Nordic Theatre Studies
Vol. 28, No. 2, 2017, 6—35.

Staging Cultural Identities as Political Performance:

Hålogaland Teater, North Norwegian stage language and the emancipation of North Norwegian identities

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ABSTRACT
When Hålogaland Teater was established in Tromsø in 1970 as Norway's first regional theatre, the main goal was to create a professional company that would act as a people's theatre of North Norway. In order to achieve this, the underlying principle of the theatre was that they should produce plays about the North Norwegian reality using a North Norwegian stage language and that these plays should be devised in close collaboration with the local population. Initially this caused a lot of controversy because the theatre challenged accepted standards of theatre-making both in terms of content and representation. For some it was utterly inconceivable that national and international classics such as *Peer Gynt* and *Hamlet* should be performed in a low-status North Norwegian dialect. It was simply perceived to be a sign of the deterioration of the arts! Despite heated debates and major conflicts, the artistic and political principles of Hålogaland Teater remained constant and today, almost fifty years later, both Shakespeare and Ibsen are performed in North Norwegian dialect without any protests and with great success. How was this development possible? And what has it meant for the northern region and its people? These are questions that I am exploring in this article with the aid of Bourdieu's "thinking tools". The main argument is that Hålogaland Theatre has been central in the revaluation of Northern Norwegian identities and culture by elevating the low-status Northern Norwagian dialect to the status of official stage language.

KEYWORDS
Hålogaland Teater, North Norwegian dialect, stage language, identity, emancipation

ISSN 2002-3898

http://ojs.statsbiblioteket.dk/index.php/nts/index
Published with support from Nordic Board for Periodicals in the Humanities and Social Sciences (NOP-HS)

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INTRODUCTION

When Hålogaland Teater (HT) was established in Tromsø in 1970, Lars Berg and a small group of pioneers had been fighting for a professional North Norwegian theatre for over two decades. The main argument behind this prolonged fight was that the North Norwegian region was deprived without a professional theatre that reflected the reality of the people living in the north and that toured to every corner of the district. It was thus argued that the theatre should serve the three northernmost counties of Norway (Finnmark, Troms and Nordland), it should produce plays about North Norwegian reality, and it should develop a North Norwegian stage language based on Northern Norwegian dialects to reflect this reality. In short, the argumentation for a North Norwegian theatre was a clearly articulated region-building project.

Initially, the attempts to establish a North Norwegian theatre caused a lot of controversy. A controversy that was deeply embedded in the marginalised status of the northern region and its people. For several hundred years, the northern part of the country had been perceived as a low-status region, marked by poverty, lack of education, and lack of cultural institutions.[1] After 1860, great changes took place. Northern Norway was modernized like all other parts of Norway, but the region's low status persisted. The use of the vernacular as stage language was thus perceived to be a sign of the deterioration of the arts. How could international and national classics, written by authors such as William Shakespeare and Henrik Ibsen, possibly be performed in the North Norwegian dialect? For many, this was a disgrace and utterly inconceivable. Today, almost fifty years later, both Shakespeare and Ibsen

1. Edvardsen 1997; Knutsen 1993; Brantenberg & Hauan & Knutsen 1994.

FIGURE 1. Hålogaland teater: Landstrykere (Wayfarers). 2016. Photographer Arne Nøst.

are performed in North Norwegian dialect without any protests and with great success. How was this development possible? And what has it meant for the northern region and its people? These are questions that I will reflect on in this article.

It has been widely acknowledged that Hålogaland Teater has meant a lot for the positive revaluation of the Northern Norwegian dialects.[2] There has, however, been less focus on the interrelationship between Hålogaland Teater, the use of North Norwegian stage language and the emancipation of marginalised Northern Norwegian identities. In this article, I will revisit the passionate history of Hålogaland Teater and explore how its revaluation of

2. Bull 1982; Bull & Gaski 1994, 246-258; Arntzen 1994, 393-403; Eilertsen 2005. Although there are regional differences and varieties between different Northern Norwegian dialects, it is common to use the singular “Northern Norwegian dialect” to refer to the different dialects in North Norway. Northern Norwegian dialects have a common intonation that make them recognisably Northern Norwegian. Hålogaland Teater has always stressed the importance of performing in the Northern Norwegian dialect, but this dialect has not been specified as any particular North Norwegian dialect.

the Northern Norwegian dialect might have contributed to enhance the status of North Norwegian identities. First, I will outline a theoretical perspective that emphasises the significance of language in the construction and expression of identity. The focus here is on explaining some of Bourdieu's central "thinking tools", which will be used in the analysis of Hålogaland Teater's dramatic history. Next, I will show how the historical context shaped the North Norwegian self-concept as it was manifested when Hålogaland Teater was established as the first regional theatre in Norway. It is impossible to understand the significance of the theatre's work in North Norway without this contextualisation, so I will describe this history in some detail. Then, I discuss Hålogaland Teater's role in what might be understood as a North Norwegian demand for linguistic and cultural emancipation in the 1970s and 1980s, before I sum up what significance the use of North Norwegian dialect as stage language has had for the theatre and the North Norwegian people of today.

"THINKING TOOLS": IDENTITY, *HABITUS, DOXA, SYMBOLIC CAPITAL*, AND *FIELD*

Identity is a many-faceted phenomenon, but in its most basic sense it refers to our understanding of who we are, how we see ourselves, and how we are perceived by others, both personally and in the social group(s) we belong to. The concept of identity is, however, not singular. Our self-concept might change according to the contexts we find ourselves in, and an individual's self-esteem is shaped by the social group(s) s/he belongs to and the social value attached to her particular social memberships. Identity is thus part of complex social processes that shape our ways of being and acting in the world.

In his sociological writing, Pierre Bourdieu is concerned with identity formation and how we come to think and act as we do. Bourdieu's scholarly work started from a conundrum: he was baffled by the fact that individuals make decisions that are characterised by regularities, even though no one dictates these decisions. (Working class kids don't aspire to a higher education, and middle class students read middle-class literature, etc.) Indeed, Bourdieu asserts that "all my thinking started from this point: how can behaviour be regulated without being the product of obedience to rules?"[3] His answer is that people are regulated by their *habitus*. In short, a person is born into and occupies a *habitus* that is constructed by that person's historical context,

3. Bourdieu 1984, 65.

childhood experiences, class background, education, family, language, etc.[4] The *habitus*, in turn, is described as, "a set of dispositions which incline agents to act and react in certain ways."[5] *Habitus* thus structures an individual's identity, beliefs, and actions.

Habitus, does not, however, act alone. Instead, Bourdieu argues that our identity and beliefs are shaped by "an unconscious relationship" between a *habitus* and a *field*. He sets up the following equation to explain our actions and states of being: "[(habitus) (capital)] + field = practice."[6] As the equation shows, an individual's *habitus* and an individual's capital are closely connected. In fact, *symbolic capital* and *habitus* both refer to the language use, worldviews, dispositions, attitudes, and skills that an individual gains in the process of socialisation into her family and community. In short, it can be said that an individual's *habitus* is her *cultural capital* in various fields. This becomes particularly noticeable through the specific linguistic utterances an individual brings to the field. According to Bourdieu, language is a cultural and symbolic capital, and some languages/dialects have more socio-political and economic value than other languages/dialects.[7] Bourdieu calls the language with the highest status in a country, the "legitimate" language. This language is bound up with the state, and is seen as the "correct" language. Thus it is the highest valued language in a country.[8] According to Bourdieu; "this state language becomes the theoretical norm against which all linguistic practice are objectively measured."[9] He argues that this language is a source of power and that linguistic capital/power is distributed unequally. Accordingly, those who speak the "legitimate" language of a nation and have a good command of this language automatically have "capital" to invest in other areas of social life. By contrast, those who speak differently are often perceived to be inferior, stupid, or backwards.[10] A speaker's identity is, therefore, at least in part, defined by what language/dialect s/he speaks, which means that there is a link between "illegitimate" languages/dialects and marginalised identities in society.[11]

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4. Bourdieu & Passeron 1977.
5. Bourdieu 2005, 12.
6. Maton 2012, 50.
7. Bourdieu & Passeron 1977; Norton 2000.
8. Bourdieu 2005, 45.
9. Ibid.
10. Ibid.
11. Evans 2015, 4.

As a general rule, the "legitimate" language has been perceived as the only acceptable standard in the field of "high" culture.[12] As such, the "legitimate" language expresses the "legitimate culture". It is thus the "legitimate" language of a country that tends to be spoken from the stage. Alterations to accepted linguistic conventions might even cause fierce reactions. As an example, Dag Nordmark, Professor of Swedish literature at Karlstad University, claims that for a Swedish audience it would be absurd and unacceptable if Hamlet spoke in a regional Swedish dialect.[13] Bourdieu would argue that a regional Hamlet is neither unacceptable nor absurd, but that this audience shares the *doxa* of the *field*, a concept that Bourdieu describes as the assumptions that are unquestioned and taken for granted as true and which, therefore, determines what is doable and thinkable. Bourdieu's point is that if the only doable and thinkable Hamlet is a Hamlet that speaks the "legitimate" language, this reproduces ideas that have an impact on how those who are excluded from the cultural *field* act and think about themselves. As such, culture is powerful.

According to Bourdieu, the *field* of culture is indeed very important for the *field* of power because it "contributes fundamentally to the reproduction of the social order."[14] According to him, the transmission of values and ideas through culture is often hidden and therefore has a "greater weight in the system of reproduction strategies" than "direct, visible forms of transmission [that] tend to be more strongly censored and controlled."[15] To expose these hidden structures and to expose how *habitus* structures individuals are thus impor-

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12. The language situation in Northern Norway is complex. The region has three official languages – Norwegian, Sámi and Kvääni, the Norwegian-Finnish language. The Norwegian language has two official written standards: *Bokmål* ("book language") and *Nynorsk* ("New Norwegian"). *De jure*, they have equal status and both are used in official documents, laws, public administration, schools, etc. Despite this fact, it can be argued that *bokmål* is the dominant language because it is the language used by most major newspapers, weekly magazines, businesses, and advertising. Unlike most other European countries, Norway does not have an official spoken standard. The dialect spoken by Norwegians living in and around Olso is, however, often referred to as "standard eastern Norwegian", or "standard Norwegian". According to late professor Eyvind Fjeld Halvorsen, "*Bokmål* was developed from the form of Danish that was freely spoken by government officials and by leading social circles in the cities; it therefore had the prestige of being the preferred speech of people with higher education and aspirations. It has the same function as normal speech in other countries as well as serving as a status symbol." See Halvorsen, Eyvind Fjeld, "Norway – A small country with two written languages", http://www.bergen-guide.com/405.htm (accessed 14 August 2016).
13. Dag Nordmark, e-mail correspondence, 5 January 2016.
14. Bourdieu 2005, 166.
15. Bourdieu 1986, 248.

tant aspects of Bourdieu's work. This is all the more important because individuals tend to internalise dominant values and ideas as "true" and "natural". According to Bourdieu, the symbolic power of language is thus a form of violence because it is used to naturalise systems of dominance and impose it implicitly on the less privileged through sanctions, approval, or disapproval. This is, however, done with the consent of those who are dominated. "For symbolic power is that invisible power which can be exercised only with the complicity of those who do not want to know that they are subject to it or even that they themselves exercise it."[16] In other words, when individuals experience acts of symbolic violence from the *field* of culture (by being treated as inferior, deprived of a voice, misrepresented, etc.), these acts of violence are often misrecognised as violence and internalised as "truth".

Bourdieu distinguishes between the "well-formed" *habitus* and the less well-formed *habitus*, where those with the well-formed *habitus* have greater *symbolic capital* than those with a less well-formed *habitus*.[17] The capital or power of a particular (linguistic) *habitus* is not, however, stable and the capital considered valuable for a particular *field* changes over time. Fields are always in flux and Bourdieu stresses that all *fields* are sites of struggles where the forms of capital specific to the *field* are contested. Those involved in the struggle have different aims and whereas some want to maintain the status quo, others want to change it. What capital a particular language has, can thus change over time. In the words of David Evans, "identity is both created through language and expressed by language."[18] This means that language can be used both to liberate and constrain identities, and as such it is a powerful tool in the creation of social and cultural capital. David thus suggests that "[t]he emancipation of marginalized cultural identities can be brought about through a socio-political and sociocultural valorisation of language and discourse."[19] In short, language is crucially important because it is implicated in the very construction of the world and of the "self".

16. Bourdieu 2005, 164.
17. Moor 2012, 108.
18. Evans 2015, 3.
19. Evans 2015, 4.

LAZY, LETHARGIC, AND PRIMITIVE: NORTHERN NORWAY IN A HISTORICAL CONTEXT

When the thought of Hålogaland Teater was conceived, the Northern Norwegian *habitus* was not "well-formed". From the point of view of the hegemonic classes, Northern Norway had, in fact, very little *symbolic capital*. Their linguistic products were assigned a limited value, and their cultural activities were outside the bounds of what Bourdieu calls "legitimate culture".

Dating back to at least 1500, Northern Norway had been treated as a colony by the government in Copenhagen. According to Nils Magne Knutsen, Professor of Northern Norwegian Literature at the University of Tromsø, civil servants who had to take a post "up there" in the north, saw it as a great obstacle to their careers, and in their reports, many painted a very dark picture of Northern Norway and the people that inhabited these regions.[20] A statement by bailiff Erik Hansen Schønnebøl in Lofoten from 1591 is typical of the attitude held by people in the south: "Lord have mercy on those who are forced to spend their lives in this wretched part of the country."[21] In short, the people in Northern Norway were perceived to be much more primitive than people in the south. They were also described as lazy, lethargic, primitive, childish, and dull.[22]

Throughout the 17th and 18th centuries, Northern Norway continued to be an exploited and financially weak part of the country and it was only due to the rich herring fisheries after 1860 that Northern Norway gradually could develop more economic independence and more cultural capital. Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson commented on this situation in his report from a trip to Northern Norway in 1869. Here, he states that the Northerners are the most neglected, plundered, and overlooked people in the Nordic region.[23] That the north was truly "neglected" and "overlooked" can be exemplified by the fact that official maps of the northern half of the country were reproduced in half size and used in schools at least until the 1960s. This gives a quite accurate picture of the political, financial, and cultural status of Northern Norway.[24]

The general poverty among the population in Northern Norway meant that most of the people were uneducated. The region lacked both educational and cultural institutions. The consequence was that men from the south of Norway

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20. Knutsen 2006, 101.
21. Knutsen 1993, 60. Translation W.T.
22. Knutsen 2006; Torrissen 2015, 199—212.
23. Bjørnson 1932, 189.
24. Hamsun 2001, 133—34; Halse 1949, 43.

and from Denmark came to fill the powerful official posts in the region. This recruitment of people from the south led to a type of "linguistic imperialism". This meant that the "legitimate" language was perceived as the language of competence, influence, education, culture, and power, whereas the northern dialect signalised poverty, incompetence, lack of education, lack of culture, lack of social power, even vulgarity, and infantilism.[25] In Bourdieusian terms, the southerners, by speaking the "legitimate" southern language, exercised enormous symbolic power over the northerners, even without knowing it.

A proof of the low value of the North Norwegian linguistic *habitus* is that people who moved to Oslo to work felt obliged and forced to change their dialect to the oral variety of the "legitimate" Norwegian language spoken in and around the capital. This was a practice commonly induced well into the 1970s. Bourdieu argues that this form of censorship often comes at the cost of uncertainty and anxiety, feelings that North Norwegians who moved to Oslo also struggled with.[26] According to one informant, forsaking her dialect was a traumatic experience because it forced her to hide and suppress her identity in ways that were detrimental for her health and wellbeing.[27]

The effect of this linguistic imperialism was that the people up north had learnt to see their own dialect as low-class and low-status. This had created what we could call a cultural inferiority complex. Generation after generation had been taught to look down upon their dialect and to feel ashamed of it. This was the situation even in the second half of the 20th century when Hålogaland Teater was established. Professor Edmund Edvardsen has commented on this in his book *Nordlendingen / The Northerner*.[28] Here, he recalls the shock he felt as a little boy when he, for the first time (around 1950), heard somebody use his own North Norwegian dialect on the radio: He "felt ashamed, like a dog," and he thought: "Now they sit throughout Norway and laugh at us."[29] He turned off the radio in the hope that he could turn it off all over the country.

The little boy had probably never been told that his dialect was inferior, but his reaction is a typical example of what Bourdieu calls *doxa*; the "pre-reflexive intuitive knowledge, shaped by experience."[30] In short, the shame felt by the little boy can be understood as an effect of the limited capital assigned to

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25. Knutsen 1993; Knutsen 2006, 101—116.
26. Bourdieu 2005, 83.
27. Interview 4 March 2016, in person, Oslo. See also: Torrissen 2015, 149—170.
28. Edvardsen 1997.
29. Edvardsen 1997, 27. Translation W.T.
30. Deer 2012, 115.

his *habitus* throughout a long historical period. The result was that he had inherited the dominant view that the North Norwegian *habitus* was inferior and internalised it as an accepted truth. That North Norwegian should be used on the radio was thus beyond what, according to him, was doable and thinkable.

An interesting and convincing example of the persistently low status of the Northern Norwegian dialect came in 1984 when Alice Walker's novel, *The Colour Purple*, was translated into Norwegian. The novel is set in the southern states of America, where the African Americans speak an "incorrect", low-status language in contrast to the "legitimate" language of the white characters. One might think that this difference between high and low status language would be impossible to convey in Norwegian, but the translator, Isak Rogde, solved this problem in a way that won great acclaim: he made the American slaves speak a North Norwegian dialect, while the white masters spoke the standard Norwegian language. The population up north had never been slaves, in any sense of the word, but by using the northern dialect the difference between high and low status language was illustrated in a way that was perfectly understandable for the Norwegian readers, both in the north and in the south.[31]

THE EMANCIPATION OF THE NORTH: HÅLOGALAND TEATER'S CULTURAL REVOLUTION

From the inception of the idea that the region needed its own theatre, it was argued that this would contribute to the emancipation of marginalised Northern Norwegian identities. The author, Lars Berg, considered to be the "father" of Hålogaland Teater, supplied the conditions for this work. It is difficult to say exactly when the idea of a North Norwegian theatre was conceived, but according to Berg it dates back to 1938.[32] This idea matured during the Second World War and, from 1946 until his death in 1969, Berg fought intensely to establish a professional theatre in the north. In 1954, Berg's efforts materialised in the founding of Hålogaland Teaterselskap (literally, Hålogaland Theatre Company), a company that was established to support amateur theatres in the region and to promote the development of a professional theatre in the north. As the company's chairman, Berg travelled throughout Scandinavia to gain political support for his ideas.[33] He also wrote innumerable letters, news articles, funding proposals, petitions, and political appeals,

31. Walker 1984.
32. *Fremover* 25 March 1954, reproduced in Fjeldstad & Kran 1981, 15.
33. Hall-Hofsø 1979, 21.

FIGURE 2. Hålogaland teater: Det e her æ høre tell (This Is Where I Belong) 1973. Photographer Odd A Sønvisen.

all with the aim of securing a government subsidy for the establishment of Hålogaland Teater. It was not easy to gain support for his ideas and the efforts to establish Hålogaland Teater was voted down on a number of occasions. Official reports about its future were also sceptical about the economic and artistic feasibility of the theatre. It would take 16 years of intense artistic development, political struggle, and bureaucracy before Hålogaland Teater finally was established in 1970. By this time, Hålogaland Theatre Company had become a renowned theatre corporation, which employed professional actors. It was, therefore, perhaps no surprise that the report, written by the government appointed committee led by the county governor Gunnar Hellesen, supported the establishment of Hålogaland Teater. The committee's recommendation came on 29th of May 1970 and on 17th of December 1970, the bill that founded Hålogaland Teater was passed in Parliament.[34]

The long and painstaking process to establish Hålogaland Teater was perceived to be an important battle for those involved and they used military metaphors to describe their mission: "We who are here must feel like crusa-

34. Eilertsen 2004, 315—17.

ders for this cause."[35] Lars Berg was an energetic and aggressive spokesperson for the emancipation of Northern Norwegian culture and for him, the establishment of a theatre in the north was a cultural struggle against southern cultural imperialism, a struggle that would secure control over the cultural production in the north. He was in strong opposition to the accepted idea that in order to ensure the quality of Norwegian culture, most of it should be produced in Oslo before it was spread to the various districts by groups of artists touring the country.[36] According to him, culture should be produced in the districts, it should tell the histories of the people in the districts, and these histories should be told using the local dialects. An important part of his standpoint was that the official Norwegian language spoken in and around Oslo was not "better" or "higher" or more suited for the stage than the Northern Norwegian dialect.

Gradually, Berg's rather utopian ideas won acclaim against ridicule and opposition, even from northerners.[37] When Hålogaland Teater started to produce plays in 1971, his idea that the theatre should discuss questions that concerned the social circumstances in Northern Norway and promote good drama based on themes drawn from the region became part of the statuary objective of the theatre. The statuary objective also stated that "[i]t is natural to encourage the use of Northern Norwegian dialects on stage because this may improve the contact between the stage and the audience, and because the theatre should help maintain the cultural heritage that the dialects represent."[38] With this, Berg's vision of a Northern Norwegian theatre utilizing Northern Norwegian stage language was finally realised.

The paragraph about language may appear to be a quite modest way of presenting the quite radical linguistic ambitions of the theatre, but Tove Bull, professor of Norwegian language at the University of Tromsø, confirms the dramatic impact of this point in the statutory objective. She argues that the use of an "illegitimate" language on stage was a radical break with all the established traditions in Norwegian theatres.[39] Hålogaland Teater was thus the first theatre that started to use local dialects in theatre productions – a tradition that the other regional theatres in Norway would follow.[40] In this way, the

35. Gravdal 1981, 15. Translation W.T.
36. Eilertsen 2004, 276.
37. Ibid.
38. Hålogaland Teater 1976, 17. Translation W.T.
39. Bull 1981, 67.
40. Sigve Bøe claims that Hålogaland Teater has played a decisive role in the development of the language policy adapted by the other regional theatres in Norway. See Bull 1981, 73.

theatre's political responsibility to revalue the cultural capital of the north was firmly established.

The young and idealistic actors who were employed at Hålogaland Teater in 1971, supported the statutory objective wholeheartedly and embraced the idea of using the local dialect on stage with great enthusiasm. Eight actors were employed at Hålogaland Teater from the start: Tone Danielsen, Klaus Hagerup, Knut Husebø, Katja Medbøe, Svein Scharffenberg, Sigmund Sæverud, Nils Utsi and Torill Øyen. Of these, it was only one, Nils Utsi, who spoke a Northern Norwegian dialect. Moreover, the actors had been trained in the Standard Eastern Norwegian language at Teaterhøyskolen (the Norwegian Theatre Academy). To acquire knowledge of the Northern Norwegian dialects was therefore a difficult and time-consuming endeavour for them all.

In the beginning, there was an intense discussion about how the Northern Norwegian stage language should be developed and used. Berg's vision was to create a standard Northern Norwegian stage language that would represent all of the Northern Norwegian dialects, but this was a vision that the actors did not support. In the programme for *Fru Carrars gevær / Senora Carrar's Rifles* (1974) it was explicitly stated that the actors were opposed to constructing a standardised Northern Norwegian stage language because this would be yet another example of linguistic oppression. Instead, the actors wanted to use a dialect close to the material that was treated in the plays that they produced. According to Sigmund Sæverud, this principle had always been their aspiration, although he admits that this ambitious goal was not always realized in practice because the actors did not master the dialects well enough and because it was too time-consuming to change dialect from production to production.[41] The reality was, therefore, that the stage language, which became the standard, used the sentence stress and intonation common to most Northern Norwegian dialects whereas the phonology and the vocabulary was based on the dialects in the county of Troms. This practice has continued, and today a standardised Troms dialect is used in most productions.[42]

The group of actors that came to Hålogaland Teater in 1971 worked hard to learn Northern Norwegian dialects and to sound as authentic as possible. In the programme for *Det e her æ høre tel / This is where I belong* (1973), Nils Utsi claims that the actors had made an "honest attempt" to learn the new stage language. He admits, however, that there was room for development

41. Bull 1981, 69.
42. Ragnar Olsen Interview, 11 December 2015, in person, Tromsø.

and he therefore encourages the audience to help the actors to improve on their efforts: "So if you are enraged over our language, let us know!"[43] This humble approach is exemplary of how the actors communicated with their audience, constantly asking them for help to tell the stories of the North Norwegian people as faithfully as possible.[44] From the comments about language in the media, it is clear that the audience appreciated the actor's efforts to speak the Northern Norwegian dialect, and even though the actors spoke affectedly at times, and even though they made mistakes, the audience generally interpreted the actor's attempts positively.[45]

In retrospect, it might be difficult to understand why the actors were so willing to work so hard at acquiring a working knowledge of Northern Norwegian dialects, and why they so enthusiastically served the project of establishing a Northern Norwegian theatre. This enthusiasm can, however, at least in part be explained as the result of an idealistic socialist ideology: The actors wanted to "serve the people" in Northern Norway by building a Northern Norwegian people's theatre.[46] In an interview, one of the actors, Sigmund Sæverud, states that the actors wanted to use the Northern Norwegian dialect as the stage language to strengthen Northern Norwegian self-esteem. According to Sæverud, both language and theatre function like a mirror where people can look at their reflection to enhance their self-esteem.[47] In the past, the theatre had been used to mirror the upper classes in ways that confirmed the status and privileges associated with speakers of the "legitimate" language. This was a custom that the actors who came to Hålogaland Teater in the 1970s consciously worked to change by enhancing the status of the Northern Norwegian dialects. In practice, the actors wanted to end the discriminating tradition they knew from the theatre practice in the south, where "only the idiot and the servant girl" spoke the northern language. "Hereafter, even the hero should speak Northern Norwegian!" Sæverud exclaimed.[48] The actors' determined efforts to build the self-esteem of the North Norwegian people show their deep understanding of how important the revaluation of language is for the revaluation of social identity.

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43. Hålogaland Teater 1973a. Translation W.T.
44. Hålogaland Teater 1973b.
45. Eilertsen 2005, 36—43.
46. Hålogaland Teater 1976, 17.
47. Bull 1981, 70.
48. Bull 1981, 67. Translation W.T. According to Nina Wester, this discriminating tradition still persists in Sweden, where regional dialects are only used to portray low status characters. Wester, Nina Interview, 9 December 2015, in person, Tromsø.

In the 1970s, the people that Hålogaland Teater wanted to mirror came from the agrarian and working classes of the north. According to Klaus Hagerup, the theatre's chief concern was to show people that they had good reason to be proud of the reality they lived in and the life they knew. "[W]e wanted to give people self-confidence."[49] By mirroring the reality of the northerners using their own dialect, Hålogaland Teater wanted to stop people from feeling ashamed of their language like so many northerners, including professor Edvartsen, did. In all these ways, Hålogaland Teater, in reality, staged a *revolt* against the symbolic violence exerted over the northerners.

Hålogaland Teater's efforts to rehabilitate the Northern people and its language were met with popular support. This success was not obvious. Historically, generations of officials and experts had come from the south to cultivate and civilize and educate the northerners. In professor Edvardsen's terms, the main result of these efforts had been that the northerners had learned to be ashamed; ashamed of themselves, ashamed of their lack of culture, and – above all – ashamed of their dialect.[50] In short, the result was that shame had become an integral part of their *habitus*.

With this in mind, critical voices claimed that the actors – all but one of whom came from the south – were serving the same old purpose – and that this was nothing but another form of imperialism.[51] This discourse of suspicion soon weakened and as the methods and philosophy of Hålogaland Teater materialised in actual performances, it became obvious that their messages were very different from the messages southerners had asserted in the past. It was very important for the actors to stress that they had no intention of teaching the people in the north anything. Instead, the actors wanted to learn from the northerners.[52] Now the messages from the "cultural experts" were that the northerners should be proud of their culture, proud of their background, proud of their histories, and proud of their dialect.

In this way, it can be argued that Hålogaland Teater fought a battle to change the value of the Northern Norwegian habitus and to make it a legitimate part of the *field* of theatre. Hålogaland Teater wanted to change the status quo by making Northern Norwegian dialects a valued capital in the *field* of art and by raising the status of the histories of the people in the region. Both these aspects challenged the logic of the *field* of theatre in fundamental ways and, as we shall see, this caused a lot of heated debate.

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49. Fjeldstad & Kran 1981, 41. Translation W.T.
50. Edvardsen 1997, 27.
51. Eilertsen 2005, 39.
52. Hålogaland Teater 1973b.

FIGURE 3. Hålogaland Teater: Vor rett vi tar (Our Right We Take) 1975. Photographer: Siggen Stinessen.

NEW HISTORIES — NEW IDENTITIES

Hålogaland Teater's struggle to change the *field* of art was saturated with *interest*, but this interest was openly articulated. That the actors working at Hålogaland Teater had socialist sympathies was no secret and that they wanted to serve the people was expressed as their primary goal.[53] In the programme to their opening performance of Brecht's play, *The Threepenny Opera* (1971), it was stated that the theatre wished to include the audience in the decision-making process and that they wanted to make theatre from the point of view of the audience.

The first attempt in this direction was a literary cabaret based on Northern Norwegian literature, *Svømmende dyr i det nordnorske hav / Swimming animals in the North Norwegian ocean* (1972). The reception was encouraging and it was argued that the performance elevated the hidden cultural heritage of the north.[54] The next production, *Agentene / The Agents* (1972), written by the Northern Norwegian author Magnar Mikkelsen, supported the theatre's ambition to promote Northern Norwegian drama and perform pieces which had relevance for people in the north.[55] But it was not until the performance of

53. Hagerup 1979, 47.
54. Eilertsen 2005, 27.
55. Eilertsen 2005, 29.

Det e her æ høre tel / This is where I belong (1973), that the real breakthrough came. The play was written by the actors in cooperation with the inhabitants of a small fishing village on the island Senja, outside Tromsø, in a close-knit devising process. The play tells the empowering story of a group of people who start a tax-strike because the regional politicians fail to provide the road they need in order to continue to live in the village. In the end, the villagers force the mighty politicians and bureaucrats to listen to them, the road is built, and the village is filled with optimism for the future.

For the first time, the whole play was performed in a Northern Norwegian dialect and everyone on stage used this dialect except the “experts” who, true to tradition, came from the south and held positions of power. That it was the northerner’s vision of the world, which was presented in a positive light, was very important for the audiences. In the words of one spectator: “the actors became one with us, not the least because they mastered our language so perfectly.”[56] When the theatre went on tour, “everybody” thus wanted to see how the “common” workers gave the experts a lesson.[57] The play was a great success, seen by 21.200 people.

The criticism of the play was divided; a division that can be characterised as a symbol of the struggle fought over what values the *field* of theatre should have in the region. National newspapers were mostly positive, even to the use of dialect. The opinion of the national newspaper, *Dagbladet* (Oslo), is exemplary of this praise: "From the stage, we hear a juicy and rich northern language, impressively well taken care of by an ensemble that has had to struggle in order to learn it. With great courage the regional theatre attacks a large piece of modern and politically charged reality, performed with high humour, generous irony and engagement."[58]

Conservative papers in the region were, however, more sceptical. Influential circles in Northern Norway felt provoked by this play, arguing that it was Marxist propaganda and that it had little to do with art. Hålogaland Teater, however, continued to produce plays in close collaboration with the people of the region. *Æ e ikkje aleina / I am not alone* (1975), *Vor rett vi tar / Our right we take* (1975-6), *Dikt & forbainna løgn / Fiction & Dammed Lie* (1977) *Det bor et troill / It Lives a Troll* (1978-80) and *Nullpunktet / The Datum Point* (1980) were all made in close collaboration with the groups in society about which Hålogaland Teater wanted to make theatre. This special method of theatre making was not considered “right” by the media and the local poli-

56. Eilertsen 2005, 29.
57. Ibid.
58. Eilertsen 2005, 39. Translation W.T.

ticians, who acted as the “taste-keepers” of the north. The establishment also felt threatened by the politically engaged plays that Hålogaland Teater produced. In many harsh exchanges, the actors were called upon to start producing “real” theatre from the classical repertoire that mirrored the productions at Nationaltheatret (Norway’s National Theatre) and to stop meddling with politics.[59] For a number of years, conservative politicians also tried to stop the funding for the theatre in order to close it down.[60] It was argued that the type of theatre Hålogaland Teater made was detrimental for the region. In their programme to *Peer Gynt* (1975), the actors commented on this criticism: "We have been accused of being a partial theatre. When the theatre doesn’t portray the riches of the English Monarchy throughout the centuries, but instead starts to portray the riches that exists in normal people, then it immediately starts to smell like one-sided propaganda."[61]

The collaborative, devised performances that Hålogaland Teater produced in the 1970s were part of its early history, but throughout the 45 years that the theatre has produced plays, it has promoted Northern Norwegian culture and history both through the production of new plays and by staging Northern Norwegian literary classics. According to the actor Ketil Høegh, Hålogaland Teater has made it their responsibility to tell Northern Norwegian history because: “It creates identity and pride.”[62] In 2016, their desire to take on such a responsibility is exemplified by a new production about Tromsø’s local history called *Vestregata* and a production of Hamsun’s *Landstrykere / Wayfarers* (1927).

In short, it can be argued that Hålogaland Teater won the right to define which cultural “capital” was acceptable in the *field* of theatre in the region. In practice, this meant that people, who generally were not heard in the public debate, were given a voice and a language that placed their experiences centre stage, and made their stories important. According to the American philosopher Stanley Cavell, it is important to find words to describe our experiences. Without this effort to try to express ourselves, we become voiceless.[63] Hålogaland Teater helped the northerners to express their experiences in their own language and, by depicting Northern Norwegian heroes on stage, the theatre assisted in countering the negative stereotyping of Northern Norwegians. According to Bourdieu, the symbolic value of such a revaluation

59. Fjeldstad 1981, 101—108.
60. Fjeldstad 1979.
61. Hålogaland Teater 1975a. Translation W.T.
62. *Nordlys* 3 February 2003, 30. Translation W.T.
63. Cavell in Moi 2015, 11—33.

is great.[64]

Statistically, Hålogaland Teater has had the greatest successes with productions that have depicted Northern Norwegian reality, but the theatre has also had a long tradition of staging national and international classics as well as new international drama in the Northern Norwegian dialect.[65] Hålogaland Teater has also developed a tradition for retranslating plays in ways that frame the plays within a Northern Norwegian reality and context. The first attempt in this direction was their production of *Peer Gynt* in 1975.

"STRANGELY UNIVERSAL IN ITS LOCAL COLOURING": CLASSICS IN THE NORTHERN NORWEGIAN DIALECT

In 1974, it was decided that Hålogaland Teater should adapt Ibsen's *Peer Gynt* to a Northern Norwegian context. This was the first time that the Northern Norwegian dialect was used in a production of a Norwegian classic. The criticism levelled against the theatre before the premiere was merciless, with the first attack coming as early as five months before the premiere.[66] The press questioned how the most sacred and sacrosanct literary treasure in

FIGURE 4. Hålogaland Teater: Vestregata. 2016. Photographer Gisle Bjørneby.

64. Bourdieu 2005, 18—19.
65. *Nordlys* 14 November 1996, 30.
66. Eilertsen 2005, p. 68.

Norway could be translated into the low-status northern dialect? For many, this seemed inconceivable and utterly futile. Why should a text that everyone could understand be translated into a northern dialect? Many people in the north felt that the theatre was underestimating the northerners' ability to understand Norway's common cultural heritage. Newspapers and reader's letters criticised the theatre for being provincial and for using the northern Norwegian dialect to support a Marxist interpretation of the play. A number of critics claimed that this was propaganda and not worthy of public funding.[67]

According to Tove Bull, the inferiority complex of the northerners was easily discerned in these heated discussions, where some people maintained that Hålogaland Teater made the northerners look like fools.[68] This was the opposite of what the theatre wanted to achieve. In the theatre programme, it was argued that the theatre was working to make the Northern Norwegian dialect an acceptable and equal stage language, and to increase the understanding of the use of Northern Norwegian dialects on stage. The aim of the translation was also to bring the play closer to the public and to make theatre that mattered to people in the north. One important way to do this was to use the language that reflected the identity of the audience.

FIGURE 5. Hålogaland Teater: Peer Gynt. 1975. Photographer: Siggen Stinessen.

The North Norwegian translation of Peer Gynt illustrated the inherent power relations that are expressed through language. In the programme it was stated that: "we know that people's language change according to their social position. We

67. Midbøe 1980, 138.
68. Bull 1982, 242.

try to emphasise this in the piece."[69] This was done by making Peer speak a Northern Norwegian dialect while he is in the north, and by changing his dialect to the "legitimate" language when he travels abroad and becomes a citizen of the world. In doing this, Peer leaves behind his local dialect to adopt the language of power in order to increase his cultural capital on the market. In this, Peer becomes an example of how language acts on people as power and how people are forced to adapt to the "rules" of those in power to gain the necessary cultural capital. As such, the play commented directly on the situation of the Northern Norwegians who were induced to change their language in their meeting with the job market, the cultural market, etc.

After the premiere, the general consensus was that the use of the Northern Norwegian dialect worked well on stage. It was also argued that the theatre's language policy brought the play closer to the people.[70] The translator's aim to use a more popular and up-to-date language in their version of *Peer Gynt* was thus successful.

The aim to bring the classics closer to the people in more accessible and popular forms has also been the aim of Ragnar Olsen, the artist and author

FIGURE 6. Hålogaland Teater: Peer Gynt. 1975. Photographer: Siggen Stinessen.

69. Hålogaland Teater 1975a. Translation W.T.
70. Midbøe 1980, 138.

who has been responsible for most of Hålogaland Teater's Northern Norwegian translations and reinterpretations during the last forty years. In an interview, Olsen claims that his translations of Shakespeare's A *Midsummer's Night Dream* (1991), *Macbeth* (1992) and *Othello* (1993) were well received and that this first and foremost was due to the fact that the audience felt that the plays became much more relevant through the use of a Northern Norwegian dialect. In his words, the plays became easier to understand – and that was what Shakespeare would have wanted.[71] Ragnar Olsen won the Association of Norwegian Theatres and Orchestras' translation prize for his work with Shakespeare. Olsen described this as an indication that the Northern Norwegian dialect was put on an equal footing with the standard Norwegian stage language based on *bokmål*.[72]

Olsen's retranslation of Sofokles' *Antigone* was also highly praised. It was argued that the translation was "first-rate" and "strong as dynamite."[73] A number of critics emphasised that Olsen had managed to make the text so immediate and present that it spoke directly to the audience, and it was also argued that the "melodious" and "up-to-date" Northern Norwegian dialect un-

FIGURE 7. Hålogaland Teater. En midsommernattsdrøm (Midsummer's Night Dream) 1991. Photographer Ola Røe.

71. Olsen 2015.
72. *Nordlys* 22 October 1993, 17.
73. *Dagbladet* 28 January 1996, 5. Translation W.T.

derscored the actuality of the drama.[74] *Aftenposten* claimed that it was "strangely universal in its local colouring."[75] That the Northern Norwegian stage language could express universal, existential themes clearly surprised the journalist. The comment thus reveals the common assumption that significant thoughts can only be expressed in the "legitimate" language. When universality was possible, after all, it was brought out through an excellent translation, which was described as "a linguistic all-out effort that in itself demands respect."[76] Ragnar Olsen's skills as a translator should not be underestimated in the continuous work to make Northern Norwegian an accepted stage language. The quality of his work and his ability to retranslate classics into a language that is both poetic and that manages to make Ibsen, Shakespeare, and Sophocles accessible and intelligible for a Norwegian theatre public, is emphasised as his particular strength. In this way, Olsen has contributed decisively in making the Northern Norwegian stage language recognised in terms of both its particularity and its universality. In short, Olsen has contributed to elevating the low-status Northern Norwegian dialect to a high-status language that is suited to express the most complicated human emotions.

Figure 8. Hålogaland Teater: Antigone 1996. Photographer Ola Røe.

74. Olsen 2015; *Nordlys* 29 January 1996, 27; *VG* 28 January 1996, 47.
75. *Aftenposten* 29 January 1996, 24. Translation W.T.
76. Ibid.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS: HÅLOGALAND TEATER AND THE STRENGTHENED VALUE OF THE NORTH NORWEGIAN *HABITUS*

Today, the Northern Norwegian linguistic *habitus* is much more "well-formed" than when Lars Berg and the other pioneers started their indefatigable struggle to change the *field* of theatre in 1938. Northern Norwegian people no longer have to change their dialect when moving to Oslo because the linguistic capital of their dialect can "buy" positions in the job market. The Northern Norwegian dialect is frequently used on radio and on TV, a great number of children's television programmes use the Northern Norwegian dialect, and Northern Norwegians are generally not ashamed of their dialect anymore.

In what way has Hålogaland Teater contributed to this development? The story of the Northern Norwegian cultural revival is, of course, part of a complex historical development, which is beyond the scope of this article.[77] I would, however, argue that Hålogaland Teater has been central in the revaluation of the Northern Norwegian dialect by elevating it to the status of an official stage language. From the beginning, the theatre exported the Northern Norwegian stage language to other parts of the country. Many of Hålogaland Teater's productions were shown at Nationaltheatret (the Norwegian National Theatre) and other key theatres in Oslo. A number of productions were also televised, making the Northern Norwegian dialect even more accessible for people outside the northern region. Lars Berg had argued that the Northern Norwegian stage language had to be used on the main stages in Oslo before the development of the Norwegian theatre scene could be complete.[78] When Ragnar Olsen is asked to translate for Det Norske Teater (The Norwegian Theatre) in Oslo and when theatres all over the country use his Northern Norwegian translations in their productions, it is a sign that the revaluation of the Northern Norwegian dialect has been successful.

As we have seen, Bourdieu regards culture as one of the most important fields for the *field* of power because it has the power to shape the social order

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77. The establishment of Hålogaland Teater was part of a strong identity phase in North Norwegian regional development. Nordland Teater in Mo i Rana (in the southernmost county of Northern Norway) was established in 1979. The Sami National Theatre Beaivváš (BSNT) in Kautokeino (in the northernmost county Finmark) was established as a free group in 1980 and from 1991, it received state funding. All three theatres have worked actively to heighten the status of local identities and local culture and whereas Hålogaland Teater and Nordland Teater have worked to revalue North Norwegian dialects, BSNT has worked to revalue the Sámi language. The identity phase in the North Norwegian region has also led to the revival of Kvääni.
78. *Fremover* 1981/1954, 16.

through "hidden" and subtle mechanisms that form and shape people's identities. Through the centuries, the idea that Northern Norwegian identities were inferior had been reproduced in and through the *field* of culture, and the great weight of this "hidden" reproduction meant that Northerners, not uncommonly, perceived their identities to be inferior and insignificant.

Against this context, the significance of Hålogaland Teater's struggle to redefine the *field* of the theatre should not be underestimated. The theatre's stubborn demand to use Northern Norwegian as their official stage language, whether they stage international or national classics or contemporary plays, can be understood as a refusal to reproduce the hegemonic domination and linguistic imperialism inherent in the "legitimate" language. Instead, Hålogaland Teater reproduce a different social order – an order where the Northern Norwegian dialect is the identity marker of everyone, including fishermen, peasants, lawyers, princes, psychopaths, kings, and queens. If we accept that language underpins identity and that a positive revaluation of language can emancipate marginalised cultural identities, Hålogaland Teater's use of dialect as an official stage language has thus meant a lot for the emancipation of marginalised Northern Norwegian identities.

In a recent survey of Hålogaland Teater's reputation in Troms and Finnmark (the two northernmost counties in Norway), the use of Northern Norwegian dialects was perceived to be an important factor for the generally positive impression people had of the theatre. That the use of the Northern Norwegian dialect supported the building of Northern Norwegian identities was also highlighted as important.[79] That Hålogaland Teater has contributed to building a strong sense of regional pride and identity is, therefore, acknowledged. According to one informant, the theatre's use of the Northern Norwegian dialect makes him feel proud of his regional identity.[80]

Hålogaland Teater's aim to "strengthen and develop Northern Norwegian identity" is still an important part of the theatre's strategy.[81] According to Hålogaland Teater's former manager, Nina Wester, this is important because alt-

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79. *Opinion*, Omdømmeundersøkelse: Hålogaland Teater, Tromsø: Opinion, 2015.
80. Hans Olaf Brox, Interview, 7 December 2015, in person, Tromsø.
81. In the current strategy, one of Hålogaland Teater's goals is to strengthen and develop North Norwegian identity. In order to achieve this, it is stated that the stage language, on the whole, will be the North Norwegian dialect, that the theatre will present performances that take North Norwegian reality and culture as their starting point, that the theatre will collaborate with artists that have a North Norwegian background, and that they will shed light on subjects that are of current interest for the northern part of the country.

hough the Northerners today have a more confident self-concept than in the 1970s, she nonetheless senses that the Northerners still suffer from an inferiority complex that is deeply embedded in their historical past.[82] Professor emeritus in Northern Norwegian literature at University of Tromsø, Nils Magne Knutsen, agrees: "It is difficult to shed 400 years of oppression overnight. The values and dispositions gained from our cultural history remain with us, both consciously and unconsciously."[83]

The symbolic power of being represented positively on stage is of great value. This very act is linked to cultural authority – it builds cultural capital and makes people proud of their own cultural history and their social identity.[84] What identities Hålogaland Teater stages and what stage language the theatre uses is, therefore, never value free.[85] Through conscious and unconscious strategies, Hålogaland Teater thus continues to shape and reflect Northern Norwegian identities, both in terms of concrete geographical identities and more universal, human identities.

82. Nina Wester Interview, 9 December 2015, in person, Tromsø.
83. Nils M. Knutsen, Interview, 11 December 2015, in person, Tromsø.
84. Goodman 1993.
85. Hålogaland Teater also promotes the Sámi language. The theatre's name is featured on the front of the theatre building using the same size characters in both Sámi and Norwegian: HÁLOGALÁTTI TEÁHTER / HÅLOGALAND TEATER. The Sami National Theatre Beaivváš and Hålogaland Teater collaborate on many projects and Hålogaland Teater's current manager, Nina Wester, has worked actively to introduce a system to subtitle the theatre's performances in Sámi. So far, this initiative has, however, not been followed up. Wester 2015.

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