Giron: Sámediggi, 2016), at www.sametinget.se/rapport_psykosocial_ohalsa (accessed 25 May 2020).
- 27 Åsa Simma, personal interview, 12 April 2021.
- 28 Out of nine different Sámi languages, five are spoken in the Swedish part of Sápmi: Northern Sámi, Southern Sámi, Lule Sámi, Pite Sámi and Ume Sámi. The Minority Language Act from 2000, and revised in 2010, identifies Sámi as an official minority language in Sweden.
- 29 Tjällegohte: Samiskt författarcentrum, at www.tjallegohte.se.
- 30 Harald Gaski, 'The Secretive Text: Yoik Lyrics as Literature and Tradition', *Nordlit*, 3, 3 (1999), pp. 3–27; Gaski, 'Song, Poetry and Images in Writing: Sami Literature', *Nordlit*, 27 (2011), pp. 33–54; Rauna Kuokkanen, 'Borders Crossings, Pathfinders and New Visions: The Role of Sámi Literature in Contemporary Society', *Nordlit*, 15 (2004), pp. 91–103; Krister Stoor, 'Juoiganmuitalusat - jojkberättelser: en studie av jojkens narrativa egenskaper', PhD dissertation, Umeå University, 2007.
- 31 While the Sámi theatre company Rávgoš in the Finnish part of Sápmi is now defunct, the Rovaniemi Theatre also caters to Sámi audiences. Thanks to the efforts of choreographer Ola Stinnerbom and scholar Birgitta Stålnert, who run the Kompani Nomad dance ensemble, Sámi dance is being revived and has been traced back to the ritual ceremonies performed by shamans (*noaidi*). Birgitta Stålnert, *Jakten på*

- den försvunna samiska dansen* (Umeå: Umeå University, 2011); see also Ola Stinnerbom's homepage at <https://olastinnerbom.se> (accessed 18 July 2021).
- 32 Patrik Lantto, 'The Consequences of State Intervention: Forced Relocations and Sámi Rights in Sweden, 1919–2012', *Journal of Ethnology and Folkloristics*, 8, 2 (2014), pp. 53–73. These forced displacements were also the subject of a televised documentary: Sara Omma Simma (prod.), *Tvångsflyttningar: Bággojohitin*, Sveriges Television, 2019.
- 33 Historian Åsa Össo has studied the expansion of hydroelectric power plants across Sápmi since the early twentieth century and charts the negative impact that the damming of lakes and rivers has on Sámi living conditions, territories and industries, including fishing and reindeer herding. Åsa Össo, 'Nya vatten, dunkla speglingar: Industriell kolonialism genom svensk vattenkraftutbyggnad i renskötselområdet 1910–1968', PhD dissertation, Umeå University, 2014.
- 34 The case marked a legal watershed because it went all the way up to the Supreme Court of Sweden, which in January 2020 ruled in favour of Girjas Sámi village's claim to the land from time immemorial. The trial also generated significant mass media reports that criticized the racist language used by the attorney representing the state and the palpable colonial relationships that exist to this day in Sweden. Christina Allard *et al.*, 'DN Debatt: Rasbiologiskt språkbruk i statens rättsprocess mot sameby', *Dagens Nyheter*, 11 June 2015.
- 35 Dritëro Kasapi, personal interview, 6 April 2021.
- 36 Åsa Simma, personal interview, 14 May 2021.
- 37 Irena Kraus and Malin Stenberg, personal interview, 18 May 2021.
- 38 Ibid.
- 39 Paul Ol Jona Utsi, personal interview, 23 October 2021.
- 40 Maina Arvas, "'Ædnan" är vacker, rytmisk och tungt drabbande', *Dagens Nyheter*, 5 September 2020.
- 41 Kraus and Stenberg, personal interview.
- 42 Harald Gaski, 'Indigenism and Cosmopolitanism: A Pan-Sami View of the Indigenous Perspective in Sami Culture and Research', *AlterNative: An International Journal of Indigenous Peoples*, 9, 2 (2013), pp. 113–24, here p. 115.
- 43 Simma, personal interview.
- 44 Kasapi, personal interview.
- 45 Axelsson, *Ædnan*, pp. 337 and 601–2.
- 46 Kraus and Stenberg, personal interview.
- 47 Anne Heith, *Experienced Geographies and Alternative Realities: Representing Sápmi and Meänmaa* (Gothenburg: Makadam, 2020), p. 67.
- 48 Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang, 'Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor', *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society*, 1, 1 (2012), pp. 1–40, here p. 5.
- 49 Kuokkanen, *Reshaping the University*, p. 32.
- 50 Heith, *Experienced Geographies*, pp. 65–6.
- 51 The Swedish Arts Council is a government agency that is presided over by the Ministry of Culture, administers grants to the arts sector and implements the national cultural policy determined by the Riksdag.
- 52 Viermie K, 'Samisk kultur är en svensk angelägenhet!', 4 February 2020, at <https://sameforeningen-stockholm.se/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Viermie-K-debattartikel.pdf> (accessed 13 August 2020).
- 53 Simma, personal interview.
- 54 Giron Sámi Teáhter, at www.samiteahter.org/en/about-us (accessed 9 July 2022).
- 55 For political reasons, it is harder to reach Sámi communities in the Russian part of Sápmi.
- 56 Rikard Hoogland and Willmar Sauter, 'A National Theatre Decentralized: Sweden's Three-and-a-Half National Theatres', in S. E. Wilmer, ed., *National Theatres in a Changing Europe* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), pp. 164–72.
- 57 Regeringens proposition 2017/18:1, Budgetpropositionen för 2018, 20 September 2017, at www.regeringen.se/rattsliga-dokument/proposition/2017/09/prop.-2017181 (accessed 8 March 2021), Utgiftsområde 17: Kultur, medier, trossamfund och fritid, p. 34, my emphasis.

- 58 In 1977, the Swedish Riksdag first recognized the Sámi as an Indigenous population. In 2011, the Swedish Constitution was modified to officially acknowledge the Sámi as a *people*, thus distinct from a national minority group, and therefore, at least theoretically, though not always in reality, having the right to self-determination. Sámediggi, 'Samerna i Sverige', 18 March 2020, at www.sametinget.se/samer (accessed 10 March 2021).
- 59 Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*, 2nd edn (London: Zed Books, 2012), p. 119.
- 60 Harriet Nordlund, 'Utredning om samisk teater' (Kiruna/Giron: Kiruna/Giron municipality, 1994 [1990]), p. 8, archived at the National Library of Sweden, Stockholm.
- 61 Lehtola, 'Staging Sami Identities'.
- 62 Marita Ulvskog, 'Uppdrag till Sametinget om samisk teater', letter from the Swedish Ministry of Culture to the Sámi Parliament, 13 March 1997 (Ku96/2527/ESU), archived at Sámediggi in Kiruna/Giron.
- 63 Jens Klemet Stuong, 'Samisk teater: En utredning om förutsättningarna för inrättande av en samisk teaterinstitution' (Kiruna/Giron: Sámediggi, 1997), archived at Sámediggi in Kiruna/Giron.
- 64 *Ibid.*, p. 19.
- 65 Katarina Hällgren, 'Samiska teatern: En långdragen kamp', *Samefolket*, 5 (2000), pp. 10–14; Lars Linder, 'Konsten att förnya en tradition', *Dagens Nyheter*, 1 April 2000.
- 66 Johnny Wahlström, 'Allt klart för fast samisk teater', *Västerbottens-Kuriren*, 22 June 2000.
- 67 Anders Lerner and Pia Sjögren, 'Giron Sámi Teåhter: Samiska teatern från pionjärverksamhet till etablerad kulturinstitution' (Kiruna/Giron & Tärnaby/Dearna, 2011); Elisabeth Heilmann Blind, 'Projektrapport: Strategi för den framtida samiska scenkonsten i ett samnordiskt perspektiv' (Kiruna/Giron: Sámediggi, 2013).
- 68 Erika Josefsson, 'Teaterchefen: Det måste bli en nationalscen nu', *Svenska Dagbladet*, 6 February 2022.
- 69 Giron Sámi Teåhter, 'Samisk nationalscen, samlade underlag', 6 March 2020, report archived at Giron Sámi Teåhter in Kiruna/Giron.
- 70 Lerner and Sjögren, 'Giron Sámi Teåhter', p. 6.
- 71 Eva Åström, 'Det handlar om att vinna eller försvinna', *Norrbottnens-Kuriren*, 8 November 2013.
- 72 Sámediggi, 'Kulturpolitiskt handlingsprogram 2018–2021', 23–5 May 2018, p. 18, at www.sametinget.se/106945 (accessed 26 October 2020).
- 73 Svensk scenkonst, 'Nationalscen för den svenska delen av Sápmi', 13 February 2020, at www.svenskscenkonst.se/vaara-fraagor/samisk-nationalscen (accessed 16 May 2020); Länsteatrarna, 'Giron Sámi Teåhter', February 2020, at www.lansteatrarna.se/nyheter/lansteatrarna-i-sveriges-ytrande-om-en-samisk-nationalscen (accessed 10 March 2020).
- 74 Giron Sámi Teåhter, 'Samisk nationalscen', 2020.
- 75 The proposed locations are Kiruna/Giron, Jokkmokk/Jáhkámáhkke, Östersund/Staare, Tärnaby/Dearna and Umeå/Ubmeje in Sápmi, as well as Stockholm, where many Sámi live nowadays.
- 76 Giron Sámi Teåhter, 'Samisk nationalscen', p. 9.
- 77 Lindblad quoted in 'Det är viktigt att äga berättelsen', *Region Norrbotten*, 15 November 2019, at www.norrbotten.se/sv/Kultur/Nyheter/Kulturkonferensen-ar-igang---folj-den-har (accessed 7 May 2021).
- 78 A recently published report reveals the staggering differences between Norway's annual support for Sámi culture (c. €16.2 million) and Sweden's meagre annual €1.8 million; the former is notably nine times greater than the latter. Tomas Bokstad, 'Villkoren för samisk kultur: En rapport för Viermie K och Kultur i Norr' (Kiruna/Giron, 2022), p. 18, archived at Giron Sámi Teåhter in Kiruna/Giron.
- 79 For a critique of Swedish mining policies see, for example, Simon Haikola and Jonas Anshelm, 'Swedish Mineral Policy at the Crossroads? The Challenge to Governmental Attempts at Expanding the Swedish Mining Sector', *Extractive Industries and Society*, 3, 2 (2016), pp. 508–16; Sofia Persson, David Harnesk and Mine Islar, 'What Local People? Examining the Gällöck Mining Conflict and the Rights of the Sámi Population in Terms of Justice and Power', *Geoforum*, 86 (2017), pp. 20–9.
- 80 TT, 'Thorwaldsson: "Hoppas öppna flera gruvor"', *Aftonbladet*, 20 November 2021.

- 81 'Näringsministern om gruvtillstånd', SVT Nyheter, 23 January 2022, at www.svt.se/nyheter/lokalt/norrbotten/naringsministern-det-skaver-ganska-ofta-mellan-foretag-och-lansstyrelsen (accessed 13 February 2022).

DIRK GINDT (dirk.gindt@teater.su.se) is a Full Professor of Theatre Studies in the Department of Culture and Aesthetics at Stockholm University. His research studies the relationship between the performing arts, social justice and diversity with a particular focus on Swedish, Canadian and French theatre. Gindt is the co-editor of the volume *Viral Dramaturgies: HIV and AIDS in Performance in the Twenty-First Century* (2018), the author of the monograph *Tennessee Williams in Sweden and France, 1945–1965: Cultural Translations, Sexual Anxieties and Racial Fantasies* (2019) and the co-editor of the volume *Berätta, överleva, inte drunkna*, which explores anti-racism, decolonization and migration in contemporary Swedish theatre (2022). Gindt's current research, financed by a four-year grant from the Swedish Research Council, analyses Indigenous performance cultures in the Arctic and is conducted in consultation and close dialogue with Giron Sámi Teáhter in Kiruna/Giron.