

“The Long Road of Reconciliation”: The Church of Sweden’s Performative Apology to the Sámi People

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ABSTRACT: Grounded in performance theories and Indigenous methodologies, this essay focuses on the 2021 solemn service in Uppsala Cathedral, when the Church of Sweden apologized for its historical complicity in the colonization of Sápmi. The essay discusses key rhetorical features of the Archbishop’s apology and analyses how the service incorporated Sámi visual, material, oral, and performance cultures. Of specific interest are five Sámi testimonies about settler colonialism and artist Anders Sunna’s redesign of the sanctuary. To tease out the contextual specificities (and limitations) of the apology and situate it as part of unfolding decolonial processes across the circumpolar North, the essay draws selective comparisons to Canada’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission and former Prime Minister Stephen Harper’s 2008 formal apology to First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Peoples.

RÉSUMÉ: Basé sur les théories de performance et les méthodologies autochtones, cet essai se concentre sur le service solennel tenu à la cathédrale d’Uppsala en 2021, durant lequel l’Église de Suède s’est excusée publiquement pour sa complicité historique dans la colonisation du Sápmi. L’essai discute les éléments rhétoriques clés des excuses de l’archevêque et analyse la façon dont cette messe incorporait les cultures visuelles, matérielles, orales et performatives des Samis. Le réaménagement du sanctuaire par l’artiste Anders Sunna, ainsi que les cinq témoignages de Samis sur le colonialisme sont particulièrement intéressants. Afin de déterminer les spécificités (et les limitations) contextuelles de ces excuses et les situer dans les processus de décolonisation en cours dans le cercle polaire, cet essai établit des comparaisons sélectives avec la Commission de vérité et réconciliation du Canada et les excuses officielles de l’ancien Premier ministre canadien Stephen Harper aux Premières Nations, Inuits et Métis en 2008.

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“

Today we kneel before you, to acknowledge the abuses of the Church of Sweden and to take an essential step forward on the long road of reconciliation. We apologise for the Church of Sweden’s abuse of the Sami” (Jackelén 2021).

With this performative declaration, Archbishop Antje Jackelén rounded off a public apology on behalf of the national Lutheran Church of Sweden for the manifold colonial crimes committed against the Indigenous Sámi people during a special service [*högtidsgudtjänst*] held at Uppsala Cathedral on 24 November 2021.

The event marked the culmination of three decades of ecclesiastical seminars, public events, and efforts to reform the Church of Sweden from within. These initiatives can be traced back to international ecumenical developments that have been unfolding since the 1990s in Christian churches (Lindmark and Sundström 2016a). In the early 1990s, the Church of Sweden initiated a research project to explore its historical relationships with the Sámi and shed light on the abuses committed against the Indigenous people. In 1996, a Sámi Church Council [*Samiska rådet i Svenska kyrkan*] was appointed with the goal to facilitate the reconciliation process, increase Sámi representation, and integrate Sámi identities and experiences into the Church organization and ceremonies (West). One result of the Sámi people’s push for recognition and representation was the increasing integration of Sámi languages and visual, material, and performance culture including yoiking into some church interiors and selected services (Christoffersson 675-76; Mebius 701-04; Stoor 728-30; Tyrberg 64-67). Another key step on the path to reconciliation was the first Ságstallamat conference in Kiruna/Giron in October 2011.¹ This meeting between Sámi representatives, artists, and theologians set out to explore and document how the Church had historically contributed to the suppression of Sámi identities, cultures, and languages (Svenska kyrkan 2012). The Ságstallamat initiative resulted in two publications: a scholarly volume known as *Vitboken* [*The White Paper Project*] published in collaboration with Umeå University (Lindmark and Sundström 2016b) and a collection of Sámi survivors’ narratives of the residential Nomad schools (Huuva and Blind), commonly referred to as *Nomadskoleboken* [*The Nomad School Book*]. Archbishop Jackelén herself has long been a vocal supporter of the Sámi people’s decolonial struggle.²

Grounded in performance theories and Indigenous methodologies, this essay focuses on the highly performative solemn service in Uppsala Cathedral. Apart from highlighting and discussing key rhetorical features of the Archbishop’s apology, it analyses how the highly ritualized service incorporated elements of Sámi visual, material, oral, and performance cultures. Of specific interest are five Sámi testimonies that outlined the Church’s

complicity in settler colonialism as well as the Sámi artist Anders Sunna's radical redesign of the sanctuary.

Circumpolar Processes of Truth and Reconciliation

On 3 November 2021, only a few weeks before the solemn service at Uppsala Cathedral, the Swedish government announced the launch of a national Truth Commission [*sanningskommission*] to investigate the crimes and abuses committed against the Sámi.³ The objective of the commission was described as follows: “Kommissionen ska synliggöra och sprida kunskap om samernas erfarenheter och kommissionens slutsatser samt lämna förslag på åtgärder som bidrar till upprättelse och främjar försoning” [The Commission shall make visible and disseminate knowledge about the Sámi people's experiences and the Commission's conclusions as well as submit proposals for measures that contribute to redress and promote reconciliation] (Government Offices of Sweden). The Commission is due to present its final report at the end of 2025 and it is too early to speculate on any potential outcomes.

The solemn service and the official announcement of a national Truth Commission form part of an unfolding reconciliation process across the circumpolar North, which is also making an increasing impact in Finland, Norway, and Sweden (albeit not Russia), where governments and the national Evangelical Churches are investigating the legacies of their, often joint and complicit, colonization of the Sámi people.⁴ At present, it is unclear to what extent these seemingly progressive reconciliation efforts will lead to concrete improvements and structural changes for the Sámi or simply result in a continued exploitation of Sámi territories and natural resources by the national states and transnational companies (Kuokkanen 2020).

To tease out the contextual specificities (and limitations) of the Church of Sweden's apology and simultaneously situate it as part of a transnationally unfolding decolonial process across the Arctic, my primary points of reference are the Canadian Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) and former Prime Minister Stephen Harper's formal apology to First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Peoples, which he delivered in the House of Commons in 2008. I do not seek to collapse distinct histories and political realities by implying that an apology made on behalf of the Church of Sweden would be equivalent to Canada's TRC nor do I conflate the different roles and power positions of an Archbishop with those of a head of state. Both procedures form part of broader political developments to honour Indigenous people's rights and acknowledge colonial crimes, but the motivations, implications, and national contexts are different.

Although the Church of Sweden and the State officially separated in 2000, the Church continues to be responsible for the preservation of significant parts

of the country's cultural heritage and the administration of burial grounds (Sidenvall). Additionally, through its increasingly active engagement in issues ranging from migration and climate to Sámi rights, "the Church of Sweden of the new millennium seems to be able to use its resources and institutional role to engage in Swedish politics" (Linde and Scaramuzzino 135). The separation from the state has thus paradoxically allowed the Church to become more vocal in its critique against the state's neglectful attitude towards the Sámi people's rights, yet this critique is also less consequential as ministers and bishops are no longer state employees and lack political authority.

The Canadian TRC and the apology of the Church of Sweden are thus parallel, yet also independent processes. Nevertheless, I maintain that a strategic comparison with Canada's reconciliation process will help tease out some of the overarching features of the apology at Uppsala Cathedral as well as highlight significant nuances and contextually specific issues. At the point of writing, Canada is the only country in the Arctic region to have concluded a national TRC that documents the abuses committed against First Nations, Inuit, and Métis people. Thanks to the national and international impact of the TRC, it represents an important blueprint for other circumpolar countries and constitutes a key political, activist, and intellectual point of reference, also in light of the rich scholarly literature in the field of cultural production that has been produced in its wake (Henderson and Wakeham; Morra and Henzi; Regan; Robinson and Martin).

When the Sámi Parliament of Sweden [*Sámediggi*] submitted the results of a preliminary investigation of the needs for a national Truth Commission to the Swedish government in 2021, it highlighted the Canadian TRC as an exemplary model precisely because its method of collecting testimonies and documenting intergenerational traumas focused on witnesses' psychosocial health by having trained professionals present during townhall meetings and interviews (Enoksson 51). The same document also welcomed that the TRC's final report included a number of concrete recommendations, the so-called 94 Calls to Action, for future initiatives to make amendments to Indigenous peoples. Moreover, two prominent members who had played a key role in the TRC formed part of the international expert committee appointed by the Sámi Parliament: lawyer Chief J. Wilton Littlechild who was one of three Commissioners and historian Paulette Regan who is a senior adviser at the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation at the University of Manitoba which houses all of the material collected and reports generated by the TRC (Enoksson 8). Canada's TRC thus has a very palpable influence on how the agenda and mission of a Swedish Truth Commission might be framed.

Another key motivation for a strategic comparison between Sweden and Canada is to pinpoint the cultural and historiographical shifts that happen when a liberal democracy engages in a reconciliation process, faces its settler-

colonial past and present, and revisits hegemonic claims of progressive politics and national exceptionalism. Both countries project an image of a liberal and democratic state and defender of human rights in the international political arena. For these reasons, a sincere engagement with settler colonialism creates a national identity crisis. As media and communication scholar Naomi Angel and cultural studies and literature scholar Pauline Wakeham argue, Prime Minister Harper's apology and the launch of the Canadian TRC signified

an act that, in summoning the idioms and mechanisms of transitional justice typically employed in the aftermath of oppressive regimes, articulated a self-proclaimed liberal democratic nation to the scene of apartheid in South Africa, civil war in El Salvador, and military dictatorship in Chile. (94)

In other words, a financially secure and politically stable nation in the Global North was faced with the kind of human-rights abuses that are often believed to be only committed in war-torn countries and by dictatorial or racially segregating regimes in the Global South, an insight that severely shook Canada's self-image and damaged its international reputation. Compared to Canada, Sweden is severely lagging behind when it comes to Indigenous rights and is regularly criticized by international human rights organizations for disrespecting the Sámi people's right to self-determination. Like Finland and Russia, but unlike Norway, the country has yet to ratify the Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention from 1989 (ILO 169), which outlines Indigenous people's rights of ownership and possession of their lands, territories, and resources (Lantto). Since the large-scale protests against a planned iron ore mine in Kallak/Gállok just North of the Arctic Circle took place in 2013, Sámi activism has become revitalized and its impact keeps spreading through the arts and social media. A renewed wave of Sámi cultural production, coupled with an increasing number of academic publications, confront majoritarian society with the legacies of settler-colonialism (Aamold, Haugdal and Angkjær Jørgensen; Gindt; Heith; Liliequist and Cocq; Sandström). Time will tell whether the current struggles for decolonization and the national Truth Commission will rectify false notions of Swedish exceptionalism and lead to an increased Sámi self-determination.

The Solemn Service as Performance

As a non-Sámi scholar, I do not claim the right to debate the potential meaning of the apology for the Sámi. As an immigrated scholar to Sweden, who has on countless occasions experienced majoritarian society's general

ignorance on Sámi history and culture and seen how the Swedish educational system has institutionalized "epistemic ignorance" (Kuokkanen 2007, *passim*) regarding Indigenous people, I do, however, welcome any initiative that generates greater public awareness of Swedish colonialism and its ongoing legacies. While decolonization is first and foremost about Indigenous peoples' rights to self-determination, lands, and natural resources, it also invites, even requires, western-centric universities to make an effort and open up for Indigenous knowledges, scholarship, and students (Kuokkanen 2007; Smith).

As a trained performance scholar, my contribution is to subject the very performativity of the solemn service at Uppsala Cathedral to critical analysis, to go beyond a textual analysis of the apology, and consider questions of embodiment, spatiality and oral, visual, and material culture. Furthermore, I am interested in how these elements convey both intellectual and emotional meaning, the various relationships and communications they help establish, and, not least, the reactions to and potential consequences of the performance. Working with a politicized understanding of performance, I follow the ethos of contemporary performance theorists who advocate to "share the ways our work uses performance to intervene in the political scenarios we care about" (Taylor 1) and believe in the potentially transformational potential of performance to create a utopia that "takes place now, in the interstices of present interactions, in glancing moments of possibly better ways to be together as human beings" (Dolan 38).

Drawing on Richard Schechner's now famous distinction between "is performance" and "as performance" (38-40), wherein the former refers to actual staged and embodied actions and speech acts while the latter designates a methodological approach to study culture as a series of performative events (see also Carlsson; McKenzie), I do not insinuate that the solemn service at Uppsala Cathedral is theatre in the sense of a fictitious play that is staged for the entertainment of an audience, let alone a hollow spectacle devoid of meaning or sincerity. What I suggest here, rather, is to approach the solemn service *as if it were* a performance, thus deploying the analytical tools and methodologies of performance analysis in order to tease out the multi-layered meanings and significations of the embodied actions and speech acts, levels of communication, artistic dimensions, and affective reactions provoked by the service – in other words, its *event-ness*. Methodologically approaching a performance as an event involves a two-fold distinction: "On the one hand there is someone who does something in a different way than in regular life; on the other hand, there is also someone who sees and acknowledges this difference" (Sauter 11). Crucially, a critical performance analysis does not happen in a void, but takes into consideration the cultural, social, and political context and – equally important – the dialectical nature of the event which, in turn, might influence the context in which it takes place.

The apology of the Church of Sweden constituted a verbal and embodied performance that was designed to communicate with different and partially overlapping communities, many of whom were physically present: members of the Church of Sweden, the Church Council, invited Sámi representatives, international observers, representatives of civil society, the Sámi Parliament, and the Swedish government, in addition to the national print and broadcasting media. The Church streamed the live event and later made a video recording of it available on its official homepage (Svenska kyrkan 2021), along with transcriptions of the apology in Swedish, English, Northern, Lule, and Southern Sámi (Jackelén 2021).

The Mass had a fixed duration (c. 100 minutes) and was dramaturgically structured into several distinct sections with a clear beginning, rising momentum, and a dramatic climax followed by several responses and reactions before the solemn closing. After the introductory ringing of the church bells, at which point worshippers of civil society had already taken their seats, representatives of the Sámi people, bishops, newly elected and outgoing members of the Church Council, and, lastly, the Archbishop entered the nave to the sound of organ music. The procession was led by a young Sámi woman wearing a *gákti*, the customary Sámi regalia. Two altar servers each carried a banner with the coat of arms of the Church of Sweden and the Sámi national flag. The actual Mass started with a short prayer recited in Swedish and the Kyrie “Christ, see us, hear our cry” delivered in Northern Sámi. In a key section, five invited Sámi witnesses gave testimony of the colonial abuses committed by the Church. Jackelén’s apology came about half an hour into the event and constituted the dramaturgical climax. It was followed by eight bishops who each delivered a promise to underline the Church’s future commitment to the work of reconciliation, a response from the chairperson of the Sámi Parliament, Håkan Jonsson, and reactions by three international observers representing the Lutheran Churches of Norway and Finland as well as the Anglican Church of Canada, represented by then National Indigenous Anglican Archbishop Mark McDonald. The last thirty minutes were devoted to the celebration of the Eucharist. In-between these major sections, prayers and hymns were performed and portions from the Gospel of Matthew were read in Swedish as well as on Northern, Lule, and Southern Sámi. The solemn service concluded with the procession exiting the Cathedral, once again led by the Church of Sweden’s coat of arms and the Sámi flag.

To demonstrate the Church’s commitment to produce a culturally sensitive service, extended sections incorporated Northern, Southern, and Lule Sámi through prayer, song, or witness testimony. Additionally, the Church commissioned *duodji* [Sámi handicrafts] artist Jon Tomas Utsi to design four communion bowls for the occasion. Carved out of wood and reindeer bone with engraved decorations, they were used as bread bowls. Through these bowls,

Sámi spirituality was inserted into the solemn service, seemingly invited to intrude into the Christian space from which it had been banned for centuries. Communion also happened to piano-accompanied live performances of two songs saturated with cultural meaning: "Sámiid eatnan duoddariid" ["The Highlands of Sápmi"] by the legendary yoik artist and poet Nils-Aslak Valkeapää and the Sámi anthem, "Sámi soga lávlla" ["The Song of the Sámi People"], based on a poem written in 1906 by Isak Saba and with music composed by Arne Sørli in 1992. Both songs were performed by the musician and activist Sara Elvira Kuhmunen who, in May 2021, was appointed as President of the Sámi national youth organization Sáminuorra. The most striking artistic intervention, however, was the redesign of the space.

A Subversive Performance Space

Architecturally shaped as a crucifix and designed in the Gothic style with intimidatingly high arches, Uppsala Cathedral used to be a Catholic church before the Protestant Reformation took hold. It is centrally located in the Old Town of Uppsala and within walking distance from the university campus and the former State Institute for Racial Biology. It is also a popular tourist destination and site of compelling art installations.⁵ Since Uppsala Cathedral is the official seat of the Archbishop of Sweden, the apology to the Sámi people was delivered in the ideological heart of the institution that, for centuries, had denied and suppressed Indigenous religion, spirituality, culture, and language. While the Cathedral has an architectural presence and a fixed geographical location in the urban space, it also comprises a religiously, socially, and politically coded space. These layers of meaning and signification are malleable and can be negotiated in performance. With reference to sociologist Henri Lefebvre, theatre scholar Gay McAuley argues that

space is [...] not an empty container but an active agent; it shapes what goes on within it, emits signals about it to the community at large, and is itself affected. The frame constituted by a particular building or venue is not something fixed and immutable but a dynamic and continually evolving social entity. (41)

To do justice to and incorporate Sámi culture into the solemn service, the Church not only invited selected speakers and witnesses, but also commissioned the political artist Anders Sunna to significantly re-design the space for the occasion. Working with a variety of materials and techniques that include graffiti and collage, Sunna's art represents an uncompromising critique of the

legacies of Swedish settler colonialism and his large-sized paintings often depict disturbingly violent scenes. Recurring motifs include the abuses of racial biology, the forced displacements that happened as a result of four nation-states implementing geopolitical borders throughout Sápmi, and contemporary hate speech and racist attacks against Sámi (Sandström).⁶

Sunna subverted the hierarchical and masculinist space of the Lutheran Church by incorporating a variety of material elements and visual representations of pre-Christian Sámi religion. Before entering through the gates of the narthex, the visitors passed a sacrificial site that consisted of wooden structures, reindeer horns, and an open fire. Here, Sunna juxtaposed notions of interior and exterior space. Christian Masses are usually held indoors, whereas Sámi religious celebrations, including making sacrifices at *sieidi* [sacred places], the drum ceremonies of the *noaidi* [shamans], or yoiking the beauty of Nature, took place outdoors.⁷ Sunna explained:

Det här handlar om två religioner som har kolliderat där den ena har kört över den andra med ekonomiska resurser. Därför ville jag ha med inslag från den samiska religionen, och att det mötte besökarna redan utomhus. Det blir ingen försoning mellan de två om inte båda syns. (quoted in Lindstrand 2022a)

[This is about two religions that have collided, where one has run over the other with economic resources. Therefore, I wanted to include elements from the Sámi religion, which would meet the visitors already outdoors. There will be no reconciliation between the two unless both [religions] are visible.]

Sunna's most striking move was the removal of the entire sanctuary, which he replaced with an octagon of simple wooden benches. The formation was broken only at one point which allowed people to enter and exit. A modest wooden altar marked this spot and in the middle of this octagon, a gas-fuelled fire was burning. To use the terminology suggested by McAuley, the transformed sanctuary constituted the "presentational space," that is, the location where the main action of the event unfolded and onto which the eyes and ears of the congregation were focused. Presentational space encompasses technical and artistic features such as sets, props, and lighting as well as, most importantly, "the physical presence of the actors, their comings and goings, movements and proxemic groupings, their bodily behavior within the space" (McAuley 29). Unlike in traditional theatre, the presentational space during the solemn service at Uppsala Cathedral did, however, not evoke a fictional world.

The sparsity of the presentational space strikingly contrasted with the abundant interior decorations of the Cathedral. The almost circular arrangement of the benches entailed a breaking down of traditional hierarchies between the bishop and the congregation during a Lutheran service. With the fireplace, Sunna, once again, alluded to pre-Christian Sámi religion having been practiced in nature. As a result of these radical modifications, the space appeared more like a communal circle that allows for Indigenous oral culture and story-telling practices and, in this case, witness testimonies. Indigenous theatre scholars Jayne T. Darby, Courtney Elkin Mohler, and Christy Stanlake highlight the importance of a circular performance space as a spatial and metaphorical expression of a holistic philosophy that allows for "the embodied presentation of spoken words in a communal setting" (7) and seeks to create "harmony and balance with the wider community" (8) by establishing "communal relationships, grounded in oral traditions, and tied to sacred relationships with the land" (12). The near-circular arrangement of the presentational space in Uppsala Cathedral, indeed, marked a material expression of a non-hierarchical worldview that emphasizes community over individuality and harmony with the natural world, as indicated by the burning fire, as well as the spiritual world, a link that Sunna created with two paintings placed behind the octagon.

The altar behind the temporary performance space was covered with a blue cloth embroidered with a white dove. On top of it stood two silver candle holders and towering behind it was the massive silver crucifix that is a permanent fixture of the Cathedral. Located on each side of the altar and crucifix were two large boards with charcoal drawings of Sámi women. One of them wore a horn hat [*ládjogahpir*], an elaborately embroidered headgear with a wooden protrusion [*fierra*] that Sámi women wore on festive occasions until Laestadian priests forbade the practice at the end of the nineteenth century, because they believed the wooden horn was housing the devil (Pieski and Harlin 83-90).⁸ Additionally, Sunna had painted, with expressive red brush strokes, two conspicuous Sámi symbols inspired by the sacred drums played by the *noaidi* on the lower half of each drawing. These represented two of the three *áhkát*, the central female divinities in pre-Christian Sámi religion. In Sámi cosmology, the fertility goddesses *Sáráhkká*, *Juoksáhkká*, and *Uksáhkká* are the daughters of the mother deity, *Máttaráhkká*, and dwell under the hearth or the floor near the entrance to the *goahti* [Sámi hut or tent]. They assist women giving birth, decide the sex of the baby, and protect the newborn child (Bäckman 107-15).

Visual and *duodji* artist Outi Pieski and cultural heritage scholar Eeva-Kristiina Harlin have criticized the twinned consequence of colonialism and Laestadianism that affected Sámi women's bodies and led to an internalization of Christian values that deem the female body as sinful. They point out the consequences for Sámi belief systems when "the female divinities *Uksáhkká*,

Juoksáhkká, and Sáráhká in the Sámi worldview were replaced in the Christianization process by the masculine trinity, the male God or the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, making the old symbols shameful and even prohibited” (78). Similarly, feminist political science scholar Rauna Kuokkanen argues that

[t]he Sami deity Máttaráhká (“Ancestral Mother”) with her three daughters may well signify the very foundation of the Sami cosmic order, although the ethnographic literature has usually reduced their status to that of wives of the male deities (reflecting the patriarchal bias of these interpretations). (2007, 34)

Kuokkanen further explains how the three female deities offer “the gift of life” and “personify the generative forces of the world: procreation, giving birth, and sustaining life” (2007, 34). By placing female imagery and female divinities front-and-centre, Sunna undermined the androcentrism of Christianity and inserted a powerful Indigenous feminist statement into the cultural performance: “Svenska kyrkan har förtryckt kvinnor, medan vi har våra gudinnor” [The Church of Sweden has oppressed women, while we have our own goddesses] (quoted in Lindstrand 2022a). The fact that the Church invited one of the most prominent and uncompromising Sámi artists to re-design the presentational space in order to incorporate key elements of Sámi spirituality can be interpreted as a genuine investment in a culturally sensitive solemn service. Sunna’s re-arrangement of the space for the performance, I suggest, acts as an intersectional political statement and a direct challenge to the Church and its intertwined colonial and patriarchal history.⁹

Sámi testimonies

The redesigned sanctuary, presenting a hybrid manifestation of Sámi traditional religion and Lutheranism that reflects the religious and spiritual reality of many contemporary Sámi people, was the main performance space where the Archbishop would eventually deliver the apology. First, however, five invited witnesses entered into this communal space, took a seat, and narrated experiences of colonial abuses in which the Church of Sweden had been complicit. Linda Tuhiwai Smith lists testimonies as a defining Indigenous methodology in the quest for self-determination and cultural preservation:

Testimonies [...] are a means through which oral evidence is presented to a particular type of audience. [...] Indigenous

testimonies are a way of talking about an extremely painful event or series of events. The formality of testimony provides a structure within which events can be related and feelings expressed. A testimony is also a form through which the voice of a “witness” is accorded space and protection. It can be constructed as a monologue and as a public performance. (145)

These testimonies delivered at Uppsala Cathedral focused on five key areas: Sámi spirituality, the Nomad schools, the division into categories, racial biology, and the loss of language. Together, they offered historical context for the apology and added a personal, human dimension to capture the ongoing consequences of settler colonialism.

First up was the then chairperson of the Sámi Council of the Church of Sweden, Ingrid Inga, who lamented the attempts made by the Church to eradicate Sámi religion, spirituality, and shamanism, all of which are intimately tied to the Sámi way of living in harmony with Nature which is understood as a sentient being (Church of Sweden 13). Sámi scholarship has shown how the religious trials that took place between 1680 and 1730 aimed to erase Sámi religious beliefs and rituals, which were seen as heathen. The performative traditions of yoiking and the *noaidi* playing the sacred drum fell victim to these witch hunts (Christoffersson; Mebius; Stoor).

The second witness was the author Nils-Henrik Sikku, who gave an account of the shame, confusion, and loneliness he experienced as a little boy who was taken away from his parents and placed into a Nomad school where his sheer existence as a Sámi was deemed to be worthless (Church of Sweden 14-15). Instigated in the seventeenth century as missionary schools, the Nomad schools turned into nationally regulated, either mobile or permanent, institutions in the early twentieth century and were only reformed in the 1960s. The Church played a key role in initiating and administrating these boarding schools that offered the children of reindeer-herding Sámi a low-quality education and separated them from settled Sámi whose children were sent to municipal schools in the attempt to assimilate them into Swedish society. In addition to being separated from their families for most of the year, children had to endure emotional humiliation and physical punishment by teachers and school staff. Furthermore, they were often forbidden to speak their mother tongue and coerced into communicating exclusively in Swedish (Hagerman 2016; Huuva and Blind).

To further contextualize the Nomad schools, clergyman Erik-Oscar Oscarsson’s testimony outlined how Swedish bishops had actively encouraged and contributed to the government’s divide-and-conquer politics in the early twentieth century (Church of Sweden 15-16). The segregation of the Sámi was a direct result of the 1913 Nomad School Act [*nomadskolereformen*] and the 1928

Reindeer Grazing Act [*renbeteslagen*]. Through these legal paragraphs, nomadic reindeer herders were classified as “real” Sámi whom the paternalistic state sought to “protect” from an overt influence of western civilization. “Non-Sámi” were assimilated into becoming Swedish farmers or members of the lower working classes. As a result of this highly racist “Lapps must be Lapps” [*lapp ska vara lapp*] policy as it was designated at the time, generations of Sámi lost their mother tongue and cultural identity (Lantto).

For her testimony, artist and author Rose-Marie Huuva recited a poem about how the Church assisted the State Institute for Racial Biology, founded in 1922 and active until 1958, by facilitating anthropometric observations on Nomad school children and allowing burial sites to be plundered and human remains to be moved to laboratories and museums (Church of Sweden 16-18; see also Hagerman 2015; Kjellman). The first two stanzas described how a Lutheran minister ordered an act of graverobbing to get his hands on the skull of a newly-buried child, the third stanza described how Huuva’s own mother was forced to strip naked and be photographed from various angles, and the fourth stanza inserted Huuva into this intergenerational story by describing how she searched through the archives of the State Institute for Racial Biology to reassemble her family history. The final witness testimony was presented by Julia Rensberg, the youth representative of the Sámi Council of the Church (and, as of September 2022, a representative for Indigenous peoples in the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches). Rensberg outlined how she had to reclaim her mother tongue as a result of the consequences of the century-long suppression of Sámi languages and the ensuing loss of identity for second-generation boarding school children and their descendants (Church of Sweden 18-19).

With the exception of Oscarsson and Rensberg who spoke Swedish, the witnesses read their testimonies in Northern Sámi. The narratives were fact-based, yet at the same time deeply personal and highly emotional. Collectively they painted a picture of an entire people’s inter-generational trauma and emphasized the intertwined loss of land, culture, language, and identity. These intimate relationships, and the disastrous breach that settler colonialism caused, cannot be overemphasized. Like many Indigenous people, the Sámi have “a particular worldview, one characterized by the perception that the natural environment is a living entity which gives its gifts and abundance to people provided that they observe certain responsibilities and provided that those people treat it with respect and gratitude” (Kuokkanen 2007, 32).

Importantly, the five Sámi testimonies went beyond a representation of victimhood. The stories and the sheer presence of these five witnesses manifested Sámi resilience. Inga made a fitting connection between Sámi cosmology and Christianity which teaches the omnipresence of a divine force. Sikku celebrated how the Sámi never gave up resisting settler colonialism’s

theft of Sámi territories. Huuva's poem expressed hope that Sámi human remains may finally be returned by museums and archives to receive a dignified burial in Sápmi. And Rensberg concluded her speech with a powerful critique of the Church for owning and managing large areas of land in Sápmi, a point to which I shall return below.

Resilience also manifested itself through material culture. Each witness wore a *gákti* to express Sámi identity and pride. Some of the women had wrapped a colourful, fringed shawl tied together by a silver or golden brooch around their shoulders and wore regional variations of a cone-shaped Sámi headgear. Sikku and Huuva wore pointed reindeer hide boots laced with a decorative strap. Inga and Huuva wore a large Sámi belt with a metallic buckle around their dress, while Inga and Rensberg carried a small reindeer leather purse, which in Rensberg's case was fastened with some decorative bands. Rensberg's outfit also displayed some prominently embroidered Christian insignia, highlighting that Sámi spirituality and Christianity are not mutually exclusive. Many Sámi adhere to Lutheranism or, more precisely, Laestadianism and, given that the solemn service was organized in consultation and collaboration with Sámi representatives, seem willing to enter into a dialogue with the Church of Sweden on how to address the legacies of settler colonialism.

As indicated above, the five testimonies were introduced with a Kyrie performed in Northern Sámi: "Christ, see us, hear our cry / Shine through our darkness / In your grace have mercy / Turn your face to us" (Church of Sweden 12). Each testimony was followed by a ritualistic repetition of the same Kyrie, offering a moment of reflection and contemplation. The entire dramaturgical section was rounded off with three readings from the Bible: a psalm from the Old Testament about the righteousness of God's judgments delivered in Lule Sámi, an epistle celebrating the diversity of languages in Southern Sámi, and finally, the commandment of love from the Gospel of Matthew in Swedish. In other words, Christian liturgical features bookended and permeated the section of the testimonies, reinserting the presence of the Church of Sweden as the primary organizer of the event.

The Performativity of the Apology

The next section marked the climax of the event. The Archbishop joined the five assembled Sámi in the octagon, sat down on the wooden bench, and delivered her apology to the Sámi people on behalf of the Swedish Church. Giving up the spatial privilege of the pulpit, she sat eye to eye with the Sámi representatives and with her back to the congregation. Cultural theorist Sara Ahmed has insisted that "whiteness involves a form of orientation" (150). Whiteness is a way of, often without critical reflection, taking up space with a privileged body, which in turn affects and confirms one's fortunate, yet skewed,

perception of the world. Ahmed explains: “The starting point for orientation is the point from which the world unfolds: the ‘here’ of the body, and the ‘where’ of its dwelling. Given this, orientations are about the intimacy of bodies and their dwelling places” (151). What Archbishop Jackelén performed on 24 November 2021, however, was a form of re-orientation. She shifted the starting point of her body and, temporarily, relinquished her otherwise privileged position as primate of the Church of Sweden. As Ahmed reminds us, it is not just bodies that are oriented, but space is equally important: “Spaces also take shape by being orientated around some bodies, more than others” (157). Sunna’s temporary re-arrangement of the presentational space made the Archbishop re-orient her body and adjust to a different premise and spatial reality.

Once Jackelén had taken her seat in the octagon, she started the formal apology by invoking the tale of Jesus meeting a woman with a crooked back in front of whom he kneeled to be able engage eye to eye with her. She then admitted that the Church of Sweden had failed to meet the Sámi people eye to eye. The heart of the apology mirrored the five areas in which the Church of Sweden contributed to settler colonialism and which had already been outlined in the five testimonies. Jackelén concluded each of these points with a slight variation of *acknowledging* and *apologizing* on behalf of the Church of Sweden, which helped ground the performance in the Christian liturgy’s ritualistic repetition of repentance:

Within the Church of Sweden, Sami spirituality was despised. Instead of recognising the image of God in our Sami sisters and brothers, we tried to remake them in the image of the majority culture. [...]

Today, we acknowledge this, and, on behalf of the Church of Sweden, I apologise.

The Church of Sweden played a significant role in establishing and running nomad schools and work huts. Sami children were forced to leave the security of their families, and social ties were broken. [...]

Today, the Church of Sweden acknowledges this, and we apologise.

The Church of Sweden played a crucial role in opening doors for racial biologists. Our representatives used their authority and power in society to justify racist and colonial thinking, resulting in severe violations of human dignity and value.

Today, the Church of Sweden acknowledges this, and we apologise.

[...]

Assisted by the Church of Sweden, the majority society separated Sami from Sami. The division of the Sami into different categories came to shape the legislation and the "Lapps must be Lapps" policy, resulting in painful conflict between Sami that remains to this day.

Today, we acknowledge this, and, on behalf of the Church of Sweden, I apologise. (Jackelén 2021; emphases in original)

At the end of the apology, Jackelén asked the assembled clergy to rise and then kneel before the Sámi, followed by a final repetition of "We apologise for the Church of Sweden's abuse of the Sami." Designed to create a strong affective reaction in the audience, this moment constituted the dramaturgical climax of the event.

To place the content and implications of the apology into context, let us take a step back and turn to the former Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper's apology to First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples on Turtle Island, which he delivered in 2008 "on behalf of the Canadian government and all Canadians," a statement which in itself received justified criticism for homogenizing the nation and othering Indigenous and Métis peoples (Dorrell). A short extract from Harper's speech helps reveal some striking parallels to Jackelén's apology:

We now recognize that it was wrong to separate children from rich and vibrant cultures and traditions [...], and we apologize for having done this. [...] We now recognize that, far too often, these institutions gave rise to abuse or neglect [...], and we apologize for failing to protect you. (CBC News)

In their analysis of Harper's address to the House of Commons, Angel and Wakeham draw attention to his "rhetorical deployment of anaphora, or the repetition of the phrase 'we now recognize' for strategic emphasis" (99). In a similar argument, literature scholars Jill Scott and Alana Fletcher identify this repetition as a key rhetorical ingredient:

The words "we recognize that ... and we apologize for having done this" act as a refrain, giving the narrative a rhythmic or even poetic tone. The lilting repetition can be seen as an

aesthetic of comfort – typical of laments or elegies – but it also has a lulling or dulling effect, making it difficult to focus on the meaning of the words. (157-79)

The same use of anaphora can be identified in the apology delivered by Archbishop Jackelén. Every paragraph accentuated one particular area where the Church had failed the Sámi and was rounded off with a variation of the ritualistic repetition: “Today, the Church of Sweden acknowledges this, and we apologise” (Jackelén 2021). Borrowed from the liturgical device of the *mea culpa* to express the shame that one feels for having sinned against the laws of God, the anaphora, of course, is also a key element of the Eucharist and organically anchored the apology in a Christian tradition and context. Nevertheless, I suggest that the effect of the anaphora in Jackelén’s apology was anything but somnolent, thanks to her skilfully embodied performance, which suggested sincerity and a sense of humility. The apology was explicitly delivered “on behalf of the Church of Sweden,” as Jackelén highlighted in her speech. She also acknowledged the Sámi Council of the Church of Sweden for taking the initiative and the Sámi Parliament, which had been consulted. Finally, ecclesiastical polity was involved on both a national and a regional level through the Central Board of the Church of Sweden [*kyrkostyrelsen*] and the thirteen diocesan boards [*stiftsstyrelser*]. Because of the long and careful series of preparations and the various agents involved, it seems reasonable to assume that the script and delivery of the apology had been carefully prepared, scripted, edited, debated, and, crucially, *rehearsed*. Jackelén’s delivery thus marked a “twice-rehearsed behavior” (Schechner 36) that was the result of careful preparations, yet still managed to convey a strong sense of respect and personal emotional investment. She spoke in a solemn tone, but with enough measured cadences to prevent any dulling effect. Only the occasional small slip of the tongue betrayed her nervousness. She enunciated meticulously and used sparse hand gestures to not distract from the content of her apology. At no point did she look directly into any of the cameras present, but kept her focus on the five assembled Sámi witnesses. Near the end, when she explained that the apology was meant to be “an essential step forward on the long road of reconciliation,” Jackelén made a short dramatic pause before the adjective “long,” which emphasized her awareness that this process will take time.

Jackelén’s choice of words deserves some comment. On four separate occasions, she used the term colonialism or variations thereof. She also made explicit reference to racial biology and mentioned the terms racism, shame, and abuse multiple times. There were no attempts to rhetorically extenuate or whitewash the actions of the Church, as she acknowledged the institution’s “complicity in the abuse of the Sami” and that it had “contributed to and legitimised oppression.” The fact that Jackelén used these terms and thereby

acknowledged Swedish colonialism as a historical fact and contemporary reality cannot be underestimated, especially in light of the various attempts made by the Swedish state over the last decades to actively deny that Sápmi is a colonized land (Fur 161-70; Allard et al.). What is striking, however, is that Jackelén discursively created a contrast between a colonial past characterized by ignorance and an enlightened present that allows for the recognition of crimes committed against Indigenous people: "For a long time, we did not want, or were unable, to understand this. We did not see. [...] Since the 2011 Ságstallamat hearing, we have learned more about our guilt and responsibility," crediting the research presented in *Vitboken* and *Nomadskoleboken* in particular (Jackelén 2021). These skewed temporalities constitute a key parallel with Harper's apology, at the heart of which lay "a progressive and inclusive narrative of the nation-state," which failed to "alter the fundamentally colonial relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples" (Dorrell 30; see also Authers 2021). Harper started several paragraphs in his apology with the emphatic "We now recognize that" (my emphasis) and, similarly, Jackelén repeatedly stated: "Today, the Church of Sweden acknowledges this, and we apologise" (my emphasis). Angel and Wakeham caution against these kinds of deflecting processes as "a semiotics of pastness," that is, a variety of strategies that falsely create a temporal sense of distance from the actual colonial crimes committed and thereby help "framing the work of witnessing as an act of retrospection, a looking and feeling backwards into history that risks shifting perspective away from the present state of settler-colonial relations" (98). As Jackelén's speech emphasized, the solemn service was not intended to mark the final word on reconciliation. Jackelén also acknowledged that the Church could neither control how the apology would be received by the Sámi nor determine if or when there would be a response.¹⁰

The Quest for Reconciliation and Future Commitments

In a Canadian context and often with reference to the TRC, Indigenous scholars have debated the intricate relation between guilt, forgiveness, reconciliation, and Christianity with a pronounced decolonial perspective. "At its core, reconciliation is a Western concept with religious connotations of restoring one's relationship to God," Jeff Corntassel, Chaw-win-is and T'lakwadzi argue (380). A palpable risk they see is that contemporary power imbalances and issues around land and ownership are subordinated when "reconciliation becomes a way for the dominant culture to reinscribe the status quo rather than to make amends for previous injustices" (379). Deena Rymhs notes that reconciliation risks failing "to recognize the autonomy of the

wronged parties” (332) and, instead, seeks to “obfuscate notions of guilt and responsibility” (333). Rymhs does not question the need to create public awareness through reconciliation processes but asks whether these can move beyond provoking affective reactions and lead to a tangible political change. Similarly, Gabrielle L’Hirondelle Hill and Sophie McCall write that reconciliation risks “to impose a sense of closure on experiences of colonization that are very much alive and ongoing” (vii). Writing in an American context, Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang identify a number of “moves to innocence” that characterize settler colonial societies to atone for their guilt, but without ceding lands, natural resources or political influence. Hence why they conclude: “Reconciliation is about rescuing settler normalcy, about rescuing a settler future” (35).

In a Swedish context, theologians have discussed the reconciliation efforts of the Church of Sweden in relation to international developments and identified “ett ökat kyrkligt intresse för att bidra till att läka politiska, sociala, ekonomiska och även ekologiska konflikter” [an increased ecclesiastical interest in helping to heal political, social, economic and even ecological conflicts] (Nordbäck 161). Reconciliation, as conceptualized by the Church of Sweden, is emphasizing social relationships between individuals or groups as opposed to a previously more exclusive focus on restoring a relationship with God (Nordbäck 142-43). The Church primarily conceptualizes reconciliation as a “dialogical” process and a strategy that entails “listening to the Saami, documenting the dialogues, and producing material for future conversations” (West 13), but without necessarily engaging in any theological reflections about reconciliation. The restoration of a relationship with Sámi communities, I suggest, was indeed one of the most prominent aspects of the solemn service. However, this did not translate into a genuinely decolonial agenda in relation to power, land, and ownership.

To manifest the determination of the Church to not let the apology represent the final word on the matter, eight bishops, each wearing imposing authorial vestments, stepped forward to an improvised podium to deliver a promise for future commitments to further the labour of reconciliation. These eight commitments were drawn up in dialogue with the Sámi Council of the Church of Sweden, Sámi organizations, and the thirteen dioceses in the country. They emphasized a willingness to increase knowledge on the oppression of the Sámi people, strengthen the influence of the Sámi in the Church of Sweden, as well as further incorporate Sámi languages and spirituality into the Church (Church of Sweden 66-69).

While the reading of these eight commitments made it clear that an actual apology cannot be devoid of follow-up actions, including further dialogue and research initiatives, the fifth promise was perhaps the most remarkable: “Expand knowledge of and respect for the principles of indigenous rights within

the Church of Sweden and in society” (Church of Sweden 68). It is admirable that the Church underscored the necessity of Indigenous people’s rights being observed and respected on a broader social scale. And yet, the follow-up sentences – “Indigenous rights are part of human rights. Respect for and observance of indigenous rights are essential for a socially sustainable society” – remained conspicuously vague on what the respect of these rights would entail, with no mention of the fraught issue of ownership and management of lands and resources.

Sámi Christian theologian Tore Johnsen, who attended the solemn service, welcomed the Church raising the issue of Indigenous rights, but pointed out the substantial amount of land and forests (c. 390.000 hectares) that the Church owns and administers in Sápmi, a fact also criticized in one of the five testimonies. Julia Rensberg, the youth representant of the Sámi Council of the Church, did not mince her words:

Today, the Church of Sweden is one of Sweden’s largest forest owners, and about 40% of this is on our traditional lands. In the Church constitution, this is referred to as returnal revenue on donations made to the Church, which are to be managed so as to provide the best possible return. [...] As long as the Church considers itself entitled to control Sami territory, it will allow colonisation to continue. Without the lands we lose our culture, identity, language and traditional livelihoods. (Church of Sweden 19)

As both owner and administrator of large areas of forest, the Church seeks to balance economic, ethical, and environmental responsibilities. Deforestation in the quest for economic gain has negative consequences for the reindeer industry, which is already under heavy pressure due to the industrial exploitation of minerals, iron ore, and water resources in Sápmi. Furthermore, not all of the forest areas owned by the Church, including the two most Northern dioceses Luleå and Härnosand, have been certified by the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) that advocates for forestry done in a socially responsible way to protect biological diversity and, crucially, allow for Sámi influence when it comes to *sieidi* and reindeer grazing areas.¹¹ Criticism has justifiably been levelled by the former chairperson of the Sámi Council of the Church as well as representatives for Sámi villages (Inga; Sunna).

The Archbishop is aware of this unresolved tension between taking responsibility for crimes committed in the past and facing ongoing discrepancies in the present. She admitted in an interview: “Det är lättare att i vår tid säga att vi verkligen tar avstånd från rasbiologi än att säga hur vi ska göra med marken” [It is easier to say, in our time, that we really distance

ourselves from racial biology than to say what we should do with the land] (quoted in Palmström). At present, the Church of Sweden seems willing to investigate the question through further research into how it historically came to own these lands. Forty million Swedish kronor (c. four million Euro) will be invested into further research and documentation over the next ten years (Lindstrand 2022b).

Conclusion: To be continued

The official homepage of the Sámi Parliament reprinted a reaction offered during the solemn service by then chairperson Håkan Jonsson, who complimented the Church for owning up to its abuses, but also expressed caution as to whether the apology would lead to tangible consequences. By drawing attention to the limits of a verbally delivered apology, no matter its intentions, Jonsson's speech echoed many Sámi people's sentiments reprinted over the following days in the regional press (Fundin; Kallersand; Unga). The headline of an editorial in the news magazine *Samefolket* best summarized the mixture of scepticism and optimism: "Ursäkten ska följas av handling" – "The apology needs to be followed with action" (Lindstrand 2022b).

Three months after the solemn service, visual artist and photographer Katarina Pirak Sikku, whose work scrutinizes how traumas caused by the loss of land, identity, and racial biological abuses are inherited in an intergenerational way (Pirak Sikku; Heith), reflected on the potentially positive outcomes of the apology. She welcomed that the Church was owning up to its complicity in settler colonialism, but also highlighted the emotional labour that must follow such an apology. The Sámi, she emphasized, need to engage in this labour on their own terms, which will also re-shift the attention from the colonizers to the colonized: "Det är kanske dit vi behöver komma, att ta hand om vår såriga historia. Vi vet vad förövarna har gjort, nu är det dags för arbetet inåt" [Maybe that's where we need to go, to take care of our own wounded history. We know what the perpetrators did, now it's time to work inwards] (quoted in Palmström).

Pirak Sikku's reflections mirror Métis artist and visual arts scholar David Garneau's notion of "irreconcilable spaces of Aboriginality" (26-30), which he coined to identify the safe spaces and conversations in which Indigenous people can share knowledge and experiences about colonialism, abuses, and the limits of forgiveness or reconciliation without fear of eavesdropping or interference by settlers. He posits that "while decolonization and Indigenization is collective work, it sometimes requires occasions of separation—moments where Indigenous people take space and time to work things out among themselves, and parallel moments when allies ought to do the same" (23). For Garneau, the

value of such spaces consists of the opportunity for members of Indigenous communities to act and behave without the constraints imposed by a watchful colonial gaze, share experiences that are not meant to be consumed by majoritarian society, and do so in a way that does not risk being interpellated into the position of “the Other.”

At this point in time, it is too early to tell to what extent the apology will affect the relationships between the Sámi people and the Church of Sweden, let alone facilitate a healing process for the Sámi. What seems clear is that the Church needs to follow up on its verbal declaration with concrete actions. My own utopian wish and suggestion here would be that the apology goes beyond the admission of the historical complicity in colonialism and realizes its inherent performative promise to create further public awareness about Swedish and Nordic colonialism and influence political leaders to push for the necessary legislation for a concrete social change and tangible contribution to the unfolding process of decolonization.

NOTES

1. Ságstallamat means conversation in Northern Sámi.
2. In a debate article published in one of Sweden’s largest newspapers in 2015, Jackelén called out the Church’s historical complicity in settler colonialism, endorsed the Sámi people’s right for self-determination, and lamented how Sweden has failed to live up to international conventions as it concerns the protection of the rights of the Indigenous people, not least by overriding the principles of free, informed, and prior consent before the industrial exploitation of Sámi territories.
3. In 1998, the then Minister of Agriculture Annika Åhnberg apologized on behalf of her Social Democratic government to the Sámi. This apology, however, was never followed up by any concrete actions (Fur).
4. The Evangelical Lutheran Churches of Norway apologized to the Sámi people in 1997 and a Finnish bishop did the same in 2012 (Lehtola 2016; West 2020). In June 2018, the Norwegian government launched a national Truth and Reconciliation commission “to investigate the Norwegianisation policy and injustice against the Sámi and Kven/Norwegian Finnish peoples,” with the final report due in June 2023 (https://uit.no/kommisjonen/mandat_en). In 1997, King Harald of Norway apologized “on behalf of the state for the injustice committed against the Sámi people through its harsh policy of Norwegianization” (Kuhn 2020, 31). A Finnish Truth and Reconciliation Commission “to gather Sámi people’s experiences of the actions of the Finnish state and authorities and their effects on the Sámi people” was established in October 2021 with a final report expected in December 2023 (<https://vnk.fi/en/truth-and-reconciliation-commission-concerning-the-sami-people>). Unlike Finland, Russia and Sweden, Norway ratified ILO 169 in 1990.

5. In 1998, for example, photographer Elisabeth Olsson Wallin's exhibition *Ecce Homo*, which represented members of LGBTQ communities and people living with HIV in biblical settings, was temporarily shown at Uppsala Cathedral, causing a national media debate and outrage in the Vatican.
6. In 2022, Sunna was one of three artists invited to the Venice Biennale to design and transform the Nordic Pavilion into a specifically Sámi Pavilion.
7. For a pioneering study on Sámi religion, see Bäckman 2013.
8. A pietistic revivalist movement, Laestadian Lutheranism greatly affected the Sámi in the nineteenth century and beyond.
9. Anders Sunna is not the first artist to introduce Sámi elements into a Lutheran church. Sámi *duodji* and visual artist Lars Levi Sunna has been a driving force to integrate pre-Christian Sámi spiritual motifs with Christian Laestadian elements, thus pushing for a recognition of the damages inflicted by assimilation practices of Lutheran missionaries while simultaneously bringing Sámi art into a contemporary church space. Apart from making artistic contributions to secular buildings such as Kiruna/Giron City Hall and People's House, in 1997 he famously decorated the organ at Jukkasjärvi/Čohkkiras Church with a Sámi sun symbol that was inspired by signs engraved on the *noaidi*'s sacred drums. Lars Levi Sunna seeks to integrate artistic elements of Sámi spirituality and Laestadianism and "call for a simple acknowledgment of the former effectiveness and meaningfulness of the old religion and its practitioners" (DuBois 149).
10. Jackelén and the Church delivered the apology a second time. The re-enactment took place in Sápmi, at the second Ságastallamat conference in Luleå/Julevu in October 2022, just before Jackelén's retirement.
11. For more information, see: FSC Sweden, <https://se.fsc.org/se-se>. FSC Sweden forms part of the international Forest Stewardship Council which lists the respect for Indigenous rights as one of its guiding principles: "The Organization shall identify and uphold Indigenous Peoples' legal and customary rights of ownership, use and management of land, territories and resources affected by management activities" (Forest Stewardship Council 12).

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