UDK 342.54(485):792
DOI https://doi.org/10.2298/FID2501139L
Original Scientific Article
Received 2.2.2025. Accepted Accepted 18.3.2025.

PHILOSOPHY AND SOCIETY
VOL. 36, NO. 1, 001–332

To cite text:
Lund, Anna, Rebecca Brinch and Ylva Lorentzon. 2025. "The Potential for Civil Resilience. Staging Inequalities in a Stigmatized Neighborhood." *Philosophy and Society* 36 (1): 139–164.

Anna Lund, Rebecca Brinch
and Ylva Lorentzon

THE POTENTIAL FOR CIVIL RESILIENCE. STAGING INEQUALITIES IN A STIGMATIZED NEIGHBORHOOD

ABSTRACT
Currently, Sweden is a society marked by growing anti-immigrant sentiments and residential stigmatization. As a result, the symbolic and social gaps between in-groups and out-groups are widening. Consequently, interactions that could foster empathy and solidarity across differences have become increasingly fragile. However, artistic initiatives that counter anti-civil forces are emerging. This article focuses on theater and social inclusion by examining three interconnected elements: meaning, communication, and social change—and how they can serve as a form of civil resilience through critical reflection and recognition processes. Thus, we illuminate how theater can become a venue for social inclusion for a young, ethnically diverse audience by activating symbolic structures of meaning and emotions that recognize the inequalities present within marginalized groups and their experiences. This is achieved by investigating the professional and dramaturgical strategies employed by an artistic team establishing a new theater in a stigmatized neighborhood north of Stockholm and their efforts toward social cohesion. The analysis identifies dramaturgical strategies involving emotions, authenticity, and bodies, along with other professional strategies that work transformatively within the theater and the community, resulting in theatrical communication that allows for psycho-social identification for the audience and critical self-analysis for theater professionals, thereby holding potential for civil resilience.

KEYWORDS
Civil Sphere, Theater, Young Audience, Civil Resilience, Stigmatization, Ethnography, Recognition, Critical Self-analysis.

Anna Lund: Professor of Sociology, Department of Sociology, Stockholm University: anna.lund@sociology.su.se
Rebecca Brinch: Assistant Professor, Department of Culture and Aesthetics, Stockholm University: rebecca.brinch@su.se
Ylva Lorentzon: Assistant professor, Department of Child and Youth Studies, Stockholm University: ylva.lorentzon@buv.su.se

Introduction

This article analyzes the strategies a newly established theater in a stigmatized neighborhood has developed to create relevant productions for a multiethnic and young audience. Today, Sweden is a super-diverse society that is strongly urbanized. Nearly thirty-five percent of the population has a foreign background, either born abroad or having one or both parents born overseas (SCB 2024). Many non-white Swedes and recent immigrants live in high-rise housing projects outside city centers, which the white majority has abandoned. This demographic shift is indicative of segregation, as well as economic (Haandrikman et al. 2019) and educational disparities (Malmberg and Andersson 2019; Osman et al. 2024). "The immigrant" is precariously positioned in contemporary Sweden. In the mid-2010s, Swedish policy underwent a significant shift in migration and asylum policy. For instance, legislation related to residence permits and family reunification was restricted, while a multicultural ethos shifted toward ideals of assimilation and ethnocentrism (Switzer 2024).

And, although Sweden is super-diverse, the world of theater and aesthetic traditions other than Western have largely been invisible in Swedish cultural life (Malmcrona and Larsson 2017; Svens 2015). Recent surveys show that the Swedish art scene lacks multiethnic representation (Myndigheten för Kulturanalys 2023). Art professionals are mainly white ethnic Swedes from middle-class backgrounds. This reality echoes the experience of Isra, one of the high school girls we interviewed in our research focusing on processes of social inclusion in Swedish theater. She has an Iraqi background, and when she remembers her previous theater experiences, she says: "Oh my god, the only kind of plays I've seen were when I was a child, with school. What can I say? It was white people putting on plays. So, it was boring."

Some Swedish art milieus are, however, currently working to de-center and diversify art spaces (Brinch et al. forthcoming). In research on incorporation processes within the field of art, valuable contributions have been made by Alexander (2006) and Schall (2019), Lund (2024), and Josten (2024), yet it is a field of research that requires further development (Martiniello 2015; DiMaggio and Fernández-Kelly 2015). Additionally, many studies focusing on youth and incorporation processes emphasize educational and/or mental health over social or cultural practices (SOU Ju 2013:17). To narrow this research gap, this article focuses on the theater's role in the civil sphere in a democratic society.[1] Such a civil sphere operates on the premise of universal inclusion, while retaining responsibility for collective goals and defending the autonomy of the individual (Alexander 2006, 34). We analyze the practice of a theater aiming to change the white and middle-class status quo of Swedish theater, and we

1 The article is partly based on a previous work: Lund, Anna 2022. "Att gestalta miljonprogrammet: Husbys nya scen och en berättelse inifrån" In Brinch, Rebecca, Dirk Gindt, and Tiina Rosenberg eds. *Berätta, överleva, inte drunkna: Antirasism, dekolonisering och migration i svensk teater*. Stockholm: Atlas: 235–256. The article has been significantly revised and received approval from the publisher to re-publish.

investigate the practice of leaving space, quite literally, for bodies and stories different to what has historically been the case. The aim is to produce knowledge about how a theater can work for social inclusion and empower a young multiethnic audience.

In the present article, we focus on one specific case: the meaning attached to a new stage, Husby Theater [Kulturhuset Stadsteatern Vällingby Husby]. This theater is located in a neighborhood called Husby. This neighborhood is multiethnic and, in Wacquant's terms, subjected to territorialized stigmatization (2008). Husby consists of high-rise housing projects from the 1970s, and is situated 20 minutes northwest of city center by subway. In Swedish, Husby and similar stigmatized areas are called "förorter," [suburbs in English], shortened by young residents to Orten" (from "förorten"), equivalent to the value-laden English "the hood."

We analyze the Husby Theater and its opening production *Mizeria*. The play premiered on March 7, 2020. The production was directed by Astrid Kakuli, with music by Marko Saez. Maria Nohra and Ahmed Berhan played the title roles. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, performance of the play was postponed to the fall 2022, when it was staged again with a new female lead, Yasmine Seifi. We are interested in what the premier play and the theater team want to communicate and what they, in practice, do when trying to change the world of theater into a more inclusive space. How are they trying to be relevant to a young local audience? Making the theater a more inclusive space involves de-centering the theater and its taken-for-granted truths and an awareness of how these are part of historically shaped power structures (cf. Go 2016). As we will show, portraying stories from within contributes to realizing inclusion processes. New stories and purposeful casting are central, as is a staging process that understands how "we" and "the other" have a relational dynamic where the conventions and norms speak the language of the actors of the "central stage" in society (Alexander 2006). What happens backstage in rooms where strategies and theater repertoires are planned and organized, media reviews, and acknowledgment in the world of theater are also a part of the story (see also Saha 2018). This article explores how *Mizeria* enhances the self-respect of a multiethnic audience by allowing them to identify with the narrative and cultivating hope for mutual recognition between minority and majority groups in Sweden, as evoked among the audience by the play. It also addresses a change process within the theater, focusing on realizing one's blind spots as white middle-class theater professionals.

As children and youth are prioritized groups in Swedish cultural policy, theater tickets are subsidized for them, particularly when purchased through schools. In practice, this allows young people in Sweden to experience professional theater in school at no cost. The democratization of the arts is key, and offering a cultural infrastructure that enables everyone in Sweden – irrespective of age, class, gender, and geographical location – to encounter and take part in art has been the goal since 1974. One could argue that encouraging citizen

participation in the arts and culture is an essential aspect of the welfare state (Lund 2008; Lorentzon et al. 2025).

After this introduction, we outline our theoretical perspective and explain the data collection and analysis before arriving at our findings. The analysis regards meaning, communication, and change in the practices of the Husby Theater. The article concludes with some reflections on the potential of staging inequalities for civil resilience.

From Civil Repair and Social Resilience to Civil Resilience

For this article, we have been inspired by civil sphere theory (Alexander 2006), which incorporates solidarity into sociological theorization and considers the potential to repair gaps in the social fabric. We have also been inspired by the concept of social resilience (Lamont et al. 2013) and the role recognition can have for marginalized groups.

In Sweden, having a non-white, non-Western, or Muslim background is currently associated with negative stereotypes (Voyer and Lund 2020). These stereotypes are on an individual level related to the constant identity threat of being perceived as a negative racialized category by the white majority rather than an individual with unique characteristics and resources. This is a heavy burden to bear, creating unsustainable emotional stress and a constant feeling that the white majority doubts one's abilities. Frustration may arise as one's capacity may be questioned, fostering a need to prove that one is good enough (Steele 2011).

The current divide in Swedish society and the increased presence of anti-immigrant and ethnonationalist policies enhance the important role of new narratives and aesthetic experiences. Theater, among other art forms, has a proven ability to create empathy and mutual understanding (Brinch et al. 2023), decrease shame among ethnically marginalized groups, and create productive guilt among a white majority (Lund 2024). Thus, art can illuminate gaps in the social fabric through representation, authenticity, and emotional cues such as humor (Lund 2024).

Our theorization highlights the potential of theater for social inclusion by suggesting a new conceptualization within this methodological framework: *civil resilience*. While studying stage-audience encounters, we have listened to voices from society's uneven distribution of recognition. Symbolized by the perspectives of theater professionals and a young, ethnically marginalized audience group, both sides of the recognition gap are represented in the article (Lamont 2018).

Civil resilience builds on the idea that social resilience depends on the experience of recognition among marginalized groups. This happens on a societal level and can occur through personal interactions, political initiatives (Lamont et al. 2013), and encounters with art (Lund 2024). But this is not on its own sustainable in the long run. Civil repair is also needed, which speaks to solidarity in a broader and deeper sense, i. e., when procucing a hierarchy

of people as less worthy of recognition becomes polluted. Civil repair can only happen, as Alexander et al. point out, if those in power stop "applying the discourse of repression to the dominated, polluting them and justifying their exclusion" (2020: 200). This demands that the white majority engage in critical self-analysis and, in our case, convert this to an internal learning process in strategically creating relevant theater for a marginalized, multiethnic, and young audience group. In our theorization, this resembles a work toward a mode of multicultural incorporation, i.e., solidarity through a unity-in-difference approach (Alexander 2006). Our conceptualization of civil resilience points to the double process occurring for the out-group and the in-group in a stage-audience encounter: the out-group can experience recognition, while the in-group can engage in critical self-analysis, resulting in strategical choices towards a broadened societal 'we'. The ongoing social drama between in-groups and out-groups in society highlights the historical malleability of relations of dominance and the potential for solidarity through mutual respect.

In order to illuminate civil resilience in practice, we utilize a cultural sociological perspective that pays attention to the meaning structures and objectives woven into artistic projects and their connections to further social and cultural processes (Eyerman and Ring 1998: 280). We consider the professional work being done at Husby Theater, supplemented by an approach that analyzes the meaning, communication, and hopes for change attached to both Husby Theater and the play *Mizeria*.

We are interested in the content and meaning of the play, but also in the meaning of Husby Theater as part of the urban landscape. *Meaning* is analyzed from the perspective of the respondents. And their motives and problem-solving strategies regarding the dominance of "white standard theater" and its exclusionary practices. In terms of *communication*, we are interested in what the theater – as a place and a professional practice on and off stage – wants to convey. Fictional media constitute a communicative institution in the civil sphere (Alexander 2006). How this communication takes shape through dramaturgical and other professional strategies is of interest for understanding the potential of civil resilience during times of ruptures in the fabric of civil society. The perspective on *change* means that the meaning of art is not only seen as a reflection of social conditions. Art is not simply about taste, power, and conventions (McCormick 2022); it can also uphold civil values (McCormick 2015) and reflect social conditions (Schall 2019). What is more, it can influence the social world and create change through emotional extension and understanding, as well as redefine what is civil in the world (Alexander 2006, Lund 2024).

Thus, performing art, as an organization and as staged narratives, has the potential not only to reproduce existing power structures but also to shape social conditions and social change and support civil resilience. Eyerman and Ring (1998) and Alexander (2006) have emphasized that encounters with art can lead to an increased understanding of our position in the world, the social relationships we are part of, and how they are valued and recognized in society. Our theoretical approach takes these dimensions of meaning, communication,

and change into our empirical work by investigating the professional practices used to establish the Husby Theater and the dramaturgical strategies used to stage *Mizeria.*

Studying meaning, communication, and change

We have worked on getting to know Husby Theater and the play *Mizeria* from different perspectives. Since 2019, we have been part of a collaboration between The City Theater in Stockholm, of which Husby Theater is a part, and Stockholm University regarding the performing arts and urban development. We had the opportunity to get to know actors in the city of Stockholm who are working to reach out to the youth and more diverse audience with relevant theater by expanding their collaborations. The organization of a new theater in Husby is something we have followed as ethnographers since its start – sometimes very close up, looking at the theater's creation of new collaborations and its plays, and sometimes at a distance, by reading the reviews of theater critics and listening to other actors in the neighborhood talk about what the Husby Theater means to them.

For this article, we have read the book *Mizeria* and saw the transformation of the book into a play. We have watched the recorded version of the play and seen the on-site performance with the young audience five times. On one occasion, we followed a group of 88 junior high school students, saw the play with them, and followed them back on the subway to their school and observed their interactions and small talk connected to their encounter with *Mizeria*. On another occasion, we observed teacher-student interactions during a lesson when Mizeria was processed in different assignments. We have done five focus group interviews and one individual interview with audience members (ages 14-19), with 16 members in total. These were done within a week of seeing *Mizeria.* We asked questions about the meaning of the play, emotional reactions, possible identification, and their thoughts on theater in society. We will also utilize interviews with theater professionals with extensive experience working with theater and permanently employed in leading positions at the Husby Theater, and a local artist on a temporary contract. Olof Hanson, theater manager and artistic director; Mia Winge, who is a dramaturge; Jiasi Maciel, executive producer at Husby Theater; and Melody Farshin, the local artist, a Husby-profile stand-up comedian, and author of *Mizeria.* We talked with theater professionals about their experiences of working in different locations in Sweden, representation on and off stage, their hopes for the theater, and considerations when lived experiences in stigmatized high-rise housing projects are to be portrayed. All the interviews have been semi-structured and offered good opportunities for follow-up questions.

As we could look at the theater from many different perspectives, the material is rich and colorful. However, our analysis is connected to the professional and audience views on *Mizeria*, and their hopes for Husby Theater. This means that our analysis does not include voices from the local community outside the

theater. Researching theater has its limitations; once a play concludes, there is a short window of time to study its communication with the audience. However, the presentism of the theatrical encounter also brings an analytical advantage to ethnographic analysis, as we as researchers become "immersed" in the theatrical event along with all the voices and interactions connected to the stage-audience encounter. Our cultural performance analysis (Brinch et al. forthcoming) serves as a triangulation between dramaturgical strategies, various professional approaches, audience reception, and social and cultural structures. Our coding procedures were characterized by deductive strategies (social recognition, modes of incorporation, civil repair), as well as inductive ones (emotions, authenticity, bodies/identification), resembling an abductive process of theorization (Timmermans and Tavory 2012). The present study is part of a larger project[2] and was considered exempt from ethical review by the Ethics Committee in Sweden (Etikprövningsmyndigheten), protocol code 2020-07039. Informed consent was adhered to, alongside confidential data management. The names of the audience members used in the paper have been pseudonymized. The theater professionals have consented to be represented with their actual names.

Considering that we are white and hold academic positions, we cannot fully understand the feelings and experiences of people who are at risk of being exposed to racial discrimination and everyday racism. Deep down, we also do not understand the behavioral patterns that an upbringing in an elite environment creates. Probably no sociology can achieve a complete understanding of the social life of individuals or groups (Duneier and Back 2006). At the same time, we believe that intercultural understanding across different life experiences is possible. As Frantz Fanon wrote, "I sincerely believe that a subjective experience can be understood by others" (1986: 86). But as researchers analyzing how experiences of migration, segregation, and non-whiteness affect living conditions, we are often reminded of our privileged positions in public spaces, the education system, the labor market, and the media. While working on the present text, we have been in dialogue with the people who shared their work in the theater with us and let their reading of our analysis be a way of verifying that our interpretations are valid representations of their experiences.

Meaning

Olof Hanson, the theater manager and artistic director, emphasizes that Husby's new theater must be "relevant" to its audience. Collaborations with artists who have "something to say to the audience [who live in the neighborhood]" are prioritized. Criteria for meaningfulness are that meaning is created through narratives that can affect the audience emotionally and that the work front and backstage "must be representative." In concrete terms, this is done by offering

2 The research is part of the project Staging Migration. Rhetoric, Representation, and Reception in Swedish Children's Theater (financed by the Swedish Research Council).

a repertoire of plays that stage narratives that come "from within." These narratives are portrayed by artists who are not exoticized and do not have an outsider's perspective but who can relate to staged experiences.

But it is not a self-evident matter for an art form largely associated with the white middle class in the inner city of Stockholm to establish itself in a class-stigmatized and multiethnic neighborhood. Zarah, a high school student from Husby tells us that her reaction to the founding of a theater was that it was, "out of place." Zarah tells us that she does not expect a theater of such quality to be around for the long-term (see also Lund et al. 2024).

> You start to think: it's just another thing that will fail. That is what happens to new projects in our neighborhoods. Why should we be engaged? It will soon disappear. Because almost everything that has been opened has been closed down. Opened up. And closed down. All the time.

Her expectations for her first visit to the theater were that the experience would be a "half- hearted attempt that would not lead anywhere." However, entering the venue and finding her way to her seat, she was surprised to find that "when I entered the venue, I saw that it's nice, it's clean, completely newly built inside and it was very nicely done. I was surprised. And I thought: 'Why am I surprised?'" Iman, who was interviewed together with Zarah, fills in by saying: "You expected it to look dilapidated." To which she responds: "Run down and bad. Because everything that opens up, the state only takes it half-heartedly, for the socioeconomically vulnerable areas nothing is serious." Quality and serious attempts at communication and engagement from cultural policy actors is seen with suspicion. The young women we interviewed are critical, and their summary of what it is like to live in Husby is that the neighborhood is: "genuinely deprived of quality."[3] These young women's expectations echo throughout our ethnography. Observing the audience, we could often hear positive utterances about how nice everything looks, and how surprising this was.

Trusting, long-term relationships need to be built between the new stage and the local audience. Or as Jiasi Maciel puts it: "We are not better than our collaborations." The young audience "trusts" certain artists, which makes the path to the theater shorter, according to the executive producer. Meaning is created for the new theater in Husby by furthering relations that are "already created" with cultural actors the audience can relate to. It is about developing relationships with cultural actors in whom the audience has confidence. In this way, and as Jiasi Maciel puts it, the Husby theater "cultivates where it is already growing." Often, this approach involves the theater collaborating

3 It is worth noting that even if there are experiences of low-quality formal institutions and municipality services, there are also positive driving forces within the area, such as active civil associations supporting culture and sports activities, and supportive social services within these associations. In a survey conducted in the community where the theater is located, 85% feel at home and enjoy living in this area, 80% feel that their neighbors are helpful, and 73% trust the people in their community (Schclarek Mulinari and Wolgast 2020).

with individuals new to theater production and the silent and tacit traditions of the craft, making it essential for theater professionals to bridge knowledge gaps and manage expectations. Dramaturgue Mia Winge emphasizes how she must balance translating and transforming work methods to facilitate collaboration. It can sometimes be the simplest details, such as the time of day she is available to take calls for a joint effort to progress. Engaging in new collaborations becomes a mutual learning process where the conventions of professional theater are opened up and transformed.

The stage is anchored in local collaborations and stories from within. The play *Mizeria* combines these dimensions. Melody Farshin, the novelist and playwright, is of a similar socio-economic profile as the residents of Husby. *Mizeria* is about being young in a multiethnic and stigmatized neighborhood that the residents call "Orten." In our text we will, from time to time, use the informants' way of talking about their neighborhood. *Mizeria*, as a novel, is popular among the local youth, and the story does not shy away from addressing questions of racism and the sorrow of losing a young person to gang violence,[4] but it is also about love for the neighborhood and its people. Isra, a high school student, agrees with the balanced view *Mizeria* offers: "She did it in a good way. Most people, if they were to talk about themselves and their place, would highlight the good stuff and leave the bad stuff out. She took both sides." Jiasi Maciel says:

> In the suburbs, people have long lived in the context of violence. Deadly violence is present. And the insider perspective of this story [*Mizeria*], alongside the fact that it's not stigmatizing, and at the same time that violence is not at the center of the story. There is something about the language and the tonality. And this is in contrast to how much is written about this problem by others, from outside [the suburbs], where you don't recognize yourself. But this story and the language and the people, we thought were, in any case, very appropriate based on our audience [a young target group]. Which it was. It was a hole-in-one. Bull's eye.

In *Mizeria* we get to know a pair of twins: Aicha and Ali. They have dreams, they worry and they ponder life, as young people, or rather as people in general do. However, another element comes into play: their social status. They feel at home at the same time as their sense of belonging is questioned. At home, in "Orten," it is both safe and unsafe. There are shootings in the neighborhood. Visits to the white and wealthier parts of the city evoke feelings of exclusion. When Ali visits an inner-city coffee shop with his friend Osman, they note that they are the only non-whites and exclaim: "People look at us like we're ISIS on a coffee break."

4 Sweden has witnessed an increasing number of deadly shootings and explosions over the last few years. Conflicts between criminal groups from stigmatized neighborhoods and their drug business have escalated into violent interactions, alongside the symbolic violence of racism in society. In 2022, 61 persons died in shootings (Polisen 2022). In 2013, the equivalent figure was 25 persons (Institutet för mänskliga rättigheter 2023).

Melody Farshin's authorship draws on the experiences of children of parents who immigrated. She writes the inside history of the high-rise housing projects, with the hope of an urgent improvement towards a safer neighborhood, yet with the same capacity for love and caring that it already has. She is also motivated to create cultural experiences that are perceived as authentic and that the audience can identify with – experiences where the suburb's emotional structure is staged with the ever-present gap between the lived experience of being labeled by others of what one is and wants to become. She describes it as "a feeling of inclusion in a state of exclusion." Inclusion in a state of exclusion is defined by her as "identification with 'Orten'." She speaks of music from 'Orten', 'Orten' style, 'Orten' slang. It is about family and everyday life, which includes "the strong role of parents, how every elderly person in the area is your aunt or uncle," as well as "extreme sibling love and sibling hatred." And, amid this cultural and social dynamic, lives are lost: "I don't know a single person in my area who doesn't know someone who is gone too soon. I don't know a single person among us who hasn't been to a funeral of a very young person."

While transcribing an interview with Melody Farshin one afternoon, Anna Lund was listening to her voice, describing the sorrow of losing close people, and contrasting this to only encountering it as a notice in a newspaper. The following morning, we read a notice about a young man who was "murdered late on Monday evening in Alby [a stigmatized neighborhood] in southern Stockholm. According to *Aftonbladet* [a daily newspaper], he was found with several gunshot wounds outside the gate of an apartment building" (Hagberg 2021). Later that day, there was another bit of news: "murdered 18-year-old in Alby is linked to a criminal gang." That was it. Pain, sadness, and underlying causes are not dealt with in the media. In *Mizeria,* Melody Farshin weaves in emotions, interactions, and complexity. One life is taken by a gunshot. We get to know him, and we like him. His name is Osman. Farshin says:

> Osman is a person who generates sympathy. A person we hold close to our hearts. And for whom we cry when his life is taken away. What is it like to have a close connection to a person who is taken from us in that way? What is life like afterwards?

Misery [which is what the word *Mizeria* means] "is almost constant. Because it doesn't take long before another person is lost," says Melody Farshin and continues: "You breathe a sigh of relief, 'oh thank god that it wasn't my relative this time'." After a shooting in the neighborhood, the character Aicha in *Mizeria* says: "I'm relieved. I haven't lost my brother. But Ali lost his."

The audience member Isra would like to bring her cousins who are involved in criminal activities to *Mizeria.* She explains that the parts of the drama that evolve after the shooting could serve as a wake-up call for her relatives:

> I think it's a different thing if you look at it from another perspective. Now, they live in it so they see it one way, but if they could see it from our perspective, we who are their relatives, and how it would affect us, maybe they would understand.

The audience is invited to process trauma that is darkening their everyday life. Talking about *Mizeria,* Lazar, a young man in the audience, started to think about how racism and violence are connected in stigmatized neighborhoods:

> It is also hard because it also makes you feel that even if you are not doing anything, you can get caught for anything. You can just be standing there and they'll be like: 'You're in trouble, come with me.' Like they did with Ali [in the play], they just took him and said you are suspected of the murder of the man. Because when you see him [Ali], they have different skin colors, and his skin color is darker, which automatically makes you think they are taking him because he looks this way. And it is what happens to you if you look this way.

A collective grief over lives taken and at the same being brutally under suspicion is shared among the audience members from the high-rise housing projects. A short newspaper notice is, in fact, a brother, a friend, a future husband, a son, and a father: a human. *Mizeria* humanizes the dehumanized by acknowledging the injustices and suffering experienced by residents of stigmatized neighborhoods. This has the potential to build civil resilience through understanding, empathy, and recognition for the members of stigmatized neighborhoods (Lamont et al. 2013). As Lazar illustrates, *Mizeria* manages to stage lived inequalities so they can be felt and verbalized.

Communication

With humor

Melody Farshin is a stand-up comedian with 17 years of stage experience. Her audience perceives her as breaking with norms: as a woman, as non-white, as Muslim, from the stigmatized neighborhoods. She awaits the silent and reserved reaction of the white, male-dominated stand-up scene in Sweden when she steps onto the stage. Often, the reaction she first encounters is "how is she supposed to be funny?" Despite the negative stereotypes, she believes in the potential of laughter to create: "meetings between people who might never have met." She gives an example:

> Someone who lives in a fairly homogenous area where you have never spoken to anyone from the suburbs. Who has never had a conversation with someone of a different religion? And all of a sudden, I get up on the stage, and in my 15 minutes, I welcome you into my whole world.

Laughter opens the potential to get to know the unknown and can create a basis for change through future memories (Lund 2024). As a form of communication, laughter is a voluntary expression: we cannot force anyone to laugh. The emotional foundation of this form of freedom contributes to the individual's openness to the narrative being staged. Melody Farshin brings her experience from stand-up to her writing of *Mizeria.*

Mia Winge, the dramaturge, agrees about the potential of humor for communication. She highlights how *Mizeria* uses humor in its opening scenes as "a good starting point" that gives a dramatic arc. The audience laughs when the siblings Aisha and Ali are fighting over how to share their common space (Play Station vs. loud music) and help with the household chores. These everyday dilemmas create familiar laughter. This affects the audience's reception – any anxiety is toned down and the risk of being uncomfortable in the stage-audience encounter is allayed (cf. Alexander 2006). The collective experience of laughing at a well-known aspect of everyday life also paves the way for the darker material of the play –unfortunately also familiar in high-rise housing projects. Mia Winge explains the dramaturgical strategy:

> If you had started with a very clear seriousness, a heaviness, then it becomes like: 'Oh, God, I have to understand this.' It can shut people down. But laughter opens them up. And then, as *Mizeria* does, the audience is slowly taken toward the painful parts.

Difficult topics can be communicated "wrapped up in a joke." Melody Farshin compares this with writing an opinion piece on structural discrimination. "Already in the title, some people will just look away and you will just be preaching to the choir." Instead, fictional media, such as the theater, have the potential to create emotional connections between the stage and the audience. Farshin elaborates:

> I believe you can get to know this world and learn to like the characters, even if you don't agree with the analysis. As long as you feel that your body reacts when you are reading or watching [*Mizeria*]. As long as you get to laugh. Sure, it's a form of entertainment, because that's how humor works. But we remember the things we have laughed at so much longer in comparison to wise words from a lecture. So, I think it's a great tool.

The humor in *Mizeria* is dark. It is a symbol of seriousness and urgency. Perhaps it works as a buffer zone for realities that may need time and processing if they are going to enter an individual's emotional and cognitive space.

An appealing authenticity

Humor is an entrance to the difficult and sad parts of *Mizeria*. But, as Melody Farshin tells us, "the characters and the language" also need to be "authentic." This is particularly true because fiction rarely succeeds in offering trustworthy portrayals of lives in the high-rise housing projects. She continues: "I don't think I've ever seen slang used correctly. But I have seen it used incorrectly so many times. I often see *exaggerated* "Orten" characters. It takes a lot to make it real."

Melody Farshin is a language expert in theory and practice. She is fluent in the language and the rhythms of "Orten" – in the slang, the quick-witted thinking. She relates to the interactions of the stigmatized suburbs. "So, if someone puts you down, you have to be quick with your response." She describes the

linguistic cohesion of the "Orten" as a shared way people there have of expressing themselves in a "relatively monotonous tone but at a very fast pace." It is also about being forthright with each other. "It is not fluffy at all," but is done with "everlasting love." Similar interactions characterize friendship, where teasing is the interaction norm. "The closer you are, the rougher the communication is. It would feel false if someone called you 'sweetie' or say 'how cute you are'." The use of language on stage was emphasized as very important when *Mizeria* was in the rehearsal phase. Authenticity and the self-evident presence of slang were vital. Melody Farshin reflects on the problems that occur if someone tries to relate to the language without having a lived experience of "Orten." She says: "I think it's difficult to act like yourself in relation to a position of acting like that [being free in the language and rhythm of "Orten"]." She clarifies: "There must be a personal connection to how you portray such personality and character. So, my big worry was that the depicted characters would be ridiculous," and Farshin uses an inauthentic tone saying, "so, this is what you're like if you live in Rinkeby [a stigmatized neighborhood in Stockholm]."

The residents of Husby do not belong to the Stockholm theater world's white, middle-age, and middle-class audience. Here, in Husby, it is imperative to work with theater that speaks, in the dramaturge Mia Winge's words, "directly *to*" the audience and not "*about*" the audience.

To speak directly to an audience in an uncommented and non-explanatory manner can communicate a feeling that 'this is for me'. An aesthetic and strategic choice was made within the theater team regarding communication in the stage-audience encounter, where slang was used without clarification for audience groups that do not live in stigmatized neighborhoods. One example is the word "benim" (a first-person pronoun in the vernacular of "Orten", borrowed from Turkish]. This is a choice of communication that works as a significant symbolic signal. One of the stage actors initially inserted an explanatory line when the word "benim" was used. The sentence was: "benim arrived first." Mia Winge says:

> So, then the actor added: "So, I arrived first." And, we just said: "no, you don't have to explain. You still understand and it means a lot to those who know the word that it's not explained to them. It means a lot to them." To just keep the language as it is. Without commenting on it [i.e., translating it to standard Swedish].

Winge compares their strategic choice with the white, middle-class theater in the city center of Stockholm. She calls it "the standard theater." She reminds us that there are words and concepts used that are not spoken in everyday life, and these are never explained to the audience.

> But we don't use glossaries for those words. You just expect the audience to understand. And we wanted to do the same thing. And if people come from the so-called inner city of Stockholm to our theater, they can look it up afterward, if they don't understand it, if there are things they're curious about. You can google it. In that direction as well.

Winge clarifies that *Mizeria* is not for all young people and especially not for those who "are used to cultural events. It's not primarily done for them." However, *Mizeria* is not difficult to follow. Still, audiences with different relations to the stigmatized neighborhoods and, thus, different vernaculars reacted differently to the play. Mia Winge spoke to students from a high school in a privileged white area who came to see *Mizeria.* After the performance she asked them: "could you follow it? Do you recognize the language?" The answer was that: "we didn't understand all the words, but we understood the play anyway." For students from the Husby area that we interviewed after seeing *Mizeria,* the "Orten" language could take on a different meaning. One student explained how the use of "Orten" language had created feelings of inclusion, as she understood jokes on stage while her white, middle-age neighbor in the audience did not. Suddenly, she was the one on the inside, while members of the majority group were excluded, something she found exhilarating. Jiasi Maciel, the executive producer, said: "You notice that the local schools or schools with students from areas similar to ours [...] have another level of understanding." He compares it with audiences coming from white and more privileged areas: "They didn't laugh in the same places, they didn't understand [what was funny]." This difference in audience reaction became "a sign that we had found the right tone and content [for the young audience in "Orten"]". A perspective close to the lived experiences of the young audience from the stigmatized neighborhoods was being staged.

With different, but recognizable, bodies

Humor, language but also bodies communicate a connection to the local community. The actors Maria Nohra/Yasmine Seifi and Ahmed Berhan represent different possibilities for identification, at the same time as their bodies are recognizable for young people irrespective of their migrant/or non-white background. Supporting the notion that representation matters, Chimamanda, a young black woman in the audience, said *Mizeria* was relatable through the bodies on stage: "It was important that they were colored people themselves that were playing." Representation is central to Farshin's work, and she thought this through analytically when reworking the novel *Mizeria* into a theater performance. We never learn what country the characters would call their motherland, other than Sweden. We understand from the names of the characters that they have a Muslim background, but we are never fully sure whether the women are veiled. Melody Farshin's artistic choice is to offer the reader, and later the audience, a wide horizon of interpretation, while there are also several known reference points to identify with. This enables psychosocial identification in the stage-audience encounter. The audience members may share a Muslim cultural background but differ on country of origin. It is thus possible to share a cultural background that is often questioned by the core group in society for Islamophobic reasons, at the same time as looks, clothing, and lifestyle may differ. The "we-ness" of social cohesion through "Orten" is present, while sharing the experience of being made into "the other" by the majority

group in society. The actors, Nohra/Seifi and Behran, stage one sibling each as well as performing other characters and genders. In this way, *Mizeria* communicates that what is socially and culturally recognizable is not fixed in one specific body. Melody Farshin explains:

> It was important to me, that they [the actors] are playing twins, but I wanted them to belong to ethnicities that many [in the audience] have seen. So, then it became necessary that one twin was black and the other had some kind of Middle Eastern brown look. Actually, Maria and Ahmed, who play Aisha and Ali, Maria is half a meter tall. Ahmed two meters. There is no biological possibility that they could be twins. But after two minutes into the play, we bought it.

Different genders and bodies embody, at the same time, the shared experiences of youth and young adults in stigmatized neighborhoods. Hence, the bodies on stage are not a statement about a particular experience or background. The very concept of race is thus called into question (cf. Saha 2018). This means that the staging of race reveals how race is a social construction and not an unchangeable essence of fixed identities and belongings.

Race is a social construction, but the very real consequences of social racialization are illuminated through the staging of what we call a counter-cultural aesthetic strategy. The choice of a staging strategy where race is deconstructed is, of course, not about making racialization processes invisible. Discrimination and how it can shape self-doubt are considered, but the pride, love, and community feeling of being at home in "Orten" is also portrayed. This could lead to strengthened solidarity and recognition in the neighborhood and civil action concerning demands for justice and equality supporting civil resilience (cf. Saha 2018: 142; Lamont et al. 2013; Alexander 2006).

Maria Nohra and Ahmed Berhan in the title roles Aisha and Ali in Mizeria. Photo by Anna Classon.

The twins Ali and Aisha's difference in background illuminates how the symbolic and social boundaries of "us" and "them" form the myth of "the immigrant," obscuring a symbolic order that creates a distinction between the in- and out-group. What is under-communicated through Swedish anti-racist color blindness (Hübinette 2019: 67) are negative stereotypes linked to non-whiteness and non-Western and Muslim backgrounds (Voyer and Lund 2020).

Minority Swedes are labeled by majority Swedes as more outsiders than insiders through the usage of words such as second-generation immigrant and of foreign background. A symbolic veil is created that hides the fact that Swedish children are discriminated against as a result of skin color, assumptions about what a non-Western background entails, and Islamophobia. In this way, and between the lines, housing segregation and the racism of low expectations are legitimized. The children and youth in "Orten" are made into an "exception," similar to the historical framing of exceptions in American society, where enslaved individuals lived without rights at the same time as the US claimed to be democratic. Such an exception designates people as less civilized and thus less worthy of respect and recognition – in a word it dehumanizes (cf. Voyer and Lund 2020). A young black man, Abdi, from the audience of *Mizeria*, describes the negative feelings of being constantly categorized in a stereotyped way:

> The stereotype is the thing that hurts the most, because people don't want to know much, and what they know is mainly stereotypes. So, this stereotype, without the person knowing, will make the person run away from me, without even knowing you. They put you in a box that is harmful and dangerous.

Mizeria moves between emotions of distress, frustration, anger and humor, friendship, and love. The emotions are used as an entrance to topics of cultural and social pain. And this is done from an insider perspective. The aesthetic choices of "Ortens" vernacular speak *to* and not about the young audience. The bodies on stage represent the similarities in differences. Regarding content, references are made to the lived experience of being young in "Orten," the feeling of a shared community of love and support, and the dark sides of lives lost and discrimination.

For Melody Farshin, the idea of creating meaningful theater for young audiences in stigmatized neighborhoods emerged through her encounter with theater in central Stockholm. To write the script for *Mizeria*, she regularly visited the city's established theater venues, but she often left the theater with a feeling of "having been made a fool," which motivated her to create theater that communicated differently.

> A lot of things were weird, just for the sake of being weird. It's so abstract that you cannot possibly understand what they are trying to get at. And I couldn't relate to that. It's just art for the sake of being art. [...] I left several plays thinking: "How is this [with *Mizeria*] going to go?" [...] I asked myself: "What was the point of the play I just saw?" I didn't understand what they had said. And this experience motivated me to make theater that the audience can understand.

On opening night, the young audience, ages 14 and up, came because of Melody Farshin, as she is a Husby profile with strong relational capital (Trondman 2003). The theater gains significance because Farshin is an asset, because Farshin is Farshin. In the foyer, before the curtain went up one young adult said: "listen, Melody, I'm here for you. I support you. But don't expect me to understand anything. The theater is not for us. I've gone several times with my class and I've never understood anything."

When the curtain went down, the reaction was: "this was not a play. This was more like a film." Farshin asked: "what do you mean?" She received the following answer: "this can't be a play. I understood it all." *Mizeria* succeeded in telling a meaningful story. The humor, the feeling of authenticity, and the bodies representing the young audience of "Orten" created a stage-audience encounter of re-fusion (Alexander 2004). Clear communication of meaning happened. Audience members experienced *Mizeria* as an authentic story, for example, remember Isra who would like to bring her cousins to the play so they could see the sadness of lost lives. The cultural meaning was projected from the performance to the audience, not only the meaning of the story per se, but a new understanding of what the art of theater could be was also created.

Change

The kind of change the audience living in stigmatized neighborhoods brings forward in our interviews is a hope of civil repair (Lund et al. 2024) When they think about what *Mizeria* can contribute, they hope that knowledge can instigate change among a greater number of people. They point to how insights into their lives can bring a more nuanced understanding of precarity and possibly change toward solidarity through recognition, i.e., civil resilience. According to Abdi, the understanding can be about:

> The people, how we live, our habits, what happens outside of the TV screen, seeing the people, like understanding what happened to them. Understanding the whole story, why it happened, who saw it but did not do anything about it.

Abdi thinks that action for problem solving can follow understanding:

> Because if you understand the project [social life and conditions in multiethnic neighborhoods] you can understand how to fix it. Understand how to help. But if you don't understand, you are just watching it like: "what am I supposed to do now?"

Magda, a young woman in the audience, reflects on the symbolic message of the play in terms of equality and a unity-in-difference approach to life. She concludes that *Mizeria* reflects how socially sharing the same experiences and belonging matters more than how we look or our family bonds: "It doesn't matter where you come from, skin color or anything like that, you can be close to someone, it doesn't matter."

The kind of change we have observed and listened in on deals also with how the theater team, which is new to Husby, changed their perspective on how to work with art. Besides the ongoing work to stage narratives that communicate to the young audience in "Orten," there is also ongoing work to make the Husby Theater useful for other institutions in the neighborhood, such as local schools being invited as reference groups (see further Lorentzon et al. 2025), as well as dance and amateur theater groups that are invited to utilize the theater's venues and get to consult with in-house artistic and project managerial expertise. These are initiatives to communicate a desire to make the occupations on and off stage known to residents in the community. The Husby Theater aims to promote the inclusion of marginalized groups by broadening residents' engagement with theater as an interest and career option. But what our analysis can most clearly observe is the change within the theater and the white professionals' thinking about their work.

Those in the theater team who have left the white stages of central Stockholm to work in an ethnically mixed and stigmatized neighborhood have developed a form of critical self-analysis. It is grounded in a growing awareness that the living conditions of residents in "Orten" are far from the lived experiences of a white professional in the Swedish cultural sector. The critical self-analysis is strengthened by a growing awareness that the Western theater tradition is not the only one and it does not hold all the answers. Instead, the experience is that the internal logic of the Western theater tradition influences professional choices and sometimes even thinks for people unconsciously (cf. Lund 2004).

This critical self-analysis has created a work ethic within the theater team. They remind each other that they need to watch and listen deeply as well as step back. They must get used to not being the ones who are always talked *to*; instead, they are becoming more prepared to be the ones who are spoken about. Olof Hanson, who is the artistic director at Husby Theater, has re-defined his view of art and is also ready to make room for other stories and experiences than his own. He says he has started to see himself as an "obstacle." His previous position – based on him being white and male – was self-evident and did not require explanation. The self-confidence that followed such a position allowed him to stage everyone's story, without any hesitation, including racism. Without ever having experienced discrimination, in 2016 he directed the play *Verkligheten* (*The Events*) by David Greig. But the events he directed were not at all his own. Olof Hanson regrets this artistic work:

> It was so wrong. Because there I was and talked about something I wasn't grounded in. The workings of racism. And I am talking about something that is incredibly painful but that I've never been exposed to. Not at all. And the audience didn't come: neither the large, white, middle-class audience nor the more mixed young audience.

He thinks of his experiences of how theater organizations he previously worked in do diversity. "It was superficial," he says and continues: "it was as if

you thought you were good if you had someone with a different ethnic background with you. And that person was exoticized." The person in question was "invited," but the work was not based on 'what is your story?', but rather 'you can sit a little on the sidelines and join in'. So, we *look* good. There was a lot of looking good instead of change that would be for real."

Melody Farshin describes, from her perspective, how fiction routinely portrays characters from "Orten" in a negative light, often through stories told by people with no experience of living in "Orten." She concludes: "we're included because we're mentioned, but never on our own terms."

Hanson's learning process concerning how to work with diversity in practice started in 2016, when he received a new assignment as artistic director for the Husby Theater. However, he experiences that the potential for real change is a challenge, as the taken for granted work process, aesthetic standards, and tacit knowledge are revisited and re-defined along the way. When conventional ways of doing theater are re-evaluated, professional uncertainty arises. The dramaturge Mia Winge shares challenges related to her professional role:

> I have the classic ways of storytelling under my belt. There are stories and ways of telling these stories that I don't have the codes for. I need to be open to that. And not be like: 'This is a story that needs to be staged like this.' 'We need to *understand* this because ...' [but], 'we already understand it, it's just you [Mia Winge] who doesn't.' I need to see that [the audience in "Orten" has different references].

She described it as a process in which she needs to: "Question my gut feeling a bit." This process involves how she evaluates the quality of and the right rhythm for a story. Being unsure about her gut feeling is a new experience. She can no longer take for granted that her answers are the right ones. Winge compares this to what it was like before she started working in stigmatized neighborhoods, then she says she could: "quickly know, feel, and see things," and she further explains:

> Like, this part needs to reach a depth. We need a breather after this scene. But maybe I'm wrong. After all, it doesn't need to be like that. Because, and as I have encountered here: that is not how we talk to each other – at that tempo and it is not that story.

A critical self-analysis arose in the work with new, diverse, constellations in "Orten." It is about "becoming more open and *relearning*." One's feeling of professional security is disturbed. During a period, Mia Winge experienced that "all of a sudden I felt I can't do this. I don't know anything." It is, she says, "difficult not be able to fully trust your instincts." And where: "everything is possible at the same time as nothing is completely certain." But Winge has a positive attitude toward learning anew and supporting "new ways of telling stories with new codes, references, and languages."

Questioning the conventional ways of creating theater shakes the thinking about and doings of theater. A learning process is initiated when tacit knowledge

is articulated and challenged (Lund 2013; Polanyi 1967). Or as Winge puts it: "there are so many norms about how to stage a story. Now, I get to see these norms. And then decide that I don't need to follow them. It's transformative." In *Mizeria,* it's about the rhythm. Although the play has slow passages, it goes against a conventional narrative structure. Winge describes this in the following terms:

> The tempo of the text is much higher than you would have in a classical theatrical text. It's about the appeal. It's about this [Winge rapidly and rhythmically snaps her fingers]. The talking as well. [...] There may be no breathers [between passages] like we are used to.

Critical self-analysis arises when previous professional knowledge is insufficient. References from "Orten" are not always understandable because other rhythms for dialogue and storytelling are in use. The fact that theater professionals from the white part of the city are running a local theater in Husby may require that these professionals reflect on and reevaluate their taken-for-granted knowledge (cf. Saha 2018).

There are hopes among members of the theater team in Husby that youth in stigmatized neighborhoods will start seeing the arts as a possible professional career or leisure activity. According to Melody Farshin, there are two pre-determined choices for the young: hip-hop and soccer. Farshin firmly believes that cultural activities in "Orten" need to expand and be broader.

> Right now, and if you are from "Orten," it's socially accepted and expected that you will become a rapper or a soccer player. But what if someone has artistic talent, and wants to paint or become a ballet dancer? Or an opera singer? All that stuff.

The theater in Husby shows the multidimensional character of the theater world. It shows that theater is more than the stage-audience experience. It is also a workplace. Jiasi Maciel, the executive producer, explains: "we may be the only time a student from this neighborhood visits a theater. We need to create theater experiences they can identify with, both regarding the story and who the professionals on and off the stage are." "Who I am too," continues Maciel, referring to his non-white body. The theater is not only about relevant stories that allow the young audience, in Maciel's words, "to reflect on their life and further explore what it means to be human," but also to "open this world" as a workplace that "is magical and full of possibilities." It is a change in the lives of young Husby residents that Jiasi Maciel hopes he can help bring about. For example, what his non-white body represents has historically been excluded from or exotified in the white world of Swedish theater. He says: "Just walking over to the marketplace in Husby to order a falafel and say that I work at the theater and look like I do is the meaning of theater in this context. For us. For me." Listening to the theater team in Husby, we are reminded of what Alexander concludes in *The Civil Sphere.* For social change to occur, it must feel

meaningful on a personal and emotional level (2006: 301). And, we would like to add, also on a professional level.

The stage in Husby, which is part of a cultural center, is seen as an arena for social change. It can provide new opportunities and take the creativity of Husby residents seriously. The goal for Mia Winge is a theater that the residents of Husby can be proud of:

> That a feeling can be created that we belong to them. Rather than the inner city. I guess that, at the moment, there is a feeling that we belong to the big culture house [in central Stockholm], *care of [c/o]* Husby. But I would like to remove the "care of," so that the belonging is to Husby.

The hope of opening up the arts for young people aligns with the aim of Swedish cultural policy to democratize the arts and increase citizen participation. But it is also a form of lived experience among the theater professionals as they have seen close-up the importance of different bodies on stage and how representation can create connections in meaningful ways between the stage and its audience. Here, it is, of course, necessary to also have a critical view of how theater is diversified and the risk of tokenism and the reproduction of power structures favoring the white elite.

The stage in Husby is not just a temporary project. The theater team is relying on the theater to be stable and permanent. And they are working on a local anchoring process, supported by their critical, self-analytical reflections. Ongoing projects based on ideas from the local community are in progress. At the end of August 2023, three cultural activities were initiated: a talk show with *Galdem A Talk*, a feminist podcast community from Husby, and an open workplace day where practitioners of all occupations in the theater welcome residents to come and talk to them and learn about theatrical professions. In the fall of 2024, a new actor training program for young aspiring performers from the region and similar areas was established in Husby through a collaboration between Husby Theater and two other well-established artistic institutions in Stockholm: Unga Klara and Balettakademin. They are examples, besides the work with plays, of processes that can strengthen the potential for a theater to become a site for civil resilience.

Civil resilience by staging inequalities

Civil sphere theory brings solidarity back into sociology. Alexander theorizes how "feelings for others matter" and states that: "Solidarity is possible because people are oriented not only to the here and now but to the ideal, to the transcendent, to what they hope will be everlasting" (2006: 3). We argue that Husby Theater has the potential for civil resilience as it strives for social inclusion, and our analysis shows that this is possible through recognition and critical self-analysis. Thus, the theater team is not working toward assimilation, but is rather changing the ways theater is done through encounters with

distinctive differences in "Orten." For instance, the dramaturge Mia Winge describes this process in positive terms, as a transformative learning process. Thus, even if social inclusion of marginalized groups is on the agenda, this cannot happen without an internal change within the theater. Members of the professional team show their self-critical capacity in relation to their presence in a hierarchical dominance relation and how such structural inequalities otherwise damage the lived civil sphere. When taken-for-granted positions are disturbed, critical self-analysis can grow. Awareness can be transformative (Lund 2024). Different bodies, experiences, vernaculars, and rhythms must be valued and recognized. Aesthetic sensibilities are reconstructed while the multiethnic young audience, many for the first time, find a play meaningful.

The theater team we observed talks about the problems in "Orten," not as problems of "Orten" but as problems of the civil sphere. This is an important aspect of a civil resilience process through which solidarity may be repaired. It is too early to determine the long-term effects on the relationship between the stage and the audience in Husby. A lived civil sphere is always a hope, an act of searching, and a possibility (Alexander et al. 2020). However, *Mizeria* and the theater team in Husby demonstrate that meaningful theater is achievable by working with dramaturgical strategies of emotions, authenticity, and recognizable bodies to establish "we-ness" within the local community. Husby Theater strives to de-center and challenge the conventions of white, Western, middle-class theater while providing alternatives in the form of a theater from within – a theater that tells a story and utilizes a language that acknowledges life in "Orten," with intentional casting and portrayals that aims to facilitate psychosocial identification. This offers a young audience artistic encounters that highlight experiences deserving of attention. Such change transcends the local context and can support civil resilience through critical reflection among professionals in the art world and acknowledgment of the experiences of the young minoritized audience.

The potential for civil resilience increases with the opportunity for a shared experience where bodies in a physical, material space, such as the theater, are focused on the same story simultaneously. Experiencing emotions individually and as part of a collective fosters the ability to see each other as fellow human beings, engaging in a civil project for sustainability and equality. The embodied feelings of recognition within the audience, combined with a critical capacity and initiatives from the local community, civic organizations, and local politicians can become transformative by instilling a sense of responsibility for fellow members of society, benefiting the young audience, Husby theater, and society as a whole.

Funding

The research is part of the project Staging Migration. Rhetoric, Representation, and Reception in Swedish Children's Theater (2020–2025), financed by the Swedish Research Council (VR Ref Nos. 2019-02200).

Acknowledgments

We would like to thank the audience members who shared their experiences of *Mizeria* with us. We also want to thank Melody Farshin and the entire team at Husby Theater for their time and generosity in sharing their experiences with us. Finally, we would like to thank the three anonymous reviewers for their thoughtful insights and recommendations, which significantly improved the article.

References

Alexander, Jeffrey C. 2004. "Cultural Pragmatics: Social Performance between Ritual and Strategy." *Sociological Theory* 22(4): 527–573.

_____. 2006. *The Civil Sphere*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Alexander, Jeffrey C., Anna Lund, and Andrea Voyer. 2020. "Hope and a horizon of solidarity – An interview with Jeffrey C. Alexander: Interviewed by Anna Lund and Andrea Voyer". *Sociologisk Forskning* 57(2).

Brinch, Rebecca, Ylva Lorentzon, and Anna Lund. 2023. "Empati och erkännande i teater som gestaltar migration för barn och unga". In: Aspan, Margareta, and Mats Börjesson, eds. *Konsten att beröra: Känslor i barnkulturen*. Stockholm: Centrum för barnkulturforskning, Stockholms universitet, pp.: 133–155.

Brinch, Rebecca, Anna Lund, and Ylva Lorentzon. Forthcomming. "Cultural Performance Analysis." Leiden: Brill.

DiMaggio, Paul, and Patricia Fernández-Kelly. 2015. "Immigration and the Arts: A Theoretical Inquiry". *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 38(8): 1236–1244.

Duneier, Mitchell, and Les Back. 2006. "Voices from the Sidewalk: Ethnography and Writing Race". *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 29(3): 543–65.

Eyerman, Ron, and Magnus Ring. 1998. "Towards a New Sociology of Art Worlds: Bringing Meaning Back In." *Acta Sociologica* 41(3): 277–83.

Fanon, Frantz. 1986. *Black Skin, White Masks*. London: Pluto Press.

Go, Julian. 2016. *Postcolonial Thought and Social Theory*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Hagberg, Sebastian. 2021. "Ung man mördad i Stockholm – sköts med flera skott". *Omni,* May 4. https://omni.se/ung-man-mordad-i-stockholm-skots-med-flera-skott/a/0K6KjM (last accessed: February 4, 2025).

Haandrikman, Karen, Rafael Costa, Bo Malmberg, Adrian Farner Rogne, and Bart Sleutjes. 2019. *Socio-economic Segregation in European Cities: A Comparative Study of Brussels, Copenhagen, Amsterdam, Oslo and Stockholm*. ResSegr Working Paper 2019:1.

Hübinette, Tobias. 2019. *Att skriva om svenskheten: studier i de svenska rasrelationerna speglade genom den icke-vita svenska litteraturen*. Malmö: Arx förlag.

Institutet för mänskliga rättigheter. 2023. "Det gängrelaterade våldet och mänskliga rättigheter". https://mrinstitutet.se/nyheter/det-gangrelaterade-valdet-och-manskliga-rattigheter/ (last accessed: February 4, 2025).

Joosten, Sjors. 2024. *100% Swedish: Working for Recognition through Hip-Hop from the Suburbs of Stockholm*. Stockholm: Stockholm University.

Lamont, Michèle, Jessica S. Welburn, and Crystal M. Fleming. 2013. "Responses to Discrimination and Social Resilience Under Neoliberalism". In: Hall, Peter A., and Michele Lamont, eds. *Social Resilience in the Neo-Liberal Era*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: pp.: 129–157.

Lamont, Michèle. 2018. ”Addressing Recognition Gaps: Destigmatization and the Reduction of Inequality.” *American Sociological Review* 83(3): 419–444.
Lorentzon, Ylva, Rebecca Brinch and Anna Lund. 2025. “The (Im)possibility of Children’s Participation in Theatre. Engagement and Commonality.” *The European Journal of Cultural and Political Sociology.*
Lund, Anna. 2004. *Iscensättningar och upplevelser: om barn- och ungdomsteater och dess möte med ung publik*. Växjö: Växjö university
_____. 2008. *Mellan scen och salong: en kultursociologisk analys av ungdomsteater*. Lund: Arkiv.
_____. 2013. ”Staging Gender: The Articulation of Tacit Gender Dimensions in Drama Classes in a Swedish Context.” *Gender and Education* 25(7): 907–922.
_____. 2024. ”Laughter and Civil Repair: A Stage-Audience counter.” *Poetics* 103:101883.
Lund, Anna, Rebecca Brinch, and Ylva Lorentzon. 2024. ””De där klyftorna. Det ska inte riktigt vara så.” Teater och hoppet om förändring.” In: Hedlund, Daniel, Dennis Martinsson, and Kavot Zillén, eds. *Sammanhållning eller splittring. Olikgörande av barn och unga i samtidens Sverige*. Stockholm: Jure: pp.: 113–131.
Malmberg, Bo, and Eva Andersson. 2019. *Do Schools Mix Students from Different Neighborhoods? School Segregation and Student Allocation in Swedish Municipalities*. Stockholm: Stockholm Research Reports in Demography.
Malmcrona, Niclas, and MK Larsson, eds. 2017. *Shadowland: Föreställningar, seminarier och workshops om rasism och rasistiska strukturer i scenkonst för barn och unga*. Stockholm: Svenska ASSITEJ.
Martiniello, Marco. 2015. ”Immigrants, *Ethnicized* Minorities and the Arts: A Relatively Neglected Research Area.” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 38(8): 1229–1235.
McCormick, Lisa. 2015. *Performing Civility: International Competitions in Classical Music*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
_____. 2022. “Introduction.” In: McCormick, Lisa, ed. *The Cultural Sociology of Art and Music: New Directions and New Discoveries*. London/New York: Palgrave Macmillan: pp.: 1-16.
Myndigheten för kulturanalys. 2023. ”Att bredda deltagandet i kulturlivet”. https://kulturanalys.se/publikation/att-bredda-deltagandet-i-kulturlivet/ (last accessed: May 5, 2023).
Osman, Ali, Anna Lund, and Stefan Lund. 2024. ”From segregation to non-incorporation: a study of a failed school desegregation process in Sweden”. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*: 46(1): 113–131.
Polanyi, Michael. 1967. ”Sense-Giving and Sense-Reading.” *Philosophy* 42(162): 301–325.
Polisen. 2022. “Utveckling skjutningar och sprängningar”. https://polisen.se/aktuellt/nyheter/2023/januari/utveckling-skjutningar-och- sprangningar-2022/ (last accessed: August 27, 2023)
Saha, Anamik. 2018. *Race and the Cultural Industries*. Newark: Polity Press.
SCB (Statistics Sweden). 2024. ”Antal personer med utländsk eller svensk bakgrund (fin indelning) efter region, ålder och kön. År 2002 –2024”. https://www.statistikdatabasen.scb.se/pxweb/sv/ssd/START__BE__BE0101__BE0101Q/UtlSvBakgFin/table/tableViewLayout1/ (last accessed March 21 2024).
Schall, Carly E. 2019. “Arts Difference and Incorporation. Swedish Hip-Hop as a Site for Civil Repair.” In: Alexander, Jeffrey C., Anna Lund, and Andrea Voyer, eds. *The Nordic Civil Sphere.* Cambridge: Polity Press: pp.: 124–150.

Schclarek Mulinari, L., and Sima Wolgast. 2020. "Folkets Husbys trygghetsundersökning 2020". Kista: Folket Husby. https://folketshusby.se/folkets-husbys-trygghetsundersokning-2020-utsatthet-och-gemenskap-i-jarva/ (last accessed: February 4, 2025).
SOU Ju 2013:17, *Barn och migration.* Avhandlingsnytt 2018:6. Delegationen för migrationsstudier (Delmi).
Steele, Claude M. 2010. *Whistling Vivaldi: How Stereotypes Affect Us and What We Can Do.* New York: W.W. Norton & Company.
Svens, Christina. 2015. *Främlingen" på scenen: kurdisk-svenska skådespelare gestaltar identitet*. Möklinta: Gidlunds Förlag.
Switzer, Ryan. 2024. "It's not Sweden anymore:' The far right's mobilization of territorial stigmatization." *Mobilization: An International Quarterly*: 28(4), 471–489.
Timmermans, Stefan, and Iddo Tavory. 2012. "Theory construction in qualitative research: from grounded theory to abductive analysis."*Sociological Theory* 30(3): 167–186.
Trondman, Mats. 2003. *Kloka möten: om den praktiska konsten att bemöta barn och ungdomar*. Lund: Studentlitteratur.
Voyer, Andrea, and Anna Lund. 2020. "Importing American racial reasoning to social science research in Sweden." *Sociologisk Forskning* 57(3–4).
Wacquant, Loïc. 2008. *Urban outcasts: A comparative sociology of advanced marginality*. Cambridge: Polity.

Ana Lund, Rebeka Brinč, Ilva Lorentzon

Mogućnost građanske otpornosti: Postavljanje nejednakosti na pozorišnu scenu u stigmatizovanom susedstvu

Apstrakt

Trenutno, švedsko društvo karakteriše porast anti-imigrantskih sentimenata i stigmatizacija naselja. Kao rezultat toga, širi se simbolički i društveni jaz između onih koji pripadaju grupi i koji su izvan nje. Posledično, interakcije koje pospešuju empatiju i solidarnost među različitostima postaju sve krhkije. Ipak, nastaju umetničke intervencije koje se protive anti-građanskim silama. Ovaj članak se fokusira na pozorište i socijalnu inkluziju, ispitujući tri uzajamno povezana elementa: značenja, komunikaciju i društvene promene - i kako oni mogu poslužiti kao oblik građanske otpornosti kroz kritičko razmišljanje i procese prepoznavanja. Na taj način, osvetljavamo kako pozorište može postati mesto društvene inkluzije za mladu, etnički različitu publiku, kroz aktivaciju simboličkih struktura značenja i emocija koje prepoznaju nejednakosti prisutne unutar marginalizovanih grupa i njihovih iskustava. To se postiže istraživanjem profesionalnih i dramaturških strategija koje koristi umetnički tim koji osniva novo pozorište u stigmatizovanom naselju severno od Stokholma i njihovih napora ka ostvarivanju socijalne kohezije. Analiza identifikuje dramaturške strategije koje uključuju emocije, autentičnost i tela, zajedno sa drugim profesionalnim strategijama koje deluju transformativno unutar pozorišta i zajednice, što rezultira pozorišnom komunikacijom koja omogućava psiho-socijalnu identifikaciju publike i kritičku analizu za pozorišne profesionalce, čime se otvara prostor za jačanje građanske otpornosti.

Ključne reči: građanaska sfera, pozorište, mladi kao publika, građanska otpornost, stigmatizacija, etnografija, priznjacnjce, kritička refleksija