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Incandescent Joik: Filming Chants of Resilience in Sápmi, Norway

Abstract

The article analyses how we, as a team of visual anthropologists from the University of Tromsø (Sápmi-Norway), worked with two young Saami musicians (S. M. Gaup and L. Somby) who are themselves researchers in the “joik” tradition. Sápmi is the term of the imagined nation of the Saami people, covering a territory that goes across Norway, Sweden, Finland and Northern Russia. The joik is the specific form of Saami chanting. It conveys lyrics, melody and throat singing techniques, with a high level of abstraction in rendering the relation to people, natural sites, places, animals and events, that we attempted to understand contextually and historically.

We did not only wish to pursue an archival quest to document contemporary joik, but we wanted to render through film how joik is a vehicle for existential revelations of the self to one’s community, to imagined communities, to former and future images of self as a Saami subject. We also wished to reveal how joik operates in connecting a multiplicity of identity markers, where musicians and their audience assign meaning to events, situations, history, stories, symbols and places.

The cultural complexity emerging in this multivocal and multisited project shows the embodiment of verbal recollections, gestures, conversations, lyrics, chants, improvisations, outbursts and secretive features of the Saami chanting endeavor. Among the archetypal cultural features attributed to the Saami, the article will critically analyze: the wandering in space and time, the gathering around the Árran (hearth, bonfire), the “joik which remembers” (poetic expression of the first known Saami writer, Joban Turi, 1908), and the taboos and achievements of political indigenous activism. Among the socio-political issues that the film addressed is the poignant reality of fading away languages: Southern Saami is today spoken by less than 500 speakers in Norway. The core analysis will articulate how the joik is operating as a medium and agent for sociality and construction (and de-construction) of collective memory.

Keywords

Joik, Music, Indigenous Media, Norway, Saami, Disappearing Languages, Transcultural Cinema, Youth Culture

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“Over the years quite a few Samis have emerged, whose occupation is artistic work. And there are more on their way, and there is a need for them – we need more forces. We Sami artists have felt a wall before us. We have been unable to avoid running into it. An artist is something new for Samis, a new phenomenon. That sort of thing always gives rise to astonishment”.

Nils-Aslak Valkeapää (1979:29)

Introduction

The non-fiction film *Firekeepers*¹ explores the contemporary nature and evolution of Sámi joik, perhaps the oldest continually practiced musical form in Europe. A joik can either be an individual's spontaneous emotional or philosophical expression or a group performance, sometimes accompanied by a drum. According to Ande Somby, one of the film's main protagonist's father and a renowned Sami joiker and scholar, unlike western European music, joiks do not have "a linear structure." He continues, "A joik seems to start and stop suddenly. It hasn't a start or neither an ending. Joik is definitively not a line, but it is perhaps a kind of circle." The film addresses the polysemic, evolving mode of performance of two Sámi joikers: Lawra Somby and Sara Marielle Gaup, from the Southern and Northern regions of Sápmi². Adjágas, founded in 2003, is Lawra Somby's site-specific musical project whose aim is to disseminate the joik tradition worldwide. For example, Adjágas is sometimes performed in a staged rock music setting accompanied by a band and sometimes as a solo performance. "Adjágas" in Northern Sámi means "the state between sleep and awakening". In this peculiar condition, it is said that one can unveil reality and tune into the most profound and original joiks. Joik (juoiggus) is a specific form of Sámi chanting and it has many regional forms. Those applied by Adjágas are the luohi (North Sámi) and the vuolle (South Sámi). Starting from this practice, Adjágas brings the musical-lyrical performance of joik to the international musical scene, collaborating with musicians using different genres, and adapting its performances to the context of reception.

Film SEQUENCE 1: CONCERT ADJAGAS RIDDU RIDDU from 31:35 to 33:50 on timeline vimeo (2 min.)

Drawing on Somby's group Adjágas, the film explores how a new generation of Sámi artists relates to the cultural inheritance that their parents and grandparents were forbidden to practice, but kept in reserve as cultural and social memory. In other words, the film addresses what aspects of Sámi cultural history and tradition are worth struggling for understanding, and how joik constitutes social realities, bringing together everyday life, politics and spirituality and becoming a form of healing the pain of the decolonization process (Kramvig: 2007, introduction to the film). Sámi people have experienced centuries of gradual

¹ The film was directed in close collaboration of a team of visual anthropologists and filmmakers, who worked together with the protagonists and their families over two years. There are four languages spoken in the film: North Sámi, Norwegian, English and South Sámi. It has been screened worldwide (USA, Nepal, Taiwan, Europe, Russia, New Zealand, Australia, and Canada), as well as throughout Sápmi and the sub-polar regions, in seminars, debates, and festivals with particular interest in Indigenous issues, endangered languages and post-colonial music. In 2008, it earned a commendation at the British Royal Anthropological Film Festival, given by the Intangible Cultural Heritage jury. The film is online for the reader of Visual Ethnography at this url: <http://vimeo.com/46061235> (password= firekeepers).

² *Sápmi* is the term for the social, territorial and cultural community of Sámi people who live in Norway, Sweden, Finland and Northern Russia.

dispossession of their land and water resources from the Scandinavian nation states since modern times; cultural and linguistic assimilation; dispossession of their territory through national borders; and compulsory conversion from an animistic religion to various Lutheran denominations. In crucial ways, Sámi experiences of settler colonialism mirror those of Native Americans, Maori, and other global Indigenous peoples. According to Harald Gaski (1998 :10), “the idea behind colonization was not simply to seize new territory and more resources, however, in Norway’s case, for example, it was also a way to spread Norwegian language and culture to the Sámi” in order to destroy their claims of indigeneity and increase the number of taxable “Norwegian” citizens.



Adjágas, Troms, Norway (2009)

Firekeepers, like many recent films on Indigenous issues, was an intensely collaborative project. The film originated as a joint effort involving anthropologist and film producer Britt Kramvig, who has worked for more than twenty years on issues of decolonization and gender in Sápmi, and myself, a visual anthropologist and filmmaker who has written on migration, transnational film, and visual culture. We began by engaging in the preparatory research and then worked together intensively on the shooting and editing phase of the project. We actively involved two other filmmakers, Ingeborg Solvang and Rachel Andersen, and we co-authored the screenplay with Lawra Somby and Sara Marielle Gaup. We filmed informal and public joik of the new “era” initiated in 1968 by Nils-Aslak Valkeapää (Laitinen: 1994: 11), one of the most important poets, musicians and artists in Sápmi, who was an internationally known “ambassador” in Indigenous issues and Sámi art. Lawra and Sara were already well known performers in Norway; nevertheless, they are not preoccupied with commercial success. Instead, they produce music on their own terms, learning from elders who are well-versed in joik and their music demonstrates how they are invested in issues of Sámi history, autobiography and ethnicity. The film explores their attempts of being legitimized by elders,

relatives and joik teachers, as well as by new transnational audiences, which they reach through European distribution³.

What we wished to render through film is how joik functions as an agent for existential revelations of the self to one's community, to imagined communities throughout Sapmi, and to past and future Sámi self-representation. May it be as Sámi youth, as "post-rock" musicians, as sons or daughters of Sámi activists, as actors in a non-fictional film, as emerging Scandinavian music stars, as grandchildren of notable *siida* (herd unit) members, and/or as speakers of endangered languages⁴.

FILM SEQUENCE 2: Sara Marielle talks about her background. 33:51 to 36:16 (2 min. 30".)

But we wished also to reveal how joik operates in connecting a multiplicity of identifications, where joikers and their audiences assign meaning to events, situations, history, stories, symbols and places, and are simultaneously constituted by the materiality of these expressions. The cultural complexity emerging in this multivocal and multisided project shows, through the power of transcultural cinema (Barbash & Taylor 1999), the embodiment of verbal recollections, gestures, conversations, lyrics, chants, improvisations, outbursts and secrets towards which the spectator becomes progressively addressed. The journey that the film followed and instigated at times, was composed of actual encounters, undisclosed revelations, places and atmospheres, attempts to reconnect oneself with something lost and to make sense of untold feelings. The journey became also the affective drive toward an imagined past. It showed how joik is operating as a medium for sociality and construction (and de-construction) of collective memory (Valkepää 1983, Gaski 2000, Jernsletten 2012).

The ancestors

Trondheim, Central Norway. April 2010.

I walk past the Methodist Church. It is a place I cherish in Trondheim, for in February 1917, one hundred Sámi representatives, among whom forty were women, convened to bring light to Sámi issues. They were organized by Elsa Laula Renberg, the first Sámi woman to be published⁵. She was a Sámi activist and politician, influenced by the early global women's movement. The meeting was a memorable event in Scandinavian history: it marked the beginning of the organization of trade unions and political associations among Sámis across the border with Sweden⁶. Even if that project was suspended several times between the two world wars, it was reinigorated in the 1970s. The leadership of a woman such as Elsa Laula

³ Adjágas has a Berlin-based agent, a website (<http://adjagas.com/>), a MySpace page (<http://www.myspace.com/adjagas>), and posts music videos on YouTube, all of which contribute to its international distribution strategy.

⁴ At the time of the making of the film, Southern Sami was spoken in Norway only by less than 500 persons.

⁵ Elsa Laula Renberg (1877-1931) published *Inför Ljif eller Död? Sanningord i de Lappska förbållandena* in 1904. She was also married to Thomas Renberg, a Sámi reindeer herder from Nordland. Additionally, Renberg an organizer of the first National Sámi Organization ever, the "Lapparnas Central Förbund" in Sweden, where she studied (1904).

demonstrates that feminism was not ignored by this ethnic minority. On the contrary, women actively participated in all the political meetings that followed that one⁷.

During World War II, this same Methodist church served as a clandestine synagogue, and in 1944 welcomed refugees fleeing from or being deported by the Germans in northern Norway. The social engagement of this church, its symbolic role at the Sámi meeting in 1917, makes this square an important historical site. A plaque in Norwegian and in Sámi reads: "The Sámi Day 6th-9th of February 1917, the first national Sámi meeting was here held, Initiative taker was Elsa Laula Renberg. Daniel Mortensson lead the meeting, which made possible that Sámi of different countries could organize themselves. The meeting is the basis for the celebration of the Sámi people day. This plaque was erected the 6th of February 1997"⁸.



Trondheim, 1917 Sami National Meeting. Photo H. Rasmussen. Trondheim University Library

I stand in the same spot where these people met and exchanged ideas and plans, as portrayed in photographs and chronicles of those who attended as reporters. The first

⁶ The conference brought together Swedish and Norwegian Sámis and its agenda included reindeer herding, Sámi law, Sámi organizations and education. Elsa considered education of the utmost importance. Very critical toward the assimilationistic project of the "Lapp Mission Schools," she argued for State Sámi Schools. These weren't opened in the Southern Sámi regions until 1951 in Hattfjelldal and in 1968 in Snåase (Snåsa in Norwegian), although her influence on the creation of these schools was critical.

⁷ The movement created by Elsa Laula was called Brurskanke Sámi Women's League, and was founded in 1910, the same year in which she became very active in Norway in order to secure land rights for her people. She realized very early that the whole livelihood should be considered, not only reindeer herding. Men and women could and should be fishers and herders, handworkers, traders, teachers. Most Sámi consider their culture gender complementary prior to Norwegian assimilation.

⁸ *SAMEFOLKETS DAG 6-9 Februar 1917 ble det første landmøte for samer hold her. Initiativtaker til møtet var Elsa Laula Renberg. Daniel Mortensson ledet møtet. Møtet bidro til at samene i de ulike land organiserte seg og møtet danner grunnlaget for feiringen av samefolkets dag 6 februar. Minneplaten er reist 6 februar 1997.*

assembly departed with a promise: to continue the networking process within Sámi regions and to identify the aspects to put forward for the defense of land rights and reindeer herding sustainability. But they also departed operated during very tumultuous years in European history: the Russian Revolution, World War I and World War II. Because Elsa Laula died in 1931, she did not see the completion of her shared dream. In 1948 her husband Thomas died in an enigmatic event that took place in Dunderlandsdalen, Norway, during a car accident that killed fourteen South Sámi male and female leaders and political representatives on their return from an important national political meeting in Romsa (Tromsø in Norwegian), Norway⁹. This narrative is personalized in the film when Lawra and his family members discuss the tragic personal and communal loss of these people in the accident.

Standing in the square of the Methodist Church, I think of the protagonists of *Firekeepers* living in the Sámi areas north of Trondheim, towards the Swedish border in Snåase (Snåsa in Norwegian) in Maajehjaevrie (Majavatn in Norwegian). They are from the Westerfjell and Kappfjell families, characterized by their strong women and musical men. I also think of Anna Jakobson, lecturer and speech expert of South Sámi language, and Gustav Kappfjell, a renowned joik singer; of Nanni Mari Westerfjell, Lawra's mother ("tjiddtjie" in South Sámi), who sits on the commission for Sámi Land Rights and of Nanni's mother, Ebba Westerfjell, who was a writer on Sámi issues and continues to engage and discuss her political views and memories. Lawra's grandmother ("aahka"), Ebba Westerfjell, who lost her father, uncle and many more relatives in the accident in Dunderlandsdalen, narrates:

They were going to the national Sámi reindeer-herders' meeting in Tromsø. [...] On the way back South, the bus had an accident. Father had to see a doctor, to fix his broken arm. Others were also injured. But the driver kept on driving. It was a warm summer day, 4th of July 1948. When they came to Dunderlandsdalen, the bus tipped into the flooding river. Of the sixteen people only two survived. My father, my uncle and other relatives died in that accident. The way my father died... I can't figure it out. I don't remember much of it. We tried to live through it all. Of course, a tiny people losing so many at once - so many of our leaders [...] After this accident, we had no political leadership left. These people were leaders and organisers. Of course, the Sámi organisation had Sámi from all over Norway. But, for the southern Sámi it was a disaster. Yes, because our spokespersons were gone. [...] We lost father's briefcase... It was in the beginning of the Sámi organising themselves. My father and my uncle wanted a united Sámi organisation. Not just for the reindeer herders, but for all Sámi, whatever their living is. (from *Firekeepers*, Maajehjaevrie 2006).

I see a thin red line of history connecting these people through several generations. The concerns of Elsa Laula and Lawra's grandmother are very similar. Nanni Mari, Ebba's daughter, works with issues of sustainability that Elsa Laula had pointed out nearly a hundred years ago. Walking and reflecting upon these links, I end up in the nave of the Romanic Nidaros Cathedral, a few meters away from the Methodist Church: a grandiose site and sight. It still resonates with the vocal strength of a joik of reconciliation between son and mother,

⁹ Throughout the text, I use the North or South Sámi for various place names whenever possible, parenthetically translating the Norwegian words for these same cities and towns when referred to for the first time.

Lawra and Nanni Mari, which I elaborate on later in this essay. They could finally explain each other's pain for a vexation that had been kept silent too long, but that bore nevertheless some offspring. The film we made told some of these facts and captured this disruption of affectivity and miscommunication. It disclosed one joik like a rose with many layers. After some years from the shooting of the film, I was confronted with the "sequels" of Elsa Laula's visions and struggles, of that dramatic bus accident and of the revitalization of a language almost got extinguished. In this text I will try to draw some of the lines that connected history, joik and us.



Sara Marielle Gaup and Lawra Somby

The slow appropriation of the moment

In order to earn the trust of the actors, and to acquire access to the communities and sites where we filmed, we formulated from the beginning some fundamental research questions informing the film-work. These were basic questions, which we adjusted all throughout the process, but that finally remained quite coherent until the end:

- *How does joik enable different generations to socialize and communicate today?
- *How is joik transformed by the agency of young performers and in which arena are new forms expressed and negotiated?
- *How do joikers reach out society at large and make their way in the broader, global music industry, from their standpoint of traditional indigenous musicians?
- *How do these new musical practices contribute to the decolonizing process in Sápmi today?

This was in fact a project based on collaborative ethnographic paradigms, which sought to establish from the start the parameters, boundaries and protocols of all those involved

(ethnographers, filmmakers, financiers, social actors and performers) and to negotiate throughout the research a way to render “visible” and “audible” the findings that unfolded from 2004-2007, the years in which we interacted, when we shot and showed the unedited film material, and discussed during the work in progress among the participants of the project. The digressions and clarifications that a text permits are not possible in cinematic terms (MacDougall 1998: 85). But film can render the random and unforeseeable connections that actions take when one follows them through the camera lens and can render body language in unmistakable ways, in the context where the body-mind of people expresses itself and socializes. Moreover, no action can be repeated without changing some of it, therefore non-fiction film cannot generalize any event as if it was representative of some sort of cultural typicality. It can indeed render the uniqueness of each event recorded without staging it, respecting the fact that the subjects involved are living through their own life, and that they are not paid to act in a theatrical set. Even in a scene shot in the grandmother’s living room, where important and previously unknown information is disclosed to the protagonist Lawra, the shooting was not steered nor stopped in order to “clarify” what was happening. The filmmaker followed the events, spontaneously, and became the instigator perhaps, but not the puppeteer of what unfolded. Moreover, there was no omniscient narrator explicating the information presented, as is the case with many conventional documentaries.

The documentary presents a Northern labyrinth-like shape: the “entrance” in it can be accessed each time that a group of scenes end and in the same way as the joik, its beginning and end are fortuitous. This form was obviously a choice we made, so that form and message be one. Moreover, as H. Laitinen puts it: “The joik is a masterpiece in the use of microstructures” and we tried to evoke this idea through a very detailed montage. A few intertitles introduce the names of the protagonists, their band Adjágas, and some words about the concept of joik.

Joik is a musical and lyrical form sung by the Sámi people since time immemorial. Persons, animals, landscapes and experiences can all be « joiked ». New joiks are constantly invented, reproduced with personal variations, or passed onto other performers. They express the meaning of being alive, and they are ways of communicating other realities. A joik doesn’t have a set beginning or a set ending: it goes in circles. Lyrics are not definitive and the melody has variations too. The ability to improvise is important.”

According to the vision of N.A. Valkeapää (1943-2001), in “Art is for remembering people,” a superb manifesto that has continued to reverberate for over 40 years:

Yoik¹⁰ wasn’t music – or rather, it wasn’t only music. It was part of life, it was the friend one was joiking, it was the spiritual gossip, it was the grey lead-reindeer with the smart trot, or the summer dwelling place, in all its radiant beauty. But you didn’t yoik about somebody or something, you yoiked them. And I am almost certain that it never occurred to anybody that what was going on was music- that it was art!” (27: 1979).

¹⁰ I have maintained the original English spelling of that text, which was “yoik” and “Sami”.

He continues by noticing that every attitude, body expression, skill in dwelling in the environment and ability to create good and useful tools and artifacts, was an expression of life force, and something one could yoik in order to honor it and distribute it in vast regions where the Sámis were obliged to retire when the economical interests of non-Sámis rose. This necessitated a change in their attitude. It was no more about preserving a timeless culture, as a romantic view would suggest, but about adapting and recreating new vital forces, new trends, and to face the changes through creativity and flexibility, as many people throughout the world operating under settler colonial rule have done.

Non-Samis have always asserted that yoik is not music. In their opinion yoik was nothing, it was wailing and screaming, the voice of devil in man, the howling of wolves. There have undoubtedly been some major changes in attitude to yoik – but for the most part only in aware individuals. [...] When it comes to the language of art, we find our relatives amongst the ethnic minorities of the world. [...] The future of Sami art –and the Samis- is also dependent on the general state of the world, and what comes of it. I am thinking here of things like starvation, overpopulation, pollution, littering, poisoning, destruction (Valkeapää, 1979: 29-32)

The film begins in a region dear to Valkeapää, not far from his home place Bettika, by Käsivarsi. We are in Treiriksøysa, the site where three relatively new, artificial borders meet to bisect Sapmi: the Norwegian, Swedish and Finnish borderlines. It is a very symbolic location in Sámiland, it reminds us that there was a time where these national borders did not exist, and the fact that now they are there, is still an abstraction in many ways. But these borders have shaped the life of herd units, pastoral life, land and water rights, dwelling and wandering, for hundreds and hundreds years, and are the evidence of the national fragmentation of previous ecologically-connected territories, where the dwelling was the main force shaping customary law.

The initial sequence in the film shows a traditional summer camp, with lavvos (Sámi tents), and Sámi subjects dressed in gáktis, their colored traditional costumes, while they share a convivial moment under a roof that opens to the sun through its smoke hole. It is a joyful collective meal, followed by improvised joiks. Three men joik for a baby boy: these persons are well-known in Norwegian Sápmi: Ande Somby, joiker, activist and professor in Law at Tromsø University; his uncle Ivvár Niilas, from Deatnu (Tana in Norwegian), one of the most knowledgeable elderly joikers of Northern Norway; and Ande's son, Lawra Somby, protagonist of the film, to whom Ivvár is "fuolki", relative, being the brother of his paternal grandmother. They are lulling for Ainel, last son of Ande, half brother of Lawra, who is still a toddler.

FILM SEQUENCE 3: Under the Sámi tent, lavvo. Treiriksøya. From 01:41 to 06:57 (5min. 20 ")

To listen to three generations of men joiking to a baby was an awesome experience, both aurally and visually, imbued with many expressions of affectivity: it sets immediately the tone of intimacy of which the film wish to be enveloped. To these Northern Sámi joiks, Sara

Marielle Gaup, together with her sisters, responds spontaneously from the other end of the lavvo. Their echoes are haunting. The simultaneity of expressions in disparate locations of the tent reverberates towards Ivvár Niilas, who states that he taught Lawra to joik.

Joik has a peculiar structure with strict rules, but at the same time it leaves each joiker the possibility to shape her/his personal style. It can be sung in solos or in groups, in dialogue or whispered. The owner of the joik isn't the singer, but transforms into the "joiked object," be it a landscape, a person, an animal or even an event (Gaski 2000, Jones-Bamman 2006, Graff 2007, Hilder 2010).



Firekeepers at the àrran

Later in the evening, Ande Somby recounts the mythology of how joik was created by subterranean spirits, the *ulddat*, and given to the Sámi. Moreover, he explains how it was prohibited by the Christian Church, and its singers demonized. He notes how it was kept alive, in the same way as a flame hidden under the ambers. The hearth-bonfire in a Sámi dwelling, called *àrran*, is an agent of sociality and conviviality in the Sámi way of life: it can be a bonfire on the *duottar* (tundra), a hearth to cook under the *lávvo*, or metaphorically, the stove in a kitchen where coffee is cooking. Stories, secrets, requests, deals, arguments, daydreaming, joik often happen around a fireplace. This account inspired the title of the film: joikers in old times, are paralleled to "keepers of fire," who, through their continued practice healing and shamanic rituals, resisted against persecution and suppression: these were the "firekeepers." The camera slowly pans that around the bonfire are many onlookers: this is not a "natural" summer camp, it is a sort of performance, an event, it is organized... The camera reveals how cultural expressions are reshaped for a performative use, and how this latter shapes new knowledge production, including invention, in the social life of people. In fact Lawra employs this occasion to perform a new joik, that from now on will become a protagonist in the narrative: *Im manne gåarkab*, which means "I do not understand" in the South Sámi language.

The film shows how this particular joik came to life. It applies Southern Sámi techniques, and its theme is existential. Later in the film Lawra's mother, Nanni Mari, will explain about the peculiarity of these techniques: "There are yoiks you can initiate and those who take you. Therefore you can't refuse to joik, you must do it when it takes you", she sums up. In this way, it is similar to an urge, even a cry. "*Im manne gáarkal*" refers to Lawra's experience of loss of his mother tongue: Southern Sámi. In *Tretriksøysa*, Lawra had just discovered that the reason why he had lost the fluency at about five years was caused by the pressure of the kindergarden's personnel in Oslo, which could not cope with trilingual children, and had suggested to his parents, they suspend speaking to him in at least one of the Sámi languages he was gaining fluency in¹¹. This suggestion did not prove to be appropriate, and was perhaps even permeated yet by some principles from the linguistic assimilation time. Nonetheless, the consequent implementation of it from his parents side, had never been disclosed to Lawra, who had been tormented with doubts about this enigmatic loss and with a sense of culpability because he thought he had stopped his own fluency with no apparent reason. "It is like to be a fish in a pond, that is drying out"... he had commented in *Maajehjaevrie*.

In *Tretriksøysa*, the joik "I do not understand" lasts long, much longer than any other song that night: it sounds similar to a blues, and when it ends, it leaves the whole assembly perplexed, in an embarrassed silence. It has touched something painful and vulnerable, or maybe it is simply not the type of performance expected in that place. But this event is also important because Lawra shows his autonomy and personal style around the *árran* where his father Ande, his master of joik *Ivvár* and his partner in music Sara Marielle, all sit and listen to him. It is a touchy arena to choose in order to come forward. As Harald Gaski notes, joiking "has played an important role in creating a feeling of unity within the group" (1998: 12) and "the yoik is not about a person, it actually is the person" (1998: 13). Because of this, Lawra not only places himself outside the group as a person who has lost his ability to speak Southern Sámi, he also becomes himself, in some ways. It is not by chance perhaps, that somebody asks Ante Mikkal Gaup, clever joiker and father of Sara Marielle, to joik the grouse, as a distraction from this eloquent lull. There is a sense of puzzlement in the moment: it is an existential joik and it took all the onlookers by surprise. Lawra announced his search, as we would follow up in the film.

FILM SEQUENCE 4: Lawra joik in *Tretriksøya*. From 07:30 to 11:04 (3 min.20")

The grouse sings in the farthest, the crescent of the moon frames a vibrant *lávvo* in the summer night, and in this image of tents, a cross-dissolve shows a house in a big town emerging from a rain puddle... a melancholic transition into the symbols of sedentary life. We embark on an urban scene in *Romssa*, and it is during wintertime, across the polar night.

¹¹ His father Ande spoke with him in Northern Sámi, his mother Nanni Mari spoke to him in Southern Sámi and they were in a Norwegian majority environment, since they were both students at the University of Oslo when Lawra was a child.

Thomas Hilder, who studied joik and Sámi musical forms during years of extensive fieldwork, looked at constructions of contemporary Sámi soundscapes, analyzing the dynamics that are:

[...] formed by musicians, performances, musical institutions and mediating technologies. [...] Sámi music can be traditional and modern joik, contemporary pop music, rock, classical, rap, heavy metal, and jazz. [...] Joik doesn't have a beginning and an end. It is not about something, but brings something or someone into being. It can be a political and social commentary naming and remembering people, animals, places and events. It can be a therapy, and might call spiritual powers into action. [...] Political, everyday, sacred, performed on stage or in arctic wilderness, urban and pastoral. It is mostly funded by Sámi institutions and distributed by Sámi labels (2010: 12).

He describes the loci and foci of these expressions and cultural production, from stages to studios, radios, exhibitions, websites and the social media, the virtual imagery and the sociality of joik. He contends that it is a musical form that utilizes Sámi language and revitalizes it as well, that is able to convey and reinforce a sense of "Sáminess." It affects Sámis, and moreover creates empathy toward other indigenous musical expressions in a contemporary movement connected to the pan-indigenous discourses. Adjágas is an exemplary band considering Hilder's analysis. Most of the aspects evoked above are consciously expressed by their project. The film follows them while performing at By:larm 2006, sponsored by Riddu Ridđu, an important Sámi festival dedicated to indigenous cultures. This festival is where Lawra and Sara have been developing as joikers since they were very young, as evidence by their being awarded Best Young Artist in 2001 and 2002. During the concert in Romsa, we perceive what kind of musical project constitutes Adjágas, and the energy that the two performers deploy on stage. Lawra's attitude contrasts with the previous moments in Trieriksroya, but it doesn't clash with them. It is another register, but his "authenticity," or better sense of self, is untouched. On the contrary, the subtleties and presence of the performers signal that they know how to deal with different arenas and contexts of reception, and in both locations they seem in control and proud. The response is an ovation. While Sara Marielle has joiked since she was a child, Lawra started to do it when he was seventeen years old, but since then his career has only been growing. His first public show took place during a United Nations event in Geneva, Switzerland and from there he was invited as a joiker to the opening of the Alexandria New Library in Egypt, then to New Zealand, and in 2005, with Adjágas, to open the famous Glastenbury annual rock concert in England.

The film continues in Guovdageaidnu (Kautokeino in Norwegian) one of the main centers of Sámi society in Finnmark, where we discover more about Sara Marielle and her family background. According to her own account:

I am from Kautokeino. My father grew up here in Mieron, not too far from this house. And my mother is from Gratangen, Rivttat in Sámi. But there the yoik has disappeared. The traditional costumes are almost not used. And Sámi language is fading away. So I try

to preserve what is not lost, on my father's side of the family. I am especially interested in Sámi handicraft, duodji. I was fortunate that my relative Elle Márjá taught me duodji. Our families have very similar *málle*... (Sámi) traditional customs. How do I explain it? *Elle Márjá answers: "Málle"* : the way things should be alike, their patterns. We have the same traditions, my husband was your relative.

This conversation takes place in the duodji room (both craft and applied art in Sámi tradition); Sara Marielle and Elle Márjá sit and sew a leather jacket for a man, a ceremonial gákti. Elle Márjá is Sara Marielle's duojár. In the Sámi transmission of knowledge, this role between a learner and a master in craft, in fact, it is specific for duodji: the duojár chooses the styles, prepares the different ingredients and materials, knows how to recycle every part of a slaughtered reindeer or how to make use of any material found in the environment, to turn it into beauty and function (Guttorm 1999: 37) and the relation between the two is what gives quality and originality to the final artifact. There is a sort of invisible signature in each item, the result of the knowledge of the duojár and the praxis of the maker. A good duojár is often praised in joiks. This contributes to her or his fame. Sara Marielle shows how important is for her to learn this relation with respect and engagement. Art and handicraft, that since time immemorial weren't disentangled in the Sámi cultural production, are of great importance in her life, even if she is an emerging rock star.

FILM SEQUENCE 5: Sara Marielle and her Duojar. Sewing. From 13:20 to 18:50 (5 min. 10")

During the interview in Guodageaidnu, Sara Marielle expresses values about her gender, her role in society (both locally and globally) and her ability to live in such diverse realities: concert stage, rock music milieus, transnational travel and then duodji and motherhood in Finnmark. Doing duodji is also an art of remembrance, spontaneity, dialogue, and the theme of joik is here discussed between Sara and Elle Márjá in a very intimate way, evoking also some affecting stories connected to the shame of joiking¹², while their respective bodies at work "weave" memories, secrets, recollections, one sewing leather, while her duojár is rolling reindeer sinews on her cheek.

A shift in the film presents Lawra wandering in the Southern Sámi regions, the area in Trondelag towards Nordland, around Snåase (Snåsa in Norwegian), the small town where his mother resides. From there he drives to his grandmother in the village of Maajehjaevrie, towards the border with Sweden.

¹² Because joik was also used in shamanic rites, accompanied by drum, Christians forbade it, associating it with the "Devil's voice" and banning it from communities; in this way joik's expression and transmission became one of the forms of resistance to suppression. The fact that the action of joiking was considered shameful, shaped as well a relation of intimacy for the singer, because nobody was supposed to do it in public or to show that one had heard it.



Lawra, 5 years old, and his white reindeer pet. Majavatn

His grandmother fondly sits in her living room and is eager to communicate with this beloved grandchild, weaving in her account a very unique pattern between politics, intimacy and joik:

Through joik... You can give something of yourself to others.

Through joik, you can call on help from the spirit world. I remember once... two of my uncles disagreed about how to deal with an issue. Tempers were getting high. First, grandmother started crying. And then my mother was crying too. I was upset by this, but I just kept in the background. My grandmother withdrew from the discussion. So I followed her, to get away from that situation. She went to her turf-house and sat on the threshold, the door open. She looked to the mountains towards the east. And then she started joiking. It was the first time I heard a joik with such a volume.

Because they always kept it quiet, with low volume, my mother and the others. Because it was forbidden to joik! While grandmother was joiking, I walked towards her. The volume of the joik increased. It became so loud that I started crying. And I clung to her arm, because I felt her joik was lifting us up. And I was so scared. And I can still recall that feeling in my body...

It was... mighty. Powerful! I haven't heard anyone joiking like that before or after, and I'm 75 years old. And the tears were dropping, while she was joiking. I don't recall... but I guess she calmed down, and saw me standing there. So, then it was over. But that feeling, and that joik... Nowadays, nobody has the skills. My brother, Gustav, joiked a lot when he was older. He was also touring, with Valkeapää, in Stockholm and other places. But you know... joik seizes the situation in which it's performed in. Joik was mostly for parties. But grandmother was definitely summoning the higher spirits. I am sure of that. If I hadn't held on to her, she would have been lifted away.

It is interesting to be Sámi¹³. I think so! I am so glad that my people are discovering that our traditions are worth keeping. So I am so glad for Lawra, for he joiks. “The blood of shaman drummers is in our veins.” I like this saying. In this way, the Sámi will still live on”. (Ebba Westerfjell 2006, Firekeepers)

Lawra’s mother, clarifies (personal communication 22.10.2008) why her great-grandmother could be so outraged previous to her powerful joik, the one that young Hebba witnessed: ”That is the sequence (in the film) where my mother tells about her own experience of joik – when her grand-mother joiked in such a way that she felt that both of them were being lifted up from the soil. The reason why she did so, it is not explained further – but it is interesting: it happened in 1935, my mother was five years old. [...] The reindeer herders in the family had returned home and told that a settler had closed the track where they moved the herd through their old pasture land. This was in the middle of the worst assimilation time – the Sámi rights were never referred to publicly.”¹⁴

FILM SEQUENCE 6: Lawra’s grandmother tells about joik. (3 min.)

These are areas where Lawra’s maternal kinship comes from and has dwelt for many generations. These families and herd-units (“sejte” in Southern Sámi) are very rich in history, and they have bred activists, politicians, intellectuals, teachers, as well as reindeer herders and duodji makers. In the 1970s the Norwegian government built a barrage in Gaelpieh (Kalvavatn in Norwegian), up in the mountains where Lawra’s ancestors had their reindeer pastures¹⁵. Lawra’s uncle Niilas and grandmother Ebba bring him to the location and explain in southern Sámi what this site looked like and was used for previously: it was an important crossing point for the herds in the spring. Now the whole region is inundated because of a dam project. Lawra gets to know more about his ancestors; the journey that propelled the film. It is a journey of discovery. Lawra states during this journey that to travel to his maternal grandmother’s was like a retreat to a sanctuary. This metaphor is very powerful, for it evokes, among so many other associations to spiritual energy and peacefulness, the relation to piety that he learned from his mother. During this visit, Lawra learns about the real causes that made him lose his mother tongue. A joik bursts out like a cry: Im manne gåarkah. Is “to understand” enough to recover a complex?

¹³ Lawra’s grandmother states that “it is interesting to be Sámi” and this provokes often a laughter among the Sámi audience, because this humor and lyrical twist based on self awareness it is a choice of irony that only one charismatic and respected figure of a Sámi community can make, as she was and still is.

¹⁴ “*Det er den sekvensen der min mor forteller om sin opplevelse av joik – der hennes bestemor joiker slik at hun føler at hun og bestemoren løstes fra bakken. Bakgrunnen for at hun joiket slik kom ikke frem –men den er interessant: dette skjedde i 1935, min mor var 5 år. Reindriftsutøverne i familien hadde kommet hjem og fortalt at en nybygger hadde stengt flytteleien i deres gamle beiteland. Dette var I midt i den verste fornorskningstiden –samiske rettigheter var et ikke tema.*”

¹⁵ Differently from the Áltá (Alta in Norwegian) demonstrations happening a few years after, where hundred of people mobilized in order to stop the construction of a dam which would have destroyed the ecosystem of the Guovdageaidnu-Máze (Kautokeino-Masi) valley, opportunities to protest this political, cultural and ecological disaster in Gaelpieh never arose. As Niilas, Ebba’s son, explains: “We weren’t strong enough in the South.” In the middle of the 1970s and even more in the wake of the Áltá case, leading activists have participated in the formation of contemporary indigenous rights movements and organizations like the ILO (International Labour Organization).

Snåase, central Norway. August 22d, 2006.

On our way back from Lawra's "sanctuary": the homeland of his grandmother Ebba, in Maajehjaerie.

We follow the railway that leans over a high bridge on the skirts of a dark and extended wood. The night is over, but the dawn has not yet risen. It's been raining heavily the entire night. An interminable night spent awake amidst flames, Jack Daniels, and mysteries. Trolls emerged from the mercurial surface of a tiny lake. The bonfire endlessly consumed and resuscitated, although the rain damped it, the all nightlong. Many words were exchanged between us. Memories faded. We climbed a cliff, often sliding in the mud, we reached above the railway trails, for then we knew that something was about to happen. And the joik awaited for, during more than one year, "became". It was "joiked". And in return, it "joiked" its singer's enigma. My enchanted camera captured it. Also when he disappeared in the forest. A blinking red light announced the passage of the first train early that morning... A blinking heart in a deep blue wood...

This above is an extract from my diary. This anecdote occurred in August 2006 and I have many other entries from that period. It narrates the journey to Lawra's ancestors and to living relatives. What is narrated above appears in a poetic editing form in the film, and it precedes the very end. This is the outstanding moment in which filmmaking, research and life coincide, in which the time spent waiting and hoping, not interfering too much, but accompanying one's subjects in their tribulations and trails, in their fleeting joys and even ecstasies, sorrows or rages, it's worth having been spent. It's not that everything falls into place, but mostly that every place becomes the "thing," and novelty spreads from any situation. This is a sort of existential acceleration occurring that films like these can instigate and capture. But the film doesn't simply follow or provoke, it also shapes the mood for what is to happen. The initial plan was to follow up the birth of a joik. But utilizing a "responsive" filmmaking style, we couldn't order this wish to the protagonists, we could not make this desire too transparent, because the way our filmmaking collective intends non-fiction films resides in the possibility to accompany the formations of sociality, the existential discoveries, the actions and reflections of the protagonists without giving them a prerequisite (MacDougall 1998: 53, 2006: 4). We were obviously aware that our desire and presence as filmmakers might influence acts and thoughts at another level, but it is certainly another thing to "command" a piece of art to an artist than to hope that this will organically generate in his/her mind-body driven by real circumstances. It is substantially different from staging. Even from staging events that occurred in the past, as a way of inserting fictional reconstructions in the non-fictional universe of the present, unfolding before us.

Behind our hope was the theoretical assumption that an immaterial and material artifact, like a song, a poem or in this case a "traditional" chant like the joik, is the materialization of a much wider field of relations and also, it materializes these relations further. In another context, the "epitome" performed in a concert hall, far away in space and time from its original context of conception, may evoke the vast territory where historical, social and spatial lines cross. How does joik operate today? How can this ancient, yet evolving form express current values, concerns, feelings and untold stories, in a meaningful way? How can it constitute its subjects and how do the subjects constitute it?

We might prove the power of cinema, its ability to act upon the world, record and render forms of the real, of both the people and the course of events. But the fact that this medium possess the distinctive quality of rendering musical expressions through the aural and the visual simultaneously are also qualities which are impossible to paraphrase or “textualize.” A medium conveying another medium isn’t simply a question of embedded meta-languages. It of course adds to and detracts from the original medium. Additionally, it shows how all media are mixed-media, to borrow Mitchell’s trope. All the songs have been subtitled, a choice designed to make them appear as important texts interconnected with the moments of “pure” joik; in this way they appear as forms of storytelling, not as simple “mumbled” vocals or meaningless vocables. The respect given by a subtitle, which doesn’t often occur in documentaries showing musical performances in minority languages, was an important aspect for us. It made joiks more accessible and at the same time, revealed their poetics as meaningful, if not always fully understood by outsiders of Sámi society (Gaski: 2000).

“It is quite certain that a Sami artists would cut a film at quite different tempo from a Parisian, out of the same material. It is just as evident that a Parisian public would identify itself with the “internal clock” in the Parisian version, and the Sami public with the “clock” in the Sami version.” Valkeapää (1979: 30)

Paradoxically, although Valkeapää published the quote above in 1979, and that I was a Parisian filmmaker, the editing of the film turned out to be quite speedy and lyrically patched, and this was also by request of the Sámi protagonists, who are young and sophisticated about the language of contemporary media (internet, TV, video music etc.). The associations between images, sounds, graphics and music aim at creating a “certain state of mind” enabling the active understanding of poetic and at times arbitrary connections and disconnections, which the film montage reveals and deconstructs.

The rendering of space and time dimensions with which film-form can play so openly (although not as freely as most may assume) made the movement continuous: with no clear cut between absence and presence in each other’s horizon. It’s a future “becoming” as one goes along in finding and creating evocations, links, which are sometimes territorial but sometimes purely mental and that are translated into filmic form in order to become something else again. Moreover, one could contend that non-fiction films like this one are too obsessively sticking to their empiricism, which is accentuated by a lack of special effects and staged scenes. This style has its challenges though, and it is not assumedly only interested in the trivialities of the quotidian. A documentary constructed in this way demands an effort of renewed interpretation from the viewers’ and the makers’ side at each new screening. It demands to be seen many times, because the structure mirrors the one of a joik, where several associations are made available if connecting with different points in space (sequence) and time (length, duration). It demands a pact with the viewer, a sort of collaboration from the first sight.

We chose to represent this multi-sidedness also through the power of montage. As Marcus puts it, this type of montage can better render “the simultaneity and spatial dispersion of the contemporary production of cultural identity” (Marcus 1995: 99). It is a multitudinous space where one can assign new meanings to aspects of embodiment and sensorial knowledge, and at the same time play with what were before discrete categories such as space (namely places, sites, locations, land and seascapes, boundaries, bodies in movement) and time (namely tempo, rhythm, anticipation of future events, present, verbal evocation, storytelling and recollections). One cannot help but begin with metaphors and acts that the actors invite us to follow up and that will be discussed as contributions of the collective text operated by the montage. Nobody in the film used metaphors like “roots” or “rootedness”, but we heard more about flooded cultural spaces; car accidents; primary education and attempts at linguistic and psychological assimilation; the expression of grief and rage in joiking; shamanic experiences; traveling to an emotional and material sanctuary, etc. In the film, one hears about *málle* in northern Sámi: the “patterns which are alike,” a concept that is possible to use in kinship matters as much as in clothes materials and tools measures. Concepts that get materialized by doing, acting, connecting and that the film shows while they happen for the first time.

Lawra and Sara can also give voice to two different attitudes in dealing with the imagined past, but also with a certain common understanding and mythologizing of the past. They are in a process of mental decolonization in relation to the future. Lawra seems to play out his principle of transformation as a way to remain open to the future, while Sara Marielle sticks to cultural inflections, practices and social patterns that seem to be connected with a past, in some ways, a more “conservative” one: i.e., as identity markers as they have been passed on by her family members and close network. On the other hand, both Lawra and Sara Marielle were those who in 2000 and 2001 renewed the scene of Sámi musical performance through *Riddu Riddu*. Later on, with *Adjágas*, their innovative way of joiking together, in an anti-fusion musical style with non-Sámi musicians, was also based on certain ideas about what the future might hold for musicians of the globalized musical world industry. Sara articulates her perspective by stating that living in *Guodageaidnu* and being part of *Adjágas* is sometimes a great split, a clash of moods, responses, and psychological gymnastics. While for Lawra there is one place he needs to frequent in order to reconnect himself to a sense of belonging: his maternal grandmother’s village, *Maajehjaevrie*. All this lies deep in Lawra’s identification with an historical place, a cradle for ethno-political awareness. In this way, *Maajehjaevrie* is a place to go to when everything else seems to collapse. Thus, in his “ubiquity”, he can wander in the larger territory of *Sápmi*, and now the whole world as such, which are equally accessible places for his transient residence. Sámi young audiences in various screenings perceived this: Lawra is ahead of tradition and time; he makes the Sámi young subject a world citizen¹⁶. But a sense of history and pride is also needed, that Sara brings in a more feminine chord: she emphasizes where her own generation comes from in

¹⁶ Sámi, in many ways, have always been cosmopolitan and sophisticated in their understandings of the larger geo-political scene in which they are embedded. For example, in the familial, cultural, and economic exchanges between the north and coastal Sámi when the northern Sami go up the coast to reindeer pastures.

terms of a thirty year span (1975-2005): they are the nieces or sons of the creators of the ČSV¹⁷, a Sámi creative-political movement of the 1980s, funded in Deatnu; of the activists of the Alta case; and of the first representatives in the new created Sámi Parliament. Lawra, Sara and many of their peers are the offspring who were not as radicalized as the generations that preceded them. The heavy burden of inheriting a condition where most of the struggles seem already won and mobilized isn't so easy as the tender smile of Sara undermines. These moments are filmed in such a way that cannot be staged nor repeated and therefore, these are the moments we must see in order to grasp what an ethnographic filmmaking practice that both critiques older forms of visual anthropology and works in tandem with the needs and desires of Indigenous peoples brings to social research.

Behind, after the film

“In the eyes of ‘my’ subjects, my film will not be judged by how it makes the obvious points. They will set a much higher standard. I must go beyond what is implicit between us. I shall not be able to speak as the expert, nor shall I feel comfortable about belaboring the elementary things we both already know. My work will be judged by its good faith towards them and its understanding of their perceptions of the world, without pretending to be their view of it.” (David MacDougall, 1998:91)

After we screened “Firekeepers” the first time in the Verdensteater, the historical cinema of Romsa, Lawra phoned and stated that he was satisfied with the screening and after-party, but indeed, he articulated that the film wasn't finished. He claimed we might continue it. We knew he was already in a new phase than the one that his externalization in front of the camera had expressed. Lawra was on his way to regain his lost language, his mother-tongue, in a literal sense: this was a way of empowerment that the film had provided for him, not only because of that, but mostly because of his own realization.

To edit the narrative as it is today has been a long process: we looked at the rushes many times, we organized trips for Lawra and Sara outside of Romsa to come to the cutting room in order to comment the rushes and the editing. We did this until they were comfortable with what was selected and edited in the final version.

After the release of the film, the joik *Im manne gáarkab* became *I gob gáarkab, I can understand*. The melody is similar to the previous version, but the lyrics in Southern Sámi read:

*Time has brought us far
can't recognize my surroundings
Memories remembered by my blood
clouded by the fog of no knowledge*

¹⁷ The development of Sami politics during the 1970s and 1980s was, in many respects, a new awakening. A new awareness was expressed in art especially. Young Sami wanted to reclaim what they had lost. Old cultural expressions such as place names and the “gákti” were rediscovered, and new cultural traits invented. This was a political and cultural renaissance without precedent in Sami history. The period was often referred to as “ČSV,” after three of the letters of the Sami alphabet. (<http://sapmi.uit.no/sapmi/ExhibitionContainer.do?type=tema>)

*The fear is strangling our throats
no word can come out
Don't you understand that fear is the obstacle
fear of loss, fear of failure
Rigid pride will make us fall like rotten trees
Ancestor blood in your vein
be your blood, offer help by giving
you help life
True pride is in humbleness*

FILM SEQUENCE 7: Lawra's account about losing language. From 44:50 to 55:50 (11 min.)

Since the visit to Maajehjaevrie that we filmed, after his mother told Lawra about the reasons of the loss of the language, he had been somehow distant and slightly vexed with her. But something had happened in Trondheim, in the Nidaros Cathedral, some months later. Firekeepers was shown during the establishment of the South Sámi Church congregation, (Sør Samisk Mendighet Råd Kirke in Norwegian), belonging to the Norsk Statens Kirke. Lawra would honor the opening with a joik in the nave of this historical cathedral. The pastor who invited him to perform, Bierna Bientie, had come to Snåase to the screening of the film and the concert of Adjágas a few months earlier, and had thought that mother and son might have the occasion to talk together about the issue of language loss. Nanni Marie in fact had spoken at length after the screening, in a long “confessional” declaration where she had fully assumed the consequences of that infamous choice of removing southern Sámi language a home language for her son, in accordance with his father. At that time she believed in the educational expertise of teachers and pedagogues in the public school, but obviously they had had it wrong. Now she felt she had failed because she had not listened to her “gut feelings” at that time¹⁸. Her pain was expressed with such a dignity that she moved most of the people in the auditorium, and there were there many parents with similar stories:

“Obviously I have a sense of guilt that shall stay with me the rest of my life. Today we know that to transmit a language and a culture is something that one must do without restrictions. Nevertheless, at that time, we did not know to what extent multilingualism could influence a child. I think indeed that I have paid my debt now”. (Nanni Mari Westerfeld: Ságat n.176 – 12-10-2009)¹⁹.

Many youth were also at that screening in Snåase with their parents, and they came back the day after to the highly energetic concert that Adjágas performed, in front of so many

¹⁸ Though it is important to emphasize that this wasn't necessarily just a personal choice, but a choice that was part of a wider pattern, the settler/colonial context, that sought the assimilation of the Sámi as a people through the prohibition of language, culture, musical traditions, etc.

¹⁹ Jeg har jo en skyldfølelse som vil forfølge meg resten av livet. I dag vet vi at å videreføre et språk og en kultur er noe man skal gjøre uten forbehold, men på den tiden visste vi jo ikke hvordan det påvirket barna å være flerspråklige. Jeg føler jeg har gjort opp for dette nå. (Nanni Mari Westerfeld Ságat n.176 – 12-10-2009).

among Lawra's acquaintances, friends and family from the South Sámi region. The young people, were silently overcome with emotion during the concert while Lawra joiked "Th Goh Gáarkah." They could visibly recognize something of themselves and perhaps of their common history as Sámi people, but also as a minority within the mainstream Sámi society (young Southern Sámi subjects born in the 1970s-1980s). The atmosphere was so touching during the performance of that particular joik, that one could think that part of the pain of the past losses was relieved in a collective and cathartic rite.

A cathedral resonates with joik

Lawra had phoned before going to the Nidaros Cathedral. He was quite excited, worried, and had mixed feelings about the event. He had just finished reading the charismatic book of Eckhart Tolle *A New Earth: Awakening to your Life Purposes* (2005) that suggests a new way to look at individual and relational traumas through the emotional reactions that they induce in oppressed subjects.

He had then understood more what had happened to him in the kindergarten and about the choice of his parents, which was not only a personal undergoing, but part of broader postcolonial currents. When he had learned about it in Maajehjaevrie, he had first become "flat and still like a lake before a storm," completely devastated. He had then felt an outraged feeling rising in his body and he had asked me to drive with him for a stroll in the mountains.

"This has been such a foggy area for me. Like if the whole foundation of me had been tore apart"... he had commented that evening.

That was a completely unexpected event in the trip. Nevertheless Lawra admits that the protracting of that journey, for which we had postponed to travel to Maajehjaevrie at least three times during that year, had the precognition that something would happen. He had already received a sort of omen when he had driven to Ebba's home; he saw two ravens: one in anguish and the other taking care of its partner. That sight, while he was driving, persisted in a sort of *adjágas*-like mood long after and became an omen of radical change in his present condition.

Tolle's book deals with trans-generational relationships lingering in the person through what he calls the "pain-body"²⁰. This concept had clarified Lawra's emotional reaction to himself through his bodily reactions: he became anxious before the session in the Nidaros Cathedral when he had recently learned that his mother would be there. But the pastor made them sit in such a way that they could have a dialogue. Slowly it turned out to be a healing session, in which he sat beside his mother while they could talk together in front of the audience of dozens of spiritual professionals. At this point, Lawra had joiked. The Cathedral

²⁰ From the philosophy of Eckhart Tolle, a "pain-body" is the collective manifestation of all the pain, misery, and sorrow a person has ever gone through their entire life, and all the things they inherited from their culture and family history as well. (<http://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=pain-body>).

reverberated his voice in such a way that he had never heard himself as such. This was a sort of apotheosis, one might say.

Nanni Mari previously was a participant in *Bønne møter* (praying assemblies) all over Norway, through her former affiliation to the Pentecostal movement, to which she had often brought her son. Therefore, Lawra was used to see preachers in action, huge congregations, masses, collective reunions, emotions and ecstasies, and so many gender practices, for this activity was mainly with Nanni's girlfriends (Myrhaug 1997). She inherited this love for the Pentecostal Church from her grandfather and also from her uncle Gustav Kappfjell. Otherwise, there were few churchgoers in her family²¹. Her uncle Gustav was one of the greatest Southern Sámi joikers of his generation and because of the scarcity of singers commanding Southern Sámi, nobody had yet replaced his role. Gustav converted to Christianity during the *Maajehaevrie* tragedy in 1944. This is a chapter of the Resistance to German Occupation during WW II²². During the war, he had disclosed the location of a German soldier under the house where the latter had hidden himself after an attack of partisans. After he was found, the German was immediately shot. Then and there Gustav had a sudden conversion and became Christian, due to his sense of guilt. When Germans inquired and discovered him, he was then arrested and brought to a concentration camp nearby. He was tortured and retained two years, together with his father. In the meantime several leaders were killed in the Resistance. The Sámi contribution to the Resistance during World War II have never really been acknowledged. Since then, it was painful to talk of it. No medals, nor celebrations were awarded to Sámi participants.

After World War II, another tragedy had marked these regions: the bus accident in 1948, which added even more losses and inconsolable grief to these communities. That story has been kept silent for decades too. People do not like to speak about it in *Maajehaevrie*.

FILM Sequence 8: Grand Mother recounts bus accident. From 27:14 to 31:28 (4 min. 10")

To this day there is a very deep respect and uneasy feeling toward it which is hard to explain. The loss has been too big, and the accident too violent, even the causes of the accident have remained mysterious reasons that cannot be proven in any way.

Genesis of *ih go gáarkah*

Lawra had tackled the issue of the pain connected to loss and marginalization by co-producing the video *Mun ja Mun* in which the Southern Sámi language and culture is

²¹ Differently from the North of Sápmi, in which congregations following Laestadius ideas are plentiful, the South never had Laestadianism, but a Pentecostal presence.

²² The German occupation of Norway in April 1940 was a new experience for every person living in Norway. In particular, the German occupation had great consequences for the population of Northern Troms and Finnmark. In the autumn of 1940, the German forces had started their preparations for the assault on the Soviet Union. This made the northern part of Norway a highly strategically important area.
<http://sapmi.uit.no/sapmi/ExhibitionContainer.do?type=tema>.

presented as endangered. He had called his relatives to pose in a compelling black and white shot video clip, in which his joik *Mun ja Mun* entrances the viewer into a smooth lullaby, slightly melancholic, but indeed powerful.

FILM SEQUENCE 9: Video *Mun ja Mun*. By Lawra Somby. (3 min. 40'') link to Youtube: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I2xUQuP6SxY>



Video music *Mun Ja Mun*, Lawra, Ebba and other relatives

To continue this quest about “not understanding,” and willing to work more on the issues of loss and resilience, Lawra chose a retreat in Sirbma (Sirma in Norwegian), by Deatnu, at the Somby’s extended family place, in order to work on the genesis of *Im manne gáarkah*, a joik he was transforming into *I gob gáarkah*. He lived several weeks in the same room where, as a child, he had heard stories of ghosts and *ulddat*, and had been utterly scared. His grandfather’s death, happening in the same months when he was creating this new joik, very much influenced his condition since he felt a strong attachment to his father’s environment too. Perhaps this enabled the expression of his sentiments even more, for he is fluent in Northern Sámi and he realized that he could still take up the Southern Sámi as a result.

He relates that a huge and scary bear’s fur was hanging in his room. He dreamt he was fighting the bear, chasing him away and escaping on the tundra on a motorbike. When Lawra dreamt about this fight, he felt unburdened. It enhanced his inspiration and he wrote about twenty poems in English in a few days, and then edited them down into the actual lyrics. (Personal communication with Lawra, 2d of February 2010, Romsa).

Once back in Romsa, his mother had traveled by chance from Snåase and she helped him translate these lyrics into Southern Sámi. This occurred right after he recorded some trials with his close collaborator, the musician and sound designer Andrea Mjøs.

“I am born in a family of joikers. I think it is a fate. [...] There are so many and strong ways to express one’s feelings, there is so much behind a joik. It is a part of life and a philosophy. When I began to joik, my life started to transform itself. (...) For me joik is the life story of human beings. The sum up of a life can be in a joik. It is so strong just to think of it...” (Lawra Somby, 2006:3 Interview to C.Y. Olsen, Nordlys)

The event at the Nidaros Cathedral in Trondheim was a turning point in Lawra’s life and part of a much longer story. He had developed “*Im manne gåarkab*” throughout the filming period, and the accidental presence of his mother exactly when he had to record it had made it possible for him to transform it into an existential “manifesto.” Moreover, when he recorded it for the first time, his voice turned into a much more mature man’s tonality, lower, a little hollow, and more pained than usual. Recorded by chance during a test with Andrea Mjøs, it appeared to be an incredible beautiful and expressive voice that was kept as such in the final version of the new album. Today it seems that there is a constructive transformation in his life. Adjágas is not only increasingly successful, but Lawra and his mother are trying to speak South Sámi to each other, and at least, she speaks it now to him on any occasion and without fear.

Acknowledgements:

*I came to discover Sámi culture before I decided to settle in Northern Norway through the English translations of the poems of Nils Aslak Valkeapää (1994). Until then, I had only read the Italian translation of *Vita di un Lappone* by Johan Turi, one of the first translations ever published in Europe about the Sámi. In this way, when I came to Tromsø, I was already predisposed toward the Sámi imagery. To make *Firekeepers* was a way to pay respect to the Sámis and to honor these feelings of gratitude since I was a stranger living in their territory.*

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In memorian: Ailloas, 23.03.1943-26.11.2001

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