

LUX FILM DAYS

3 FILMS
24 LANGUAGES
28 COUNTRIES



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SAMI BLOOD (SAMEBLÖD)

A film by Amanda Kernell
Sweden, Norway, Denmark



SAMI BLOOD (SAMEBLÖD)

A FILM BY AMANDA KERNELL

An old lady accompanies her son on a visit to her region of origin, in northern Sweden, for her sister's funeral. She has no desire to renew contact with her family or her community, whom she left behind when she was very young. Upon arrival, memories come flooding back to her: in her early adolescence, she suffered humiliation at the hands of conformist Swedes, she tried to gain acceptance as their equal and she eventually changed her identity in order to escape from too constricted a destiny. After all these years, the way she rejected her origins seems to her to have been self-deception.

A KIND OF INTERNAL COLONIALISM

Amanda Kernell's film does not present any written information about the context in which it is set, for example 'Lapland, 1930'. The audience is left to speculate as to the region and the community that lives there, which is undoubtedly not well known to most audiences. The prologue, with the old lady's return to her home region, is clearly set in present-day times (a modern car, leopard-print clothing, etc.), but the long flashback that makes up the greater part of the film is not explicitly located in any particular time or place.

Christina recalls her adolescence, when she was known as Elle Marja. We see a nomadic family wearing traditional dress: they are reindeer herders. The two daughters have to go to boarding school to get a Swedish education as their mother tongue, Sami, is banned there. The younger of the two, Njenna, finds this geographical and cultural estrangement from her roots distressing. The older, Elle Marja, regards education — particularly reading books — as a gateway to emancipation. Emancipation is all the more important to her because she suffers from the ostracism inflicted on her by the Swedes. The young people who work near the school insult the Sami children, who are identifiable by their traditional dress and relatively small build. In general, these children are regarded in the neighbourhood as curiosities. Christina, their slender blond teacher, teaches them a text to welcome some people visiting from Uppsala: 'I am a poor little child, but a happy one ...'. The visitors are not, as some of the children have hoped, the King or Queen of Sweden, but a scientist, a photographer and a 'facilitator'. The first of these has come to take anthropological measurements (width of the skull, length of the nose, etc.), the second photographs of the children naked in order to study their general physiognomy, and the third tries to put the children at ease, admiring their dress and the softness of their hair ('Not frizzy at all!'), or distracting the teacher at a delicate moment when Elle Marja feels her modesty to be invaded. Elle Marja is the oldest of the children and is expected to set an example. However, as she has entered puberty, she feels humiliated by having to strip naked: the visitors have not come to meet young citizens of Sweden but to study representatives of an ethnic group, the same way one would study livestock. The feeling of being reduced to the status of an animal will not be easily overcome; after a further affront on behalf of the young people ('They have remained at a lower stage of evolution'), Elle Marja rebels and insists on an apology, but instead she receives the ultimate insult: the boys throw her to the ground and mark her like a reindeer, by cutting her ear.





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Elle Marja strongly wishes to leave this region where the Sami are stigmatised and viewed with contempt. She announces that she would like to move to a different school in Uppsala, but her teacher refuses to take the necessary steps, arguing that Sami children do not have the same aptitudes as Swedish children and even that they would not survive in the city.

All these elements show that the attitude of the Swedes towards the Sami is one of superficial benevolence: the Sami are kept in an intolerable halfway house. On the one hand, the children are given an education, which is certainly to their advantage, and they are (at least to some extent) brought into contact with culture, for example when the teacher gives Elle Marja a book. On the other hand, they are given to understand that they are fundamentally different and unsuited to modern life. Here again, the Sami are implicitly compared to animals, whose survival depends entirely on their attachment to their environment.

A CHANGE OF IDENTITY

In order to escape a destiny predetermined by her family as well as by the Swedes, who wish to keep her assigned to this second-rate status, Elle Marja has no choice but to change her identity: she changes her name (significantly, she assumes the name of her teacher, Christina Lajler); she stops wearing traditional dress and puts on standard clothing before burning her own clothes, symbolising the idea of burning her bridges; she stops speaking Sami; and, in the end, she even kills a reindeer, in an outburst of rage but also to symbolise the definitive rejection of her parents' way of life. Everything seems to suggest that Elle Marja's individual identity is stronger than her cultural identity, as if the two were in conflict and the second prevented the first from developing.

However, in reality things are not that simple. Although she changes her name, dress and language, her appearance is still that of a 'Lapp', as the Swedish say — a term the Sami consider to be pejorative. Even the more likeable Swedes, like Niklas and the friends he has invited to his birthday party, are not fooled by this false identity. In Uppsala, Elle Marja believes that she can assert her new identity and be accepted just like any other girl, or almost ... At first she is accepted, no doubt rather coolly, but nonetheless she is allowed to live at Niklas' parents' house; she starts attending a school, and although she sometimes looks out of place among all the uniformly slim, blond girls, she seems to befriend one of them. But there are still doubts: is she, the young Christina, the one who arouses sympathy, or are people merely attracted to her exoticism? The scene in which one of Niklas' female friends asks her to sing a joik (traditional Sami song) is very eloquent in this context. Even at a birthday party in town, Christina seems to be an ethnological curiosity.

Finally, she is asked to move out of Niklas' house and to pay school fees; on top of her origins, her poverty is a convenient excuse that encourages the people of Uppsala to reject her, as if that rejection took on a more civilised, less brutal form in the city than in the countryside ...

Elle Marja nonetheless manages to entirely assume her identity as Christina (her son calls her by that name too): with the aid of her father's money belt she is able to pay for her studies. What happens next is not shown, but presumably Elle Marja's

determination and her adaptability, of which we have already seen numerous examples (her resistance to the contemptuous attitude of the young people, her temerity in going to a party in a stolen dress and her imitation of the Swedes, such as when she raises her little finger when drinking coffee), will keep her on course.

THE RESOLUTION OF THE CONFLICT APPROACHES

To the audience, the conflict of identities between Elle Marja and Christina is obvious enough, and they may wonder how the character can go so far as to aspire to join the oppressor's camp. The girl does not seem to see the paradox inherent in, on the one hand, suffering denigration, stigmatisation and violence at the hands of the Swedes and yet, on the other hand, wishing to be like them and to be part of their community, against her own. In her old age, she still rejects her origins: she is reluctant to accompany her son, does not want to hear a joik, pretends not to understand Sami and refuses to stay for a single night with her family. She prefers to go to a hotel where tourists stay and where she exchanges a few words with them as they complain about the noise made by the reindeer herders with their motorbikes and even question their right to pollute the nature reserve.

Back in her home area and once again confronted with derogatory remarks made by the Swedes about the Sami, she remembers the past and finally becomes aware of her conflict of identity. She lies about her origins (claiming that she comes from Småland) and even goes along with the attitude of these contemptuous tourists, but she ultimately realises that, while deceiving other people in this way, she has deceived herself as well, and she starts to cry. So much so that she reverts to being Elle Marja: she goes to the church, opens Njenna's coffin, bends over her and apologises. She then leaves the church to climb the mountain: it is a moving image to see the dishevelled old woman walking where she walked as a child to reach the top of the mountain and view the landscape. Finally she sees her home country again, hears the herd and enters the camp, which is now full of motorbikes and quad bikes.

CONFRONTATION BETWEEN THE PAST AND THE PRESENT

Flashbacks are used to anchor Elle Marja's past in the present, and the confrontation of the two takes various forms. One scene in particular is set both in the past and in the present. The young Elle Marja has called her own sister a dirty Lapp when the latter came to fetch her while she was flirting with Niklas: the insult was supposed to suggest to Niklas and everyone who witnessed the scene that she herself was not a Sami. The teenager then came and bent over her sister's bed to explain herself, but Njenna literally acted dead. The scene is repeated in the present: Elle Marja apologises by bending over her sister's face as she lies there: she begs her pardon for her rejection, her departure and her contempt, but this time Njenna really is dead.

The confrontation of the past and present also corresponds to the opposition between tradition and modernity, two tendencies that the two sisters represent. Njenna has remained faithful to her tradition, and the eulogy for her at her funeral is also a eulogy of Sami culture: the taste for the joik and pastoral life — everything that Elle Marja rejected. Modernity has nonetheless made some inroads into the lives of the reindeer herders, who now use motorbikes and quad bikes, making them noisy and disturbing for the tourists, who have come in search of peace and quiet. The preserved tradition confines them to the status of a tourist attraction — Elle Marja perceived this very early on, protesting that she does not want to become a circus animal —, whereas modernity turns them into obstacles who spoil the countryside and the silence ... Neither of the two options is satisfactory, but the domination of the Swedes, one which is social, political and cultural, does not seem to have left the Sami people any other choice.



SOME POINTS FOR DISCUSSION

In addition to the points analysed above, several aspects of the film *Sami Blood* are worth further discussion.

- The question of minorities naturally arises within Europe. Even though situations that are as extreme as the violence inflicted on the Sami as shown in the film fortunately no longer arise, it is certainly possible to find points of comparison between the film and existing situations. Can you think of any?
- By contrasting the characters of Elle Marja and Njenna, the film contrasts modernity and tradition. These two options seem irreconcilable. Do you think that a third way, a middle way, is possible? Can you give examples?
- The character of Njenna, who opts to preserve an ancestral way of life, seems to merge with the specific nature of the Sami culture. Is it necessary to distance oneself from one's origins in order to fully express who one is?
- The very last images in the film show Elle Marja as an elderly woman, with her hair in disarray, walking among the tents of the camp. These images may remind us of an old squaw in an Indian camp in America. Is it possible to compare the fates of Amerindian tribes to those of the Sami?

BRINGING FILMS FROM EUROPE TO EUROPEANS

After last year's edition, which marked the 10th anniversary of the initiative, the LUX PRIZE continues to bring together an astonishing variety of genres and tones through films made by talented young European directors. The European Parliament is pleased to present the three films competing for the 2017 LUX FILM PRIZE:

BPM — BEATS PER MINUTE (*120 battements par minute*), a film by Robin Campillo, France

SAMI BLOOD (*Sameblod*), a film by Amanda Kernell, Sweden, Norway, Denmark

WESTERN, a film by Valeska Grisebach, Germany, Bulgaria, Austria

Adopting a sympathetic and intelligent approach, the films deal with topical subjects and reflect on what is going on in Europe at the moment. They show characters who open their eyes to the world around them in order to understand reality and the societies and communities to which they belong. By showing our stories sublimated by the emotions of film, the quality and diversity of European cinema will be displayed, as will its importance in constructing social values and cultural communities. We invite you to see the films during the sixth edition of the LUX FILM DAYS.

LUX FILM PRIZE

Culture plays a fundamental role in constructing our societies.

With this in mind, the European Parliament launched the LUX FILM PRIZE in 2007. By doing so it aimed to increase the distribution of European films across the continent as well as to encourage a European debate on major social issues.

The LUX FILM PRIZE is a unique initiative. While most European co-productions are shown only in their country of origin and are rarely distributed elsewhere, even within the European Union, the LUX FILM PRIZE gives three European films the rare opportunity to be subtitled in the EU's 24 official languages.

The winner of the LUX FILM PRIZE will be chosen by the Members of the European Parliament and announced on 15 November 2017.

LUX FILM DAYS

The LUX FILM PRIZE gave rise to the LUX FILM DAYS. Since 2012, the three films competing for the prize have been shown to a wider European audience during the LUX FILM DAYS.

During the LUX FILM DAYS, we invite you to enjoy an unforgettable cultural experience that transcends borders. From October to December, you will be able to join cinema-lovers from across Europe in watching screenings of the three films in one of the EU's 24 official languages. Do not forget to vote for your favourite film via our website, luxprize.eu, or our Facebook page!

AUDIENCE MENTION

The Audience Mention is the LUX FILM PRIZE people's choice award. Be sure to vote for one of the three films before 31 January 2018! You might get the chance to go to the Karlovy Vary International Film Festival in July 2018 — courtesy of the European Parliament — and announce the winner of the Audience Mention.

WATCH,
DEBATE
AND VOTE!



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LUX
PRIZE
.EU

DIRECTOR: Amanda Kernell

SCENARIO: Amanda Kernell

CASTING: Lene Cecilia Sparrok, Mia Erika Sparrok, Maj Doris Rimpi, Julius Fleischanderl, Olle Sarri, Hanna Alström, Malin Crépin, Andreas Kundler, Ylva Gustafsson

CINEMATOGRAPHY: Sophia Olsson, Petrus Sjövik

PRODUCER: Lars G. Lindström

PRODUCTION: Nordisk Film Production Sverige AB, Bautafilm AB, Digipilot AS, Nordisk Film Production A/S, Sveriges Television AB — SVT

YEAR: 2016

RUNNING TIME: 110'

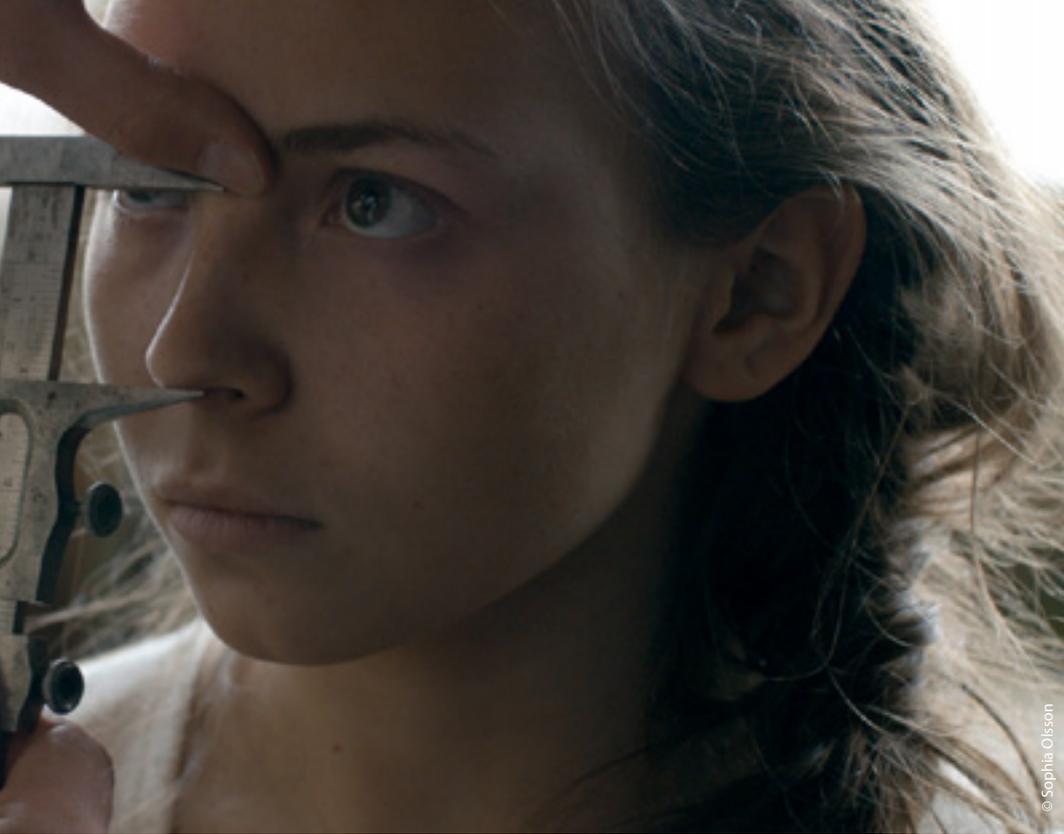
GENRE: Drama

COUNTRIES: Sweden, Norway, Denmark

ORIGINAL VERSION: Swedish, Sami

Manuscript completed in August 2017





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