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## **Abstract**

The diversification of the media has opened up new spaces for performances that seek not only to evoke laughter but also to voice social critique. One example of this development is the TV comedy show *Märät säpikkäät/Njuoska bittut*, created by two young women belonging to the indigenous Sámi people living in Finland, in Northern Europe. This paper focuses on one particularly critical sketch in the show: a counter parody of a popular parody of the Sámi presented by two Finnish male comedians. The original sketch was a parody of ethnicity. As they strike back, however, the female presenters consciously foreground the categories of gender and class, thereby introducing a completely new figure: a white, urban, underclass woman. In this paper we draw on intersectionality and indexicality to analyse this multidimensional performance and its intertextual links to the original sketch. We ask, what do these insurgent discursive practices mean in terms of critique, what do they do under cover of laughter?

## **Introduction**

The diversification of the media has opened up new spaces and resources for multisemiotic performances that seek not only to evoke laughter but also to voice social criticism in a new, postmodern manner (e.g. Bernal 2013; Häkkinen & Leppänen 2013; Leppänen and Häkkinen forthcoming). These new parodic genres are especially prevalent in social media, but have also increasingly been incorporated into 'old' media such as national TV. This development has created new possibilities especially for marginalised groups that have traditionally been silenced and invisible in both the media and society in general. The subject of this paper, the TV comedy show *Märät säpikkäät/Njuoska bittut*, is one example of this development. Launched in the spring of 2012 and written and presented by two young women belonging to the indigenous Sámi people, who live in the 'North of the North' (Naskali 2013: 8, 9) of northern Europe, it was the first comedy show ever made by Sámi to be broadcast primetime on Finnish national TV. The show is characterised by its playful and parodic, yet sharply critical treatment of old, racist stereotypes of the Sámi which are still widespread in Finland.

This paper focuses on one particularly critical sketch in the series. It is a counter parody of a popular parody of the Sámi presented on Finnish TV by two well-known Finnish male comedians in the late 1980s. The original sketch was first and foremost a parody of ethnicity. However, as the young, female presenters of *Märät säpikkäät/Njuoska bittut* strike back at the racist imagery of the Sámi, their counter parody consciously mobilises a number of other categories as well, and particularly foregrounds the categories of gender and class. In so doing, they create a completely new figure: a white, urban, underclass woman. In this paper, we draw on multimodal critical discourse analysis and the notions of intersectionality and indexicality to unravel and analyse this multilayered and multidimensional performance and its intertextual links to the original parody, and ask: What do these insurgent discursive practices mean in terms of critique, what do they do under cover of laughter? In conclusion, we suggest that while the performance represents an inventive and carefully crafted instance

of (intertextual) critique and humour, at the same time it contributes to the cultural production of a new, social Other, symptomatic of the current neoliberal social order.

We start by outlining the theoretical starting points of the study. After that, we first briefly examine the social developments that have led to this new performance and made it possible, focusing especially on the current situation of the Sámi in Finland, and set the comedy show *Märät säpikkäät/Njuoska bittut* in the context of the Finnish media landscape. We then move on to a more detailed description of the data and to our analysis. We conclude by considering the broader cultural and political implications of this turning of the tables by the makers of the series.

### **From gender to intersectionality, from language to multimodal resources**

As gender in the counter parody of *Märät säpikkäät/Njuoska bittut* is intrinsically entangled with ethnicity and class, we in this paper adopt an intersectional view of gender. The notion of intersectionality (Crenshaw 1991) addresses the simultaneous existence and operation of multiple positions, most commonly gender, class and race (Brah and Phoenix 2004). In this paper, we analyse the two sketches focusing on the categories of ethnicity (as it is foregrounded in the first sketch), and gender and class (as they are pointed to in the second). We show that these categories, created and performed indexically through a number of linguistic and other semiotic resources, are interdependent and depend on the context (cf. e.g. Lopez 2014; Bernhardsson and Bogren 2012). Like other feminist scholars on language and discourse we thus engage in finding ways to operationalise intersectionality in the analysis of dense, multimodal media texts.

Intersectionality has been hailed as the most important invention in feminist theory (McCall 2005), but it has also been criticised for confusion around its application and the vagueness of its definition (Davis 2008; Verloo 2006). While Crenshaw (1989) originally coined the term to show the struggle of black women against both racist and sexist practices, the term is now used to cover an increasing number of differences such as class, ethnicity, sexuality, religion, able-bodiedness and age. The most important insight of intersectionality is that being a woman will be different depending on one's ethnic background, social class and sexual orientation, and each difference is constitutive of and inseparable from the others. It has been pointed out, however, that each axis of difference between women operates differently. Thus: 'Although discourses of race, gender, class etc. have their own ontological basis which cannot be reduced down to each other, there is no separate concrete meaning of any facet of these social categories, as they are mutually constitutive in any concrete historical moment' (Yuval-Davis 2011: 7).

Due to the varying ontological bases, the multiplicity of the categories, and their inherent fluidity and instability, the operationalisation of intersectionality has turned out to be somewhat challenging (McCall 2005; Walby et al. 2012: 227, 228). Crenshaw (1991) originally differentiated between three forms of inequalities: structural, political and representational. In this article, we focus on the aspect of representation. The two others, however, also play a part in that structural (i.e. inequality between social groups) and political (i.e. political agendas and projects) questions regarding the changing status of the Sámi and of women in the media landscape are inseparable from the politics of representation produced in the TV show and its analysis. As Karkulehto, Saresma, Harjunen and Kantola (2012) suggest, the axes of difference operating in intersectional identities can be addressed and

analysed from the perspective of performativity, which attends to the ways in which social actors ‘do’ gender, ethnicity, class and other identity categories. Although also representations can be viewed as performative, the notion of ‘doing’ intersectional differences emphasises even more forcefully the aspect of production – an aspect we wish to foreground in the following analysis. This shift in the perspective resonates, moreover, with a similar shift in feminist media studies, from the representation of women to the production of femininities (cf. Gill & Arthurs 2006: 444, 445).

Language, as (a means of) social action, plays a fundamental role in the performative production of gender, sexuality and other intersectional differences, or identity categories (e.g. Lazar 2006; Gill 2011; Lopez 2014). Here, in the vein of the most recent research on language, gender and the media (e.g. Lopez 2014; Lünenborg & Fürsich 2014), we use the notion of intersectionality as a lens to unravel the simultaneous presence and interdependence of multiple differences from the point of view of their discursive production. Drawing on multimodal discourse analytical approaches (Blommaert 2005; van Leeuwen 2005; Scollon & Scollon 2004; Pietikäinen & Mäntynen 2009) we view language more broadly as discourse, which for us comprises besides spoken and written ‘language’ also various other kinds of semiotic resources, such as clothing, hairstyle, colour choices, and more. Moreover, discourse entails discursive resources, such as genres. Adopting a functional view, we regard *genre* as a form of social practice which is tied to particular action (Fairclough 1992). A particularly central genre in the present study is parody, which we define, drawing on Rose’s (1993: 52) formulation, as a ‘comic refunctioning of performed linguistic or artistic material that may entail criticism of the parodied work’. We will elaborate later on how these theoretical starting points bear on our analytical approach. But first let us take a brief look at the current situation of the indigenous people of the Sámi in Finland.

### **The indigenous people of the Sámi in Finland**

The Sámi, numbering today some 60,000–100,000, are the only language minority in the European Union which is officially recognised on the basis of ILO Convention No. 169 as an indigenous people (author removed-a; Valkonen 2009: 138). The traditional residential area of the Sámi, *Sápmi*, covers the northernmost parts of Finland, Norway, Sweden and Russia. However, it is estimated that today approximately 70% of the Sámi live outside Sápmi, mostly in urban areas further south in these countries. The Sámi have a rich cultural heritage characterised by skills and customs related to traditional means of livelihood such as reindeer herding, a versatile handicraft tradition, stories and legends reflecting the Sámi worldview before Christianisation, and a special, particularly close relationship to nature (e.g. Lehtola 1997; Helander 2000; author removed-b). Moreover, there are nine different Sámi languages. This points to the fact that the Sámi are not a homogenous group, but rather are made up of different groups with their own customs and traditions. Like many other indigenous groups, the Sámi share a history of colonial dominance and marginalisation by majority populations and later on by nation states. As a result of strong assimilation policies, the Sámi languages declined from thriving community languages to endangered minority languages over the course of two generations around the time of the Second World War. However, during the past couple of decades, mainly as a result of the Sámi’s own political and cultural activism and organisation from the 1960s onwards, the status of the Sámi has slowly improved. For instance, in the Nordic countries the Sámi have their own parliaments, and the Sámi languages have gained the status of official minority languages in their respective regions (cf. Aikio 1988; author removed-a; Markelin et al. 2013). However, despite the *de jure*

recognition, and notwithstanding the fact that the same waves of modernisation that have swept over the rest of Scandinavia have also swept over Sámiland, a stereotypical and outright racist perception of the Sámi prevails. Most people still see the Sámi as living in their original, primitive way, leading a simple, unspoilt, idyllic life far from modern civilisation - an image fuelled nowadays especially by the growing tourist industry (author removed-c; Pietikäinen & Leppänen 2007; Lehtola 1999). An alternative image, one outside the scope of tourist marketing, is the stereotype of the Sámi as dirty and primitive savages, a notion which will be explored at greater length later on in this study (cf. also Lehtola 1999).

The discrepancy between official rights and recognition and everyday politics and practices is also reflected in the Sámi media, in which radio and television hold the strongest position. Print media face great challenges due to the lack of resources, long distances and the multiplicity of Sámi languages. In addition to these 'old' media, the Internet is emerging as a space for new media practices, formats and developments. In the Nordic countries, Sámi radio and television have their own broadcasting units within national public service broadcasting companies. In Finland, this is *Suomen yleisradio*, commonly abbreviated to YLE. While Sámi radio in Finland has its own channel and broadcasts programmes for several hours a day, television programmes in Sámi and made by the Sámi are still rare (for a more detailed overview see e.g. Markelin et al. 2013; Pietikäinen 2008; author removed-a). In this context, then, the Sámi comedy show *Märät säpikkäät/Njuoska bittut* stands out in multiple ways, as will be shown below.

### **The Sámi comedy show *Märät säpikkäät/Njuoska bittut* in the Finnish media landscape**

The first season of the comedy show *Märät säpikkäät/Njuoska bittut* was broadcast on the Finnish TV channel YLE2 during January-March 2012. The second season followed a year later. Until the launch of *Märät säpikkäät/Njuoska bittut*, the only two regular programmes in Sámi and made by Sámi were the Sámi news, *Ođđasat*, broadcast at close to midnight, and the children's programme *Unna-Junna*, which was shown early on Sunday mornings. *Märät Säpikkäät/ Njuoska bittut* was thus the first comedy programme ever made by Sámi and partly in Sámi to be shown on national prime time TV in Finland. The idea for the show originated with two Sámi women in their late 20s, Suvi West and Kirste Aikio, who were also co-writers of and the main actors in the show. The women have a background in cultural, media and film studies, documentary film production and Sámi radio journalism (Huru 2012; author removed-a). According to media reports, they took the initiative and offered the programme format to the production company *Tarinatalo*. Having eventually agreed to watch the pilot, representatives of the production company immediately became enthusiastic about the 'new and different idea.' (Tapanainen 2013; Huru 2012; Römpötti 2012). The enthusiasm with which the show was met relates to an ongoing reform of Channel 2 (YLE2) at that time, a reform in which the channel sought to revamp itself to attract more young viewers in the face of the constantly intensifying competition with commercial channels (cf. Römpötti 2012; Huru 2012). The changing role of the national channels in the media landscape, in turn, ties in with broader social changes, especially with the neoliberalisation of societies and the rise of post-feminism, which have not only made it possible for women to do TV comedy, but have also made features that previously prevented one from being taken seriously, such as being young, sexy, female and of an ethnic background, assets in the competition for attention and money (e.g. McRobbie 2009; Gill 2007).

*Märät säpikkäät /Njuoska bittut* became a media event in Finland. Especially the first season of the show was advertised, reviewed and commented on in several national and regional newspapers and magazines both before and after it was broadcast. The first season gathered on average 160,000 viewers – quite a respectable figure in a country with only 5.4 million inhabitants (cf. Hiltunen 2012). Moreover, many of the sketches were uploaded onto Youtube, where they continue to be viewed. In the media, the show was described as ‘a hybrid’ as its makers mix fact and fiction and laugh equally at the Sámi and the Finns, at minorities, majorities and at themselves (Lehtola 2012; Helaakoski 2012). Although the programme was presented and marketed unequivocally as a comedy show, many media articles (e.g. Lehtola 2012; Helaakoski 2012; Huru 2012; Juntti 2012) emphasised the critical and political underpinnings of the show and especially the aim of the makers to transform the racist image of the Sámi as dirty and drunk, with black teeth, which still prevails among the majority population in Finland (Ruotsalainen 2012).

### **Study data and method**

Describing the show as a hybrid is apt. Besides the fact and fiction highlighted in the media coverage, the series shifts between different languages (Finnish, Sámi, English, Swedish, Norwegian), genres, styles and modalities, resulting in a scintillating and provocative cocktail. The overall tone of the show is humorous, often spiced up with a parodic, tongue-in-cheek twist and a sense of cheerful carnivalism (author removed-a; Pietikäinen 2013). The 18 episodes of the series include celebrity interviews, street polls, mock reports of ‘current events in Lapland’, mock anthropological documentary films on the ‘Helsinki tribe’, (e.g. people living in Helsinki, the capital of Finland, on the South coast), and music video parodies of popular Finnish songs rewritten in Sámi (for an examination of the last two see author removed-a). The two presenters of the show play most of the roles in these sketches and mockingly present what might be themselves in the main storyline of the show, in which two ‘girls’ from the North come to Helsinki from Sámland to learn about the Finnish way of life and especially about Finnish men. In this storyline the presenters embody a kind of post-feminist girl power: at the same time giggling, hyperactive and in-your-face, hyper-sexual and ‘always up for it’ (e.g. Gill 2008). The name of the show takes up an old Sámi expression in a similar vein: *Njuoska bittut* (in Finnish: ‘märät säpikkäät’) means literally ‘wet legwarmers’, ‘bittut’ being legwarmers made from reindeer skin. In a figurative sense, ‘*njuoska bittut*’ is a derogative term for a woman, meaning ‘slut’ (cf. Juntti 2012).

In addition to the genres mentioned above, the show contains a series of sketches in which two young women go to the manager of a TV company with an idea for a new TV programme. Although they have a new format in each episode, the frame story of the sketch stays the same. In the frame story, the women come into the manager’s office full of enthusiasm and confidence in their new idea, and insist on showing the pilot to the reluctant manager. Despite the women’s enthusiasm, the manager invariably finds their suggestions unpleasant; unsuitable for general viewing and with no prospect of commercial success. The pilot shows that they present are parodies of well-known TV show formats, including one on home decoration and another on cars. One of them is a remake of a parody sketch of the Sámi originally presented on TV in the late 1980s, and it is this remake that is discussed in the present article.

The original sketch, or series of sketches, featured two Sámi men performed by two well-known male Finnish comedians. The characters, which had made their first appearance in

1987-88 on the channel YLE1 in a comedy show called *Hymyhuulet* ('Smiling Lips'), soon became known as the Nunnuka men, due to their frequent singing (allegedly imitating Sámi 'joiking', a traditional way of singing in Sámi culture). Although the sketches are rather benign in tone, the two characters embody a number of the grossest stereotypes associated with the Sámi, including dirtiness, hyper-sexuality and excessive drinking.<sup>1</sup> After their first appearance the characters immediately provoked heated discussion in the letters to the editor section of the national press, and a complaint was made to the body responsible for the content of TV and radio broadcasting at the time (Lehtola 2000: 236). This had, however, virtually no effect. At the turn of the decade the first commercial TV channel in Finland, MTV3, launched a new show, *Pulttibois* (1989–1991), which took over a number of characters from *Hymyhuulet*, including the Nunnuka men. Thereafter, both shows have been repeated on TV several times. Today many of the Nunnuka sketches can also be watched on Youtube. At the end of the 1990s, the characters also appeared in an advert for household appliances, but a Sámi organisation made a complaint to the consumer ombudsperson and the advert was banned as racist. The decision was widely criticised by the Finns, and the Sámi were accused of being unable to laugh at themselves (Lehtola 2000: 236).

The remade version of this sketch by the presenters of *Märät säpikkäät/Njuoska bittut* received a lot of media attention. One of the largest newspapers in Finland, *Aamulehti*, reported under the headline *Hyvästi nunnukat, on takaisin maksun aika* ('Good-bye Nunnukas, it's time for the payback') that one of the new presenters had watched the Nunnuka sketch as a child and had been unable to find it funny. Now, over twenty years later, she is quoted saying:

It's OK to joke. But it is annoying that in the south the only thing they know about the Sámi is the Nunnukas. They think that we are small, black, dirty Mongols, and very backward. (Juntti 2012, our translation).

As suggested above, the remake of *Märät säpikkäät/Njuoska bittut* is a multilayered, multidimensional, and highly reflective performance. Drawing on the definition of parody presented above, we examine how the presenters of the show use parody as a resource which enables a 'comic refunctioning' of the Nunnuka parody which also entails criticism of the parodied work (Rose 1993: 52). More importantly, however, we focus on how this 'comic refunctioning' alters and remodels the intersectional categories of the original show, leading ultimately to a whole new object of ridicule and laughter. To operationalise the notion of intersectionality for analysis, we apply the concept of indexicality, which Blommaert (2005: 252) has defined as the metadiscursive meaning of signs; as 'meaning that emerges out of text-context relations'. (For applications of the concept in sociolinguistic research see e.g. Silverstein 2003; Blommert 2005, 2007; Bucholz & Hall 2010; Schlafani 2009; author removed-b). In the following, we will first introduce the two sketches, then describe more precisely our analytical procedure and move on to the analysis.

### **Parody of a parody: Shifting indexicalities, altering categories**

#### ***Sketch One (1987-88). Hymyhuulet: The Nunnuka men***

A camera shot of a big rock in a forest with some moss on it. Two men enter the scene hopping and skipping, lifting their knees high up and kicking their legs out in front of them, and 'joiking': 'nunn<sup>h</sup>uka-nunn<sup>h</sup>uka-lailaililai' The men are dressed in long blue baggy coats with red and yellow stripes at the hem, and blue four-pointed caps. The costume is a

recognisable imitation of the traditional Sámi costume. The men are carrying plastic bags with bottles clinking inside. The men sit on the rock, and turn to the camera. Their faces are smeared with red and black paint to make them look drunk and dirty. They have black teeth and hay for hair. They are very cheerful. They start by bringing greetings from a well-known tourist resort in Lapland, Luosto. Addressing each other as much as the audience, they tell viewers that they would like to give a few tips on the ‘maintenance of the body’. They say that one of the men, ‘Naima-Aslakki’, has had ‘a spring service’. His mate, ‘Soikhiapää’, reports the results of the service, detailing the technical defects that have been found in him. He talks about Naima-Aslakki as if he was a car. In the course of the narration, however, there are more and more allusions to sex and the men laugh more and more. Giggling and coughing, Naima-Aslakki then expresses the wish to have a further ‘service’ from a ‘fine lady’, regretting that there is ‘no brothel, that is, hotel’ nearby. Soikhiapää interrupts his fantasy by telling him to ‘shut up’ so that they can continue their journey. The men grab their plastic bags, get up, take their positions and dance away, again chanting ‘nunn<sup>h</sup>uka-nunn<sup>h</sup>uka-lailailailai’.

***Sketch Two (2012). Märät säpikkäät/Njuoska bittut: Leila and Laila***

A middle-aged white man with glasses, wearing a light blue shirt and a tie, is sitting behind his desk when two neatly dressed young women walk into his office saying they’re ‘sorry for the last time’ and assuring him that they’ve made sure that his wife is not present this time. The man seems panicky, appalled. He asks, ‘Who keeps letting you in?’ The women tell the man that they have an idea for a TV show featuring Finnish women. They claim that it was inspired by the man’s wife. The young women seem very pleased with their idea, introducing it as follows: ‘There are, like, Finnish women, it’s a really funny, humorous sketch. It really depicts the Finns so amazingly well.’ As they speak, they set up their pink laptop and exclaim ‘Let’s roll!’ The sketch is projected onto a screen, onto which the camera now zooms.

Shot outside an unidentifiable block of flats in an apparently rough urban area, with an iron staircase and rubbish bins in the background, the sketch begins with the sound of a woman’s coarse voice chanting a nonsensical rhyme sometimes chanted by schoolchildren: ‘Laila-löi-Leilaa-Leila-löi-Lailaa’ (‘Laila hit Leila, Leila hit Laila’). Two women appear, their bent backs turned to the camera, kicking their feet up into the air. Like the Nunnuka men, the women are carrying plastic bags with bottles clinking inside. They sit down on the asphalt holding cans of beer and cider, and present themselves to the audience as Leila Alapillu (‘Leila Undercunt’) and Laila Perseinen (‘Laila Ass’). Their faces and teeth are smeared with black paint, they have hay for hair and they are laughing raucously. Their voices are grating and hoarse, and their gestures are exaggerated and grotesque. They make faces, swear, and stick out their tongues as they speak. Their clothes look as though they have been pulled at random out of a ragbag: Leila is wearing a bright green blouse and a black and yellow woollen cap, while Laila is wearing a thin light lilac top with a red, white and blue shell suit jacket and a blue bandana. They are both wearing jeans with bleached stripes in them. Their clothes are ill-fitting: the women’s breasts seem to be bursting out of their tops and their (obviously fake) bellies are bulging over their tight jeans. Laila’s blue bra shows above the low neckline of her top. Addressing partly the audience, partly Laila, Leila opens the dialogue by announcing that something really bad has happened to her. They begin an exchange that includes a number of racist remarks, sexual allusions and stereotypes which we will discuss in detail below. After the exchange, they get up and leave the area with the chant and dance familiar from the opening scene. The camera turns back to the office of the YLE manager.



‘Wasn’t it funny!?!’ the young women exclaim. The camera zooms onto the face of the middle-aged man in his office. He looks appalled. ‘This is bloody insulting!’ he exclaims. ‘Oh no’, the young women announce, ‘you should be able to laugh at yourself. We thought we’d take this abroad!’ The man exclaims that no one will ever buy the programme. The women angrily conclude that he’s in the wrong business and unable to laugh at himself. They collect their laptop and exit the office. The man takes off his glasses and wipes his face with his hand. The scene makes a humorous, but critical reference, to the Finns’ reception of the original sketch discussed above.

As we can see in the descriptions above, there are a number of features in the sketch of *Märät säpikkäät/Njuoska bittut* which make it possible to read it as a textual intervention (Pope 1992) of the Nunnuka sketch. The similarities include the choreography, the position and poses of the characters and their interaction with one another and the camera/audience, the ‘dance’, the ‘joiking’/chanting, the dialogue, their smeared faces, the hay for hair, black teeth, plastic bags with bottles clinking, drunkenness, and the sexualized content of the dialogue. These obvious similarities establish indexical links between the sketches and highlight the substitutions and changes made by *Märät säpikkäät/Njuoska bittut* in their ‘comic refunctioning’ (Rose 1993) of the original sketch (cf. Pietikäinen & Mäntynen 2009: 120). By making parodic references to the original show, the indexical, or intertextual, links function as a source of humour. In so doing they add to the humorous take of the frame story and contribute to opening up a new space for critical treatment of the original sketch in the mainstream media.

At the same time, many of the features establishing indexical links between the two sketches are also indexical of social categories such as ethnicity, gender, and class, although the indexical reference can change when taken into a new context. Below, we focus on the similarities and dissimilarities between the two sketches and investigate the linguistic and other semiotic resources drawn upon to index the categories/dimensions of ethnicity and geographical location, gender, and class. We acknowledge that social categories are mutually constructive, and the boundaries between different categories are fuzzy and leaking; for practical reasons, however, in what follows we will take one social category at a time as a starting point for our examination, and discuss the interfaces and links between them as we proceed.

### ***Ethnicity and geographical location***

The most salient category evoked in the Nunnuka sketch is that of ethnicity, and in particular, Sáminess. The most prominent index of this is the clothes the characters wear, which through their colours, decorative patterns and form resemble the traditional costumes of the Sámi. The recognisability of the outfit to viewers of the show as an emblematic marker of Sáminess is owing to a large extent to the Lapland tourist industry, in which (mostly similar fake versions of) the Sámi dress are (ab)used in various tourist activities (cf. e.g. Pietikäinen 2013). In the Nunnuka sketch the jacket is far too long, resembling rather a loose dress, which gives the men a somewhat feminine appearance. The ‘song’ the men are chanting when they enter and leave ‘the stage’, *nunn<sup>h</sup>uka-nunn<sup>h</sup>uka-lailaalailaa*, is meant to be a humorous imitation of joiking, a traditional way of singing characteristic of some of the Sámi groups (Lehtola 1997). In the chant, the men pronounce the word *nunnuka* [nun:huka] with an exaggerated aspirated *h*, and they insert the same sound into words in their dialogue, in so doing imitating and indexing a speech variety popularly referred to as the ‘Lappish dialect’. Although the ‘Lappish dialect’ is generally associated with people living in Lapland (including Finns), it has come to represent above all the way in which the Sámi (as people from the North)

supposedly speak Finnish (cf. Pietikäinen & Leppänen 2007). As such, the way the Nunnuka men speak indexes both geographical location and ethnicity.

While the features examined above make allusions to actual cultural traditions, others tap into and reproduce racist, stereotypical notions of the Sámi. The names of the two characters, Naima-Aslakki and Soikhiapää (also here the /h/ is added), make reference to Sáminess in these terms. The name Aslak is a typical male Sámi name. However, the prefix *Naima*, which refers directly to sexual intercourse, gives it an overtly sexual colouring. The mock name Naima-Aslakki is also used elsewhere in popular (racist) stories about the Sámi, especially in jokes (see Pietikäinen & Leppänen 2007). Together the names of the characters, Naima-Aslakki and Soikhiapää, make a sexual allusion to a famous Sámi artist and poet, Nils-Aslak Valkeapää. The sexualized names index the notion of the Sámi (as indeed happens with many other indigenous groups) as filthy and over sexed (e.g. Pietikäinen & Leppänen 2007). This perception is circulated also through the dialogue, in which the men express their wish to have a 'service' from 'a fine lady' and regret the lack of brothels in the area. Besides overt sexuality, the sketch also makes reference to the stereotypical idea of the Sámi as heavy drinkers. This is indicated very saliently by the men's plastic bags, which are from Alko (the monopoly liquor store in Finland), with clinking bottles inside, as well as by the men's drunk, happy appearance. The sketch also mobilises the overall notion of the Sámi as dirty, uncivilised and backward, indexed by the black teeth, the hay the men have for hair under their 'Sámi' hats, and the black smears on their faces, supposedly soot - a reference to the huts in which the Sámi traditionally lived.

Whereas the Nunnuka sketch most saliently mobilises the category of ethnicity, relating to Sáminess, in the remake by *Märät säpikkäät/Njuoska bittut* the category of ethnicity recedes into the background, partly because of the unmarkedness of whiteness and Finnishness in the Finnish context, but also because the makers introduce the marked categories of femininity and underclass, as we will examine further below. But first let us examine how the dimension of ethnicity does figure in the Leila and Laila sketch.

In the frame story of the Leila and Laila sketch, in which the two young women present their idea for a TV show to a programme manager in the national broadcasting company, YLE, the women emphasise (by mentioning it twice) that the show is about Finnish women. In the actual sketch, however, there are no particular indexes of Finnishness in the appearance of the two characters, Leila and Laila - apart from, perhaps, Laila's jacket, which can be interpreted as being an allusion to the humorous notion of (this kind of) nylon shell suit jacket as the 'national dress' of the Finns. The jeans and tops the women wear can be read as indexes of their 'whiteness' or Westernness, but not of Finnishness in particular. Instead, as we will argue below, these appear as salient indexes of class.

Ethnicity, on the other hand, becomes a significant category in the dialogue between the two women<sup>11</sup>:

Leila: Nyt on käynyt tosi huono homma..

Laila: Mitä vittu sulle on nyt tapahtunu, kun ei o mitään lukenu ees facebookissa?

Leila: Sehän on semmonen juttu, että mun Plussa-kortti on kadonnut, enkä saa yhtään alennusta siideristä.

Laila: Tommonen kyllä vituttaa tosi paljon.

Leila: Ja sitten näin semmosen neekerin tuolla notkumassa ja se katsoi minua himoitsevasti. Kait se oli semmonen raiskari.

Laila: Tätäkö oli...? Vittu Suomi kuuluu suomalaisille!

Leila: Näin on!  
*They begin to bawl out the Finnish national anthem: Oi maamme Suomi synnyinmaa..*  
Leila, *interrupting*: Miten se menee..?  
Leila: Sitten on ne mannet!  
Laila: Mitä ne teki sulle?!  
Leila: Ne pölli mun Plussa-kortin  
Laila: Eei vittu! Mennään saunaan syömään...mämmiä!  
Leila: Joo, römpsän pesulle, ähhäähää!

Leila: Now something really bad's happened to me.  
Laila: What the fuck's happened to you? There wasn't even anything on Facebook.  
Leila: Well, the thing is that I've lost my Plussa card [a loyalty card widely used in Finland], and I can't get any discount on cider.  
Laila: That kind of thing really pisses you off.  
Leila: And then I saw some nigger hanging about there and he leered at me hornily. Perhaps he was one of those rapists.  
Laila: What the...? For fuck's sake, Finland belongs to the Finns!  
Leila: That's it!  
*They begin to bawl out the Finnish national anthem: Our land, our land, our fatherland.*  
Leila, *interrupting*: How does it go?  
Leila: And then there's these gypsies.  
Laila: What did they do to you?!  
Leila: They nicked my Plussa card.  
Laila: Fuck, no! Let's go to the sauna and eat some... mämmi! [a Finnish Easter pudding]  
Leila: Yeah, to wash our pussies, ha-ha-haa!

In this dialogue the category of ethnicity is evoked in two ways: on the one hand, as an identity category of the two characters, indexed by the topics on which and the ways in which the characters speak. On the other, ethnicity figures as an ascription of 'others' by the two characters. Features pointing at the Finnishness of the characters include a number of stereotypical notions about the Finns: frequent swearing, drinking, and 'bad English', the latter manifest in the way Laila pronounces the expression *in Facebook*, that is, pronouncing the noun as if it was Finnish, [fasepɔ:kissa]. Drinking cider (to which Leila makes a reference in the dialogue, and she also has a can of cider in her hand) is associated especially with Finnish women. Other features indicating Leila's and Laila's alcohol consumption are, however, indexical rather of social class, as is partly also the frequent swearing. We will examine these features in more detail below.

In the dialogue, the characters make references to two ethnic minorities in Finland, black people and Roma people, in emphatically categorical and racist terms. Referring to the first group, Leila uses the term *nigger*, which bears a strongly racist connotation nowadays also in Finland. She also interprets the action of the black man as 'hanging about' and his 'leer' as suggestive and on this basis makes the straightforward and categorical assumption that 'perhaps he was one of those rapists'. The account circulates the racist stereotype of black men as inclined to commit rapes (Loomba 1998: 164). Shortly after, Leila makes a similar reference to the Roma, calling them gypsies. She introduces the topic into the conversation with the general statement [*a*]nd then there are these gypsies. Laila's interrogative response to this includes a straightforward presupposition that 'the gypsies' have done something to Leila. Leila's claim that they have stolen her loyalty card and the plural form *they*, which

refers to an ethnic group rather than to an individual as the agent, index the common categorical prejudice among Finns that the Roma are thieves.

The characters' remarks on these two ethnic minority groups in Finland make an emphatic reference to the racist attitudes of Finns. Thus, besides swearing and drinking, Finnishness is constructed through a racist relationship to minorities and the stereotypes held by Finns.

Taking this further, the idiomatic exclamation, *Finland belongs to the Finns*, and the singing of the national anthem in between the racist comments make the reference not simply to Finns, but to right-wing nationalists in Finland. Through this reference also the racist remarks on the ethnic others can be read as indexes of a particular kind of Finnishness that is made representative of Finnishness in general. This 'particular kind of Finnishness' is today associated with the right-wing party *Perussuomalaiset*, 'True Finns', associated above all with working-class men. The drunkenness and the swearing attached to the statement *Finland belongs to the Finns* create the link to this kind of working-class nationalism. Through the dialogue, then, the Finns are constructed as racist and nationalist. In this context, the concluding references to the two curiosities, *sauna* and *mämmi*, which Finns often highlight as emblems of Finnish culture, seem only to serve the purpose of additional mockery.

Regarding the dimension of geographical location, the two sketches evoke a rural-urban dichotomy and a distinction between the North and the South, thereby linking geographical location to the ethnic difference discussed above. As mentioned, the Sámi are stereotypically represented in conjunction with nature (cf. Pietikäinen & Leppänen 2007). The fact that the Nunnuka men sit on a rock points to nature and rurality, and through this to ethnicity, rather than to any particular geographical location. More specifically the location of the characters is indicated in their dialogue: as noted above, they greet the audience by bringing greetings from Luosto, a well-known tourist resort in Lapland, and imitate 'the Lappish dialect' by (over)using the aspirated *h* in their speech.

Similarly, Leila and Laila's location is identifiable only as urban backyard, not a specific place. Also here the setting can be interpreted as indexing ethnicity, more specifically Finnishness, in that, as is represented in other sketches in *Märät Säpikkäät/Njuoska bittut*, the Finns live in 'concrete bunkers' (only) in Helsinki and other big cities in the south of Finland (cf. author removed-a). In Leila and Laila, however, the setting, and particularly the rubbish bins in the background, together with the fact that the women are sitting on the ground, are also indicative of their social class, as we will discuss below. The geographical location of the characters is indicated also here by the way they speak: especially Laila speaks with a nasal accent and uses a sharp, fronted /s/, a speech style commonly associated with young women living in the Helsinki area (Halonen forthcoming).

### ***Gender and class***

In popular stereotypes circulated for instance through stories and jokes, Sáminess is represented through male characters. The Nunnuka sketch takes up this male stereotype. It is (presumably) recognisable to the audience and therefore funny (cf. Pietikäinen & Leppänen 2007). Especially in late 1980s Finland the figure of a Sámi woman was not a comparable source of humour. For these reasons and because most comedians in the 1980s anyway were male, gender appears as an unmarked category. Thus, the Nunnuka sketch appears to be first and foremost about ethnicity. However, as Sáminess is represented by male characters, the sketch is inevitably about masculinity as well.

The masculinity through which Sáminess is produced in the sketch represents a particular kind of sexualized, but also effeminised masculinity and, as such, is a typical way of depicting the masculinity of ethnic others in colonial discourse (Loomba 1997, 152). A feminine appearance is evoked by the men's costumes, which resemble long dresses rather than jackets; by their mutual interaction, characterized by affinity and constant chuckling; and by their pose and gestures, such as sitting with their legs crossed and wiping the hay hair from their face. They also speak in high-pitched voices. Although the representation is demeaning, it is still made in a rather benign and light-hearted spirit which stands in stark contrast to the performances in *Märät Säpikkäät/Njuoska bittut*.

In *Märät Säpikkäät/Njuoska bittut* gender becomes foregrounded, we would argue, for a number of reasons. First, the replacement of male characters by female ones is one of the most salient changes in the remake. Secondly, if the sketch is to represent Finnishness (as is claimed in the frame story), the standard, unmarked choice would be to do this through masculinity, as maleness continues to be the cultural norm. The markedness of the decision to choose female characters is also indicated in the frame story, in which the two women emphasise that the sketch is about Finnish women as representative(s) of the Finns. (See the Section on Ethnicity, above). All this shows that in the sketch the gender of the characters is not accidental, but is deliberately highlighted. Moreover, as will be discussed further below, the femininity becomes prominent because it is represented in marked conjunction to class, and in particular, to lower classness.

The most salient indexes of gender in the sketch are the names of the two characters, Leila and Laila, the clothes they wear, and their body shape, which is emphasised by their clothes. Leila and Laila are typical names of middle-aged, Finnish women. Thus, along with some aspects of the women's dialogue (e.g. talk about the loyalty card), the names suggest that the characters are no longer very young. Both the women have large busts (clearly made up with fillings). Finally, many aspects of their dialogue index their gender, although in inseparable conjunction with ethnicity (see above) and/or class (see below).

Similarly to that of the Nunnuka men, Leila's and Laila's interaction is characterised by mutual rapport and cooperative and affirmative speech, which has been described as a feminine style of exchange (Tannen 1991). However, there is no chuckling or amusement in the interaction. Their voices are sharp and loud. Imitating the Nunnuka sketch, their facial expressions are exaggerated, and their bodies continue to jerk in the same hopping dance moves after they have sat down. However, in Leila and Laila these characteristics are exaggerated to the point that they begin to resemble compulsions, even suggesting disability: they stick out their tongues, pull faces, blink, and make convulsive movements with their arms. While the Nunnuka men were depicted as feminised, Leila and Laila appear rather masculine, an impression further encouraged by the can of beer in Laila's hand.

Also the emphasis on the dimension of sexuality is a feature taken from the Nunnuka sketch. One of the most salient resources used for this are the 'surnames' of the women, Ala-Pillu ('Undercunt') and Perseinen ('Ass'), the hyphen in the former of which makes a direct parallel to the name *Naima-Aslakki*. In addition to the characters' names, the aspect of sexuality appears in the Nunnuka sketch first and foremost in the dialogue, in their chuckling allusions to Naima-Aslakki's body through the metaphor of the car. The metaphorical treatment of the subject distances it from their actual bodies. In Leila and Laila, on the other hand, sexuality appears more immediate and embodied: when introducing herself, Leila pushes forward her large (stuffed) breast and touches it with her hand. Laila's low neckline reveals her cleavage. Given the dirt, drinking and the overall aggressive appearance of the

characters, however, their sexuality is far removed from the erotic. The women's sexuality is a curious mixture of vulgarity, abjectness and asexuality. The sense of vulgarity is reinforced by the direct reference to genitals in Leila's suggestion '[Let's go] to wash our pussies'. However, the word Leila uses for 'pussy', *römpsä*, is an old dialectal expression free of sexual connotations. Also the activity Leila refers to, washing, is not sexual as such. Furthermore, in the Finnish context, going to the sauna is a cultural ritual not associated with sexuality. Thus Leila's proposal suggests the stereotype of Finnish women as unerotic and rather asexual. However, Leila's earlier remark about the 'nigger' eyeing her 'hornily' not only constructs a racist and sexualised image of the Other, but also suggests that Leila considers herself desirable. This stands in sharp contrast with her appearance, the smeared face, the blackened teeth and the convulsive gestures, all of which contribute to her abjectness. Although Leila and Laila are sexualized in the sketch in a number of ways, the different dimensions of their sexuality appear solely negative. This depiction of their sexuality is seminal to the construction not only of ethnicity (Finnishness), but also of class, and becomes thereby a salient feature of (their) lower classness.

Also in the Nunnuka sketch, the appearance of the characters, their dirtiness, blackened teeth, and appearing drunk in public during the day-time clearly index poverty and a lower-class position. However, as noted above, traditionally and stereotypically Sáminess is linked to closeness to nature, to an immediate and direct relation to the 'natural environment', and to a remoteness from civilisation (Lehtola 1997; Pietikäinen & Leppänen 2007). In the context of this 'natural environment', social class - as a feature of organised society - does not seem to figure. Thus, also in the Nunnuka sketch, the markers of class may easily appear to be indexes of Sáminess rather than of class.

In their remake, the makers of *Märät säpikkäät/Njuoska bittut*, however, take up and foreground the dimension of social class. The reason why the dimension of class becomes salient is the stated depiction of Finnishness through figures who clearly represent the underclass rather than the middle-class, the cultural norm. This is underlined also through the contrast created through the frame story, which features two clearly middle-class young professionals with pastel-coloured suits, pearls and smart hairdos in a spacious, light and tidy office.

In the actual sketch, the class position of the characters is indexed by a number of features. Their clothing, a random sample of unfashionable, cheap clothes, the plastic bags they carry from Siwa and Alepa, two downmarket supermarket chains, together with their (fake) bellies bulging over the top of their jeans, are all associated with a lower class position. The concrete urban backyard itself locates the characters in the margins of public space and thus of society, and the rubbish bins in the background seal the association with low social status and waste. Drinking beer and cider directly from the can creates an immediate and embodied association between the women and alcohol. Whereas the Nunnuka sketch only alludes to drinking through the plastic bags from Alko, the sound of bottles clinking and the men's drunken appearance, in Leila and Laila the reference is more direct: the women have cans of cider and beer in their hands while they are sitting on the dirty, wet ground in a public place.

Their black teeth, hay for hair and smeared faces make direct links to the Nunnuka sketch, but while there these also index closeness to nature, and thus ethnicity, in the urban environment of Leila and Laila, where dirt and poor hygiene are associated more with a low social position, these same characteristics become indexical rather of lower class.

Leila's concern about not getting cheaper cider because her loyalty card has been stolen is indexical of both deprivation and alcoholism. Her choice of words 'pöllä' (nick) and the women's swearing are indexical of a lower social position, especially in conjunction with the unashamedly racist discourse and the nationalism expressed through the singing of the national anthem, both of which link them to the politics represented by the populist party *Perussuomalaiset*, 'True Finns.' With the frame story and the careful construction of the Leila and Laila characters, the *Märät säpikkäät/Njuoska bittut* thus exposes the dimension of class that in the Nunnuka sketch, in the context of the racist stereotypes prevailing in 1980s Finland, remained unmarked. At the same time they create, through careful indexing, a representation of the Finnish underclass. So in both sketches a figure is created that is productive of contemporary ideas and associations about the lower class in Finland.

## Conclusions

In the late 1980s, two well-known Finnish male comedians created a series of parodical sketches featuring two characters, Naima-Aslakki and Soikhiapää, who became known as the Nunnuka men, that have strongly influenced the perception of the Sámi by the Finns. Considered harmless and wildly funny by many, the sketches nevertheless mobilised some of the grossest and most racist stereotypes of the Sámi. Some twenty years later, two young Sámi women, Suvi West and Kirste Aikio, saw their opportunity to strike back and created a counter parody of the Nunnuka sketch. While the complaints made against the Nunnuka men in the 1980s and 1990s could be considered a manifestation of modern logics of critique, the counter parody by *Märät Säpikkäät/Njuoska bittut* embodies, we suggest, a postmodern mode of confrontation which, instead of offering a direct challenge, operates indirectly through ambivalence and laughter, thereby carving out space for criticism in the contemporary 'culture of post-critique' (Lazar 2009).

In this paper, drawing on the concepts of intersectionality and indexicality, we have analysed the multiple dimensions and layers of this performance to investigate the construction of the counter parody. In the following few paragraphs we will discuss the wider implications of this multifaceted performance and ask what these insurgent discursive practices mean in terms of critique, and what they do under cover of laughter.

The stated intention of *Märät säpikkäät/Njuoska bittut* was to strike back at the racist representation of the Sámi and challenge the uncritical acceptance of this representation by Finns as something that was simply funny and not at all insulting. In addition to the makers' statements in the media, this is underlined in particular in the frame story of the sketch in the way in which the young women react to the manager's appalled rejection of their 'humorous' sketch by accusing the Finns of being 'tight-asses' and unable to laugh at themselves. However, as the analysis above has shown, instead of refunctioning merely the category of ethnicity, the most salient category in the original version, the Leila and Laila sketch mobilises a number of other categories, especially those of gender and class, thus evoking a completely new figure: a white, urban, underclass Finnish woman.

The figure through which Finnishness is produced is characterised not only by swearing and drinking (common stereotypes about Finns), but also by outright racism and right-wing nationalism. Instead of living surrounded by northern nature, she is located in an urban backyard somewhere in southern Finland. Her sexuality appears in solely negative terms: as vulgar and abject - or altogether absent. She is characterised by excess: she speaks in a high-

pitched, loud voice, her gestures are exaggerated and convulsive, her ill-fitting clothes are unable to contain her body. She drinks in public, she is dirty, unkempt, fat, and dressed in a random selection of clothes. As such, she is yet another example of media representations that rather than challenge traditional notions of heteronormative femininity, feed on and thrive because of them, and of discursive production of social otherness through the notions of vulgarity and lack of control (cf. Lazar 2014; Gill 2009; Cameron 1995; Reisigl & Wodak 2001).

Indexicality as an analytical tool enables a nuanced analysis of the production of intersectional categories. As Hall (2013) suggests, it can be employed to bridge the perspectives that view gender as identity (intersectionality) and those that see it as something that is done (queer studies). Furthermore, indexical analysis provides a means to link claims about gender, ethnicity and social class to their textual and cultural context (cf. Koller 2009). Our analysis here points to the fact that indexes are contextual, they can have multiple references and affect one another, so that the different dimensions of intersectionality also become entangled and interdependent. Furthermore, the case shows that contextuality is not only a matter of the context of the production of a text, but also of its consumption, or interpretation: class arises as the salient category in our analysis also because as members of the ethnic group it was targeted at, we are aware of various other possible - and more hegemonic - representations of Finnishness. As members of the generation that remembers the original sketch, we can also enjoy recognising the intertextual links to the Nunnuka men, and appreciate the critique and the sophistication with which the makers of *Märät säpikkäät/Njuoska bittut* construct their act of turning the tables. Also, much of the humour of the sketch relies on the recognition of these intertextual references. But what happens if the viewer is unfamiliar with the reference to the original sketch of twenty years ago?

If the critical point of payback is removed, so too is the humour that derives from the intertextual links. What remains is laughter at - or aversion to - a new marginalised other - a poor, alcoholic woman who is most remarkably characterised by bodily and linguistic excesses that, as Skeggs (2004: 99) argues, have become indexes of low class status, as opposed to the (purportedly) contained middle class (see also Hunt 1998). Moreover, in the current neoliberal logic with its emphasis on self-management (e.g. Gill 2007), such excesses have become signs of a lack of moral capability (cf. Brown 2003). Furthermore, the characterisation of under-class women in the counter parody relies on social abjection, which again, as Tyler (2013) argues, is intrinsic to the psychosocial production of social hierarchies in neoliberal societies. Thus, while in recent studies on intersectionality the emphasis on ethnicity has often come at the expense of social class (Walby et al. 2012: 228), entwined in the performance of both gender and ethnicity, the analysis of social class is still pertinent - maybe more so than ever.

The diversification of media and postcolonial and feminist development are opening up new opportunities for marginalised groups. At the same time, these developments are contributing to a reconfiguration of social hierarchies. The figure that emerges in the Leila and Laila sketch is not a lone figure, but rather an example of what seems to be becoming a new 'other' in the Finnish cultural scene as well as internationally. Similar figures - poor female characters represented in a context of dirt, alcohol and waste - have emerged in the social media, for example in YouTube and blogs. They bear similarities to the lower-class characters, such as the chav and teen-age mothers, who appear in the contemporary comedy and reality TV formats (e.g. Wood & Skeggs 2011; McRobbie 2009; Tyler 2008) that have found their way to Finland too in recent years. In the postcolonial and postfeminist era it is no



longer acceptable to make fun of ethnic minorities and women in prime-time media, but in the course of the neoliberalisation of societies features associated with poverty seem to be becoming acceptable sources of laughter and ridicule (cf. Tyler 2013). As moral responsibility is shifted from society to the individual, the morally suspicious is no longer the one who laughs, but the one who is laughed at.

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<sup>i</sup> It has been speculated that the sketch might originally have been created as a parody of the stereotypic ideas of the Sámi amongst the non-Sámi. Due to the lack of knowledge of the Sámi and the repetition of the sketches in different contexts over the years, (most of) the viewers will not have been able to take the position of the purported 'ideal viewer' to get the ironic reference, but the sketch has rather been taken up as a parody of the Sámi. (Hietala 1991: 48, Lehtola 2000: 235, 236). That the sketch has (unequivocally) been viewed as a parody of the Sámi is also evident in references to and discussions of the sketch in the media.

<sup>ii</sup> Transcription and translation from Finnish is made by the authors of the article.