

antropologia e teatro

ARTICOLO

Joiking life narratives. The performance of indigenous self-perception in Sami life stories

di Nicola Renzi

Abstract – ITA

I Sami sono l'unica popolazione indigena ufficialmente riconosciuta dall'UE. Questo importante riconoscimento, tuttavia, è arrivato solo in tempi relativamente recenti, dopo secoli di politiche di assimilazione forzata e grazie a decisive lotte per il riconoscimento identitario. Con il presente articolo si vuole offrire un'analisi relativa a due casi di narrazioni biografiche Sami trasmesse oralmente sotto forma di *joik*, espressioni musicali tradizionalmente cantate a cappella e caratterizzate da un elevato valore descrittivo. L'obiettivo è quello di presentare, attraverso un insieme di approcci transdisciplinari, performances relative alla percezione interiore o esteriore dell'identità indigena Sami e i relativi risultati narrativi che possono aver luogo nella peculiare relazione empatica che si viene a creare tra narratore-performer e audience.

Abstract – ENG

The Sami are the only indigenous population formally recognized in Europe, nevertheless, this significant acknowledgment came only in relatively recent times, after centuries of forced assimilation policies and thanks to crucial fights for self-determination and identity recognition. This article intends to offer an analysis of two cases of Sami life narratives orally transmitted as *joiks*, musical expressions traditionally sung a cappella and characterized by a highly descriptive value. The focus is to present, through a set of transdisciplinary approaches, intimate and social perceptions of indigeneity and the related narrative outcomes which may take place in the peculiar empathic relationship established between the narrator-performer and the audience.

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ARTICOLO

Joiking life narratives. The performance of indigenous self-perception in Sami life stories

di Nicola Renzi¹*Joik as a memory coffer and an accurate vehicle of musical description*

Joik 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 joik about somebody or something, you joiked them. And I am almost certain that it never occurred to anybody that what was going on was music- that it was art!"

(Valkeapää 1982: 27)

As pointed out by Smith and Watson, rather than simply being a narrative genre, autobiography as a form of life narrative is a «discourse» that goes “beyond [written and] printed life story” (Smith – Watson 2010: 3). Self-life writing as “written form of the autobiographical” (Smith – Watson 2010: 4) is today considered the most evident case of self-life narrative since its practice is the historically most shared and consolidated form of auto-narration within the Western world. Due to this reason, other instances of self-life narration among peoples whose knowledge and history are orally transmitted, as well as several cases of marginal literature, have been for too long scarcely considered or even heard. Therefore, it is crucial to cross the conventional borders still implied in part of nowadays academic literature and to recognize the heterogeneous ways in which life narratives are conveyed within cultures *distant* from the Western one. For silenced or marginalized groups like indigenous people, in fact, today more than ever life narratives are an opportunity to claim their presence and rights, to enter the global discourse and finally let their own voice heard and decisively known all over the world.

¹ The preparation of this article was possible thanks to the infinite availability of the interlocutors that the author had the opportunity to meet during the course of a research carried out in the summer of 2019 in Sápmi. Fundamental thanks and warm greetings are due to Ante, Bigga and Niiles-Jouni Aikio, Wimme Saari and Mona Solbakk. In addition to the important information gathered on this occasion, on a theoretical level, there are also the analytical perspectives that Prof. Kirsi Tuohela (University of Turku) proposed during the *Finnish Lives - Life Narratives in Context* lectures. This approach allowed the author to deepen what he had previously analysed from a broader transdisciplinary perspective, integrating the analytical methods and instruments of ethnomusicological and anthropological disciplines (for which thanks are due to Prof. Domenico Staiti, supervisor of the thesis from which the possibilities of analysis of this article have blossomed), with those related to comparative literature and post-colonial studies on the forms and practices of oral narratives.

Since time immemorial, the joik repertoire has been, among the Sami, a *memory coffer* of musical portraits of high social and cultural value². Despite the vocal nature of this individual performance, the presence of lyrics is not binding for the definition of this genre, which traditionally is largely based on the emission of allusive syllables and vocables rather than on complex sentences. Over the centuries, these sounds have maintained a communicative power which for the Sami can be more significant than the lexical level. It is therefore ironic that for centuries missionaries and Western scholars had transcribed only the textual part of joiks. Following a narrative and aesthetic-philosophical perspective in all respects ethnocentric, they ignored the wider repertoire of joiks without text, thus underestimating the communicative power of a different narrative and musical grammar (Severi 2000: 75-86, Fubini 2001). Recently, within the Sami soundscape, lyrics have taken on greater value due to the political and social involvement of the themes and subjects expressed by contemporary joikers. What is conveyed through joik is an intense expression of the relationship established between the subject who joiks and the joiked object. In fact, as effectively stressed by Nils-Aslak Valkeapää in his quote at the head of the paragraph, a subject does not joik *for* an object or *referring* to it, but joiks the object itself. The object of a joik can be animated or inanimate, present or absent but, whatever its nature is, it is certain that a definite emotional relationship exists between subject and object (Moore 2004, Jones-Bamman 1993). Several Sami accounts describe joik as an emotional response (not always conscious) to external inductions and inner motions (Jones-Bamman 1993: 145-148, Ragazzi 2012: 11). A joik, however, largely owes its descriptive and narrative power to its combination with memory. In *Muittalus sámiiid birra (An account of the Sámi)*, one of the most important accounts about Sami culture not collected by Western scholars, but coming from the emic perspective of the Sami writer Johan Turi, the joik is primarily described as “a practice for recalling other people. Some are recalled with hate, and some with love, and some are recalled with sorrow. And sometimes such songs concern lands or animals: the wolf, and the reindeer, or wild reindeer” (Turi 1991: 181). Through the combination of all possible musical parameters and, sometimes, with the aid of a short text and mimesis, the joiker aims to “take a picture³” of the joiked object, whatever it is⁴. These descriptive features appear even more evidently within the most widespread and performed repertoire of traditional joiks: that of “personal” joiks.

According to the joiker Ante Mikkel Gaup, a personal joik can prove to be a detailed portrait of an individual when it is transmitted in a proper way (Jones-Bamman 1993: 130). The underlying principle is based on the

² As for the meaning and use of the term “joik”, see Jones-Bamman 1993: 105-106.

³ Bigga Aikio, personal communication, Levi, Aug 2019.

⁴ As for the ways of musical description through the joik performances see Renzi 2019: 22-27.

ability of a joiker to grasp certain qualities of the joiked individual's physical appearance, behaviour and/or personality and express them in music through a wise use of the voice and, sometimes, of gestures⁵.

Voya voya nana nana
He is so vigorous, he is so splendid,
Voya voya nana nana
When he ran away, he was like a bird in flight
Voya voya nana nana⁶

Traditionally, people receive their personal joik from someone else who created it for them. This implies the existence not only of an intimate connection between the subject who creates the joik and the one who receives it, but also of a wider network of social relationships, feelings, memories and perceptions of the other that are codified and highlighted through these musical performances. As for the process of drafting and publication of a life narrative, a personal joik is never an entirely private phenomenon. Who creates the joik "donates it"⁷ to the joiked subject and since then it becomes a common property «free to be used by others when describing or recalling the same individual» (Jones-Bamman 1993: 132).

As an oral tradition strongly characterized by formular improvisation, each joik is a unique narrative and descriptive musical expression that has value in the very moment of its performance. Therefore, it may be more accurate to rather understand personal joiks as dynamic life narratives able to denote the inner and visible transformations of the subjects, as well as their shifting position within the community and the various considerations which different joikers have of them. The inestimable value of this tradition lies in the creative social interaction which through the act of joiking expresses and renews the relationship between the individuals involved. This way, a personal joik is a testimony of social ties as it relates to both the referential world and the intimate perception of an interhuman relation.

As with biographies addressed to the same subject but created by different authors, from a narrative point of view, personal joiks make different approaches and interpretations of individuals towards someone else explicit, bringing out several shades of the subjects' narrated life, as well as a wide and heterogeneous spectrum of memories and feelings experienced and shared. A further peculiar example of joiks as life narrative is offered by rare cases of self-joiking in which, as it will be analyzed in the next paragraph, Sami joikers draw from their personal inner and social experiences to create detailed portraits of themselves.

"Im manne gâarkah", self-perception and memoire through musical outburst

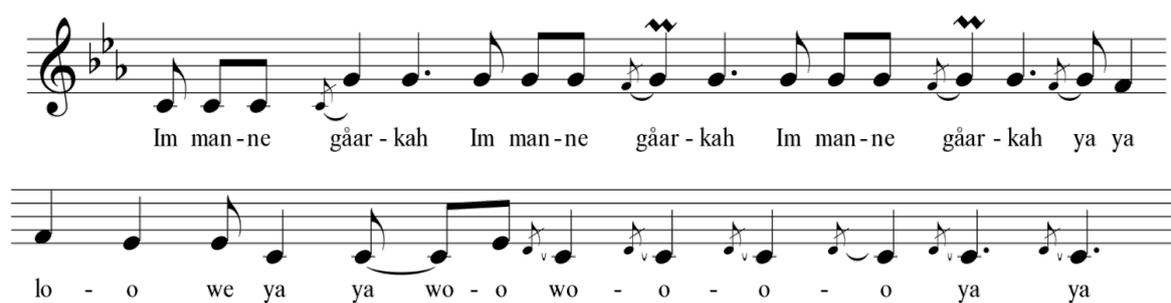
⁵ Wimme Saari, personal communication, Anár, 2019.

⁶ Personal joik of Nilas (*Nilas luotte*), in Turi 1991: 181.

⁷ Ante Aikio, personal communication, Levi, 2019.

The Sami are the only officially recognized indigenous people in Europe. This important recognition, however, has been achieved in relatively recent times, after centuries of forced assimilation policies and thanks to crucial struggles for identity recognition⁸. Sápmi territory extends almost entirely above the Arctic Circle, crossing the national borders of Norway, Sweden, Finland and the Russian Kola Peninsula. The lack of an inclusive and shared principle of identity recognition between the Nordic policies has led to paradoxical situations in which an individual officially recognized as Sami in one Country could not be considered as such in another (see Siivikko, in Keskinen *et al.* 2019). Only in 1980, the Nordic Sami Council managed to indicate a series of shared principles aimed at defining the Sami identity both on objective and subjective criteria (Sami Instituhtta 1990: 11). If, among these, the chance of self-identification almost entirely removed the racial motivations of the previously imposed criteria, the criterion for defining identity through the individual knowledge of Sami languages is today still problematic. In fact, Sami languages are at the centre of an important ongoing political, cultural and social debate which continues to involve the entire Sápmi population. Music and literature play a leading role in this debate and, alongside indigenous directors, Sami musicians and writers continue to be the main promoters of Sami languages as crucial identity markers. Of the nine surviving languages (it would be inaccurate and reductive to talk about dialects), today northern sami is the most widespread one⁹.

The consequences of the various assimilationist policies which tried to suppress the Sami languages still resonate in the voices of several joikers from all over the Sápmi. One of these voices is that of Lawra Somby, co-founder and joiker of the famous Sami band Adjágas¹⁰. In the dejection following the loss of his native language,



Excerpt of "Im manne gáarkah"

⁸ Norway was the first country to sign the ILO 169 Convention on Indigenous Rights in force since June 20, 1990 (see Bjørklund 2000).

⁹ Mona Solbakk, journalist and director of the Norwegian radio station NRK Sápmi, estimates that more than 25,000 Sami are able to understand and speak northern sami by 2019. She also states that in Norwegian territory this number is growing thanks to the recent and increasingly conspicuous production of multimedia projects in Sami language (Mona Solbakk, personal communication, Karasjok, 2019).

¹⁰ Sami word that expresses "the state between sleep and awakening" (Ragazzi 2012: 3).

the southern Sami, Lawra Somby joiked his feelings simply using the three words *Im manne gâarkah* (tr. I don't understand)¹¹.

The loss of the fluency in southern sami language, explains Lawra, dates back to his five years old, when he was attending the kindergarten in Oslo. The Norwegian personnel was unable to communicate with the children who were speaking other Sami languages besides the northern one (Ragazzi 2012). His family, Lawra recalls, was suggested to use only one dialect at home in order to solve this problem; a request that echoes the principles of linguistic assimilation that severely affected the Sami dialects between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (Beach 1994: 147-15, Ligi 2016: 114, Bjørklund 2000: 9, Renzi 2019: 12-15). Lawra Somby's joik is first of all a retrospective act, an expression of an individual experience and of the reaching of self-awareness. However, the obsessive repetition of the three words – *Im manne gâarkah* – manages to give voice to countless other cases of Sami individuals who have experienced the same alienating feeling aroused by the loss of their native language.

These bitter and melancholic reflections were further developed by Lawra Somby in the song *Ih goh gâarkah?* (tr. Don't you understand?), written together with his band Adjágas. In this case, the lyrics are significantly extended if compared to the previous example, in order to deepen even more the feelings which inspired the first extemporaneous performance of *Im manne gâarkah*. In musical terms, the song relies on a pentatonic melody similar to the one used in the original joik, a technical feature typical of the southern Sami joik tradition¹². However, if *Im manne gâarkah* was conceived as an entirely *a cappella* joik, in *Ih goh gâarkah?* the melodic vocal line is expressed on a melancholic atmosphere created by an acoustic guitar. Over this guitar octaves *ostinato*, Lawra Somby uses the southern sami language to joik the fears and the discouragement he faced once acknowledged the loss of his native language:

Aikie lea mijjiem gâhkse doelveme	Time has brought us far
Im vuinie mov bijresem	can't recognize my surroundings
Madtoen mojhtoeh mov viirresne	Memories remembered by my blood
Gorveldihkie maahtoen mearkan sisnie	clouded by the fog of no knowledge
Baltoa tjoivem garhtsij	The fear is strangling our throats
Ij naan baakoeh bâetieh	no word can come out
Ih goh gâarkah baltoen giegeh Leah	Don't you understand that fear is the obstacle
Mistet, miste darjot	fear of loss, fear of failure
Geermesvoete darjoe juktie gahtje-	Rigid pride will make us fall like rotten trees

¹¹ It is possible to find a recording of this performance in *Firekeepers*, a documentary directed by Rossella Ragazzi in 2007. Ragazzi also wrote down Lawra Somby's life story in Ragazzi 2012, where Adjágas experience is further analyzed and disclosed in relation to the audiovisual documentation provided by *Firekeepers*.

¹² Similarly to the linguistic division of the territory, the Sami talk about joik by organizing the stylistic variants into regional "dialects". Ante Aikio, personal communication, August 2019; Jones-Bamman 1993: 120-123; Edström 2010: 30.

Bie goh morhkeme goeseh
Maadtoen viirre dov veanaj sisnie
Lea dov virre faala viehkiem
Tjiejpies geermesvoete vuelekhsvoetesne

Ancestor blood in your vein
be your blood, offer help by giving
you help life
True pride is in humbleness

Ih goh gáarkah?, Adjágas, 2012

That Lawra's joik reflects not only his personal experience, but also a situation felt and shared every day by a larger number of Sami, is an indication of how language constantly acts as a marker of both individual and collective identity, as well as of how cases of indigenous life narratives are often shared as collective voices able to arise consciousness within the community. Facing the social drama of the indigenous identity crisis, facing the dialectical, at times forced, crossroad dictated by colonial assimilation strategies, Sami communities found in the musical performance a space for self-reflection within which the fracture could be addressed, both on intimate and collective levels. Thus, joik provided, and still provides, a safe and shared sonic environment within which a feeling of *communitas* may be conceived and the ancestors' roots restored through oral narratives¹³.

The staged and mediated performances of oral traditions, as the narration of community knowledge and history, had a crucial role of cultural awareness and acknowledgment during the resilience processes carried out by numerous indigenous groups around the world subject to forced linguistic assimilation and colonial domination. This also happened to the Sami among whom the nowadays less spoken languages, historically condemned to oblivion by the self-proclaimed *modern* Nordic institutions, have brought together individuals who had lost fluency with them. In the latter case, especially through narrated Sami life experiences, the languages have been collectively embraced as a crucial manifestation of cohesion as well as markers of identities which claimed, and still claim, to be preserved¹⁴.

During the 70s and 80s, the birth and development of Sami political institutions immediately focused attention on the linguistic question, aware of the high value that language has in the processes of identity revitalization and definition and of cultural resilience. This awareness was particularly expressed by the creative work of a

¹³ See Valkonen, Valkonen 2018. I also borrowed and readopted some terms from Victor Turner's ideas of social drama and *communitas* (Turner 1969, 1986, 2014) which, in relation to a performative context, I found particularly helpful (though at times too fixed and unable to represent fluid cultural experiences) to partly describe the resilience processes activated by Sami people in front of the crisis. During local Sami markets, concerts and fairs (Vuohču Sámi Márkanat, Saamen Kammi and Saamiland lives), but even during major festivals like Ijahis Idja, Riddu Riddu, Sápmi Pride and the Sámi Beassášmárkanat, for example, it is possible to notice how, from stage to audience, these places come as atemporal settings which at times seem ritual and healer. These extra-ordinary public environments reflect crucial occasions of pride and self-awareness, as well as they often present themselves as safe pan-indigenous spaces where similar global experiences might meet and common traumas be confronted (see also Hanssen 2011).

¹⁴ In the peculiar case of the four Sami dialects currently existing on Finland territory, this theme was extensively treated within the Festival of Indigenous Peoples *Ijahis Idja* during the round table "Our Golden Language" directed by Pirita Näkkäljärvi and organized by the Finnish PEN in occasion of the International Year of Indigenous Languages (Inari, August 16, 2019).

young generation of Sami artists and, eventually, during this “political and cultural renaissance¹⁵”, the bright colours of the *gákti* and the distinctive sound of joiks brought new vitality to the villages around Sápmi. Most of Sami languages were kept alive firstly through music, poetry and literature, which achieved superlative results also towards an international audience¹⁶.

“My own joik”: a musical self-portrait

Rather than considering it a truly autobiographical work, *Im manne gáarkah* may be understood as an introspective musical outburst which preserve the high evocative function of this genre. There is, however, within the wide repertoire of personal joiks, an exiguous body of *autobiographical* joiks which has not been the subject of specific research so far: the practice of self-joiking. It is therefore worth to make some considerations about this fascinating musical and narrative practice which, in its current vitality, may be a starting point for new transdisciplinary reflections.

As pointed out above, a personal joik was traditionally *given* by an individual A to an individual B and, from that moment on, it could undergo several interpretations and variations depending on the perception which different performers have about B. According to Jones-Bamman, this was the “normative practice” of the personal joik system, since “auto-joiking” practices came in most cases up against the interdiction and disavowal by a substantial part of the Sami community (Jones-Bamman 1993: 130). Nevertheless, Jones-Bamman reports also the joiker Ante Gaup’s suggestion that an “auto-joik” (or self-joik) would work as a mean of self-introduction¹⁷. The idea of joik as a sonic «self-portrait» is also considered in Ramnarine (2009: 202) in relation to renowned Sami artist Nils-Aslak Valkeapää’s personal joik, which interesting aspects of authorships and descriptiveness are deeply developed by the author.

The chosen example for the discussion of the practice of self-joiking is that of Niiles-Jouni Aikio, a reindeer herder and joiker from Aanaar (Inari), whose music became a profession as well as a known and respected artistic experience throughout the Sápmi and around the world¹⁸.

Inspired by the track *Aillohas*, a kind of self-joik *rhapsody* written by Nils-Aslak Valkeapää (see above), Niiles-Jouni Aikio wished to express his *self-being* through a personal joik created and performed by himself as a

¹⁵ This period is often referred to by the abbreviation ČSV, which stands for *Čájehehkot Sámi Vuoiŋga*, Show Sami Spirit”. See Bjørklund 2000: 28.

¹⁶ In 1991, Sami artist Nils-Aslak Valkeapää won the Nordic Council’s Literature Prize.

¹⁷ Jones-Bamman 1993: 130; Bigga Aikio, personal communication, Levi, AugUST 2019.

¹⁸ Niiles-Jouni Aikio toured in Europe, Africa, North America and Asia, even joiking for the Emperor of Japan. His peculiar formula of “joik and drumming” has been described in Renzi 2019: 68-77.

“visiting card” for anyone who would listen to it¹⁹. Thus, he created the auto-joik *leš*, which can be literally translated from northern sami as *me* or *-self*²⁰. From a narrative perspective, the main inspiration for this musical self-introduction can be found in the long sunsets and endless nights which Niiles-Jouni spent in Sápmi while taking care of his herds, as well as in his musical tours around the world. Through his voice:

I was sitting. Looking at the reindeer running here and there. And day after day this melody was flowing in my head. So, I realized. That was me. [...] I [likewise the reindeers] also ran here and there, you know? I have travelled all over the world and that is what I feel in my own joik. Can you feel it as well? [He laughs]²¹.

Jo bajas šadden Sámi eatnamis, dego
duogabeal máilme ráji jo nu.
Jo birra máilmmi mun johtan gal lean jo nu,
sámi kultuvrra ovdidan gal jo nu.
Nu fiinna gávppot lei Köpenhagen, dego Ruošša
helvet lei Christiania.
Tokyo gávppogis Akihito deaivadin, Osakas
juoigadin moadde ija nu
Boku no ai ~~sure~~ tomodachi, sayonara, sayonara.
Jo bajas šadden Sámi eatnamis, dego
duogabeal máilme ráji jo nu.

I grew up in Sámiland,
behind the border of the world.
I have travelled around the world, making the Sámi
culture known.
Such a beautiful city was Copenhagen, like a Russian
hell was Christiania.
In Tokyo I met Akihito, in Osaka
I joiked couple of nights
Boku no ai ~~sure~~ tomodachi, sayonara, sayonara.
I grew up in Sámiland,
behind the border of the world.

leš, Niiles-Jouni Aikio, 2002 (tr. by Ante Aikio)



Melodic refrain of leš

Yet, as mentioned in the first paragraph, while analyzing a joik the evocative and communicative cores almost never correspond solely with the poetic text. It is therefore necessary to distinguish between two different narrative levels: a textual one and an exclusively musical one, considering the latter at least as meaningful as the first. This distinction has a fundamental value within the contents' transmission processes activated by *performers* towards the *audience*, since each joik is decipherable through distinct *reading keys* depending on levels of *emic* or *etic* points of view. If Sami languages are already handicaps to the outsider's understanding of the lyrics, the interpretation of the musical form is usually even more difficult: the expressivity of a joik is

¹⁹ Niiles-Jouni Aikio, personal communication, Levi, Aug 2019.

²⁰ Niiles-Jouni also refers to it as *Oma joiku* and *My own joik*, respectively in Finnish and English.

²¹ Niiles-Jouni Aikio, personal communication translated by Ante Aikio Levi, Aug 2019.

traditionally based solely on the joiker ability in choosing the musical parameters, such as rhythm, intervals, timbre, intensity, which the joiker considers useful for a more accurate description of the joiked subject.

Following a conversation with Bigga Aikio, Niiles-Jouni's daughter and currently his musical *pupil*²², a different challenging concept and meaning of self-joiking has been suggested. Personal joiks are still "effective means of presenting oneself", Bigga confirms. "However", she continues,

there is nothing wrong with creating it [self-joik] by yourself. I recently started thinking about my personal joik because, you know, it's intriguing. I'm really interested in understanding who I am and a personal joik ought to mirror this. When someone is singing a [self-] joik is like saying, 'Hey, this is me, I want you to know it. This is the way I am, be aware' [...]. So, I started listening to myself more and more every day, because it is essential to know that [the joiked subject] well in order to express it properly. It is for this reason that in most cases personal joiks are given to you by someone close to you, such as your mother or your partner. I instead decided to undertake this research alone and I am still working on it. The biggest challenge for me is to fully understand myself and translate it in music. But once this is achieved, the melody begins to flow naturally from the inside, like feelings or emotions [...]. The first thing that came to my mind was a jolting melody, a vibrant rhythm. It goes more or less like this [she sings]²³:

Ei - a ngu - a lu — nu lu nu na L - ei - a ngu - a - lu nu nu nun

Ei - a ngu - a lu — nu nu nu na L - ei - a ngu - a — lu nu nu nu - na

Excerpt from Bigga Aikio's self-joik, not yet completed.

Unlike his father and her sister, Ante Aikio seems to follow the main Sami line of thought regarding the creation of personal joiks, thinking that "someone else has to create it for me. Someone who knows me very well and, therefore, who knows how to interpret my-'self'²⁴". The trace of such composite opinions, even within a family

²² Bigga Aikio started joiking in mid-2018, to carry on the memory of her sister, Maaren. Despite having started relatively late compared to the rest of her family, her ability demonstrates a crucially protracted immersion and commitment within the family soundscape.

²³ Bigga Aikio, personal communication, Levi, August 2019.

²⁴ Ante Aikio, personal communication, Levi, August 2019.

group, is an indication of the vitality and creativity which the practice of personal joking continues to offer today within the Sami soundscape and narrative context.

Conclusion

The previous individual experiences contribute to the definition of new meaning horizons which may be able to bridge the gap between individual perception and social reception in contexts of life narrative. By creating these self-narrative musical expressions, the performers activate and define processes of individual self-awareness which can easily be empathized by other members of the community. On the side of the emic reception then, by listening to these intimate and social experiences, the audience is invited to reflect on social issues or common and struggles which affect the individual or the belonging community. Self-narratives of oppressed and marginalized people have often had the function of self-construction and social or individual emancipation. As pointed out by Victor Turner, the performance of a painful and breaking event may have the empathic power to transfer an individual experience to an audience which belongs to the same historical-cultural horizon (Turner 1986: 36). In this sense, a self-joik can be understood as a way of sharing individual experiences which reflect a common condition and aim at the creation of a safe environment of reference whose members feel themselves directly involved in the experience of the narrated subject.

Indigenous life narratives are proving to be crucial turning points in contemporary post-colonial anthropological research²⁵. Through arts, especially music, literature and cinema, the Sami are demonstrating an ever-growing will to talk about themselves and to tell their culture from an emic point of view²⁶. For too long, the ethnographies written by outsider scholars have dealt with the Sami cultural aspects only by *shutting* the mouth of their subjects (Junka-Aikio 2016). The emancipation of the indigenous point of view and its active role in common research is the key to significantly expand the understanding of the still ongoing processes of identity definition, as well as to extend its reading to the same community which produced it.

²⁵ This applies also to non-indigenous, marginalized and silenced groups all over the world. In Sápmi see, for example, Gaski 1999, 2011a, 2011b; Cocq 2008; Cocq, DuBois 2019; Jones-Bamman 2011; Blix, Hamran, Normann 2013; In Europe, Suzana B., Ruggiero 2020; Bruni 2016. In North America, Jensen 2014; Wheaton-Abraham 2016; Cuturi 2003. In South America, Kopenawa, Albert 2013; Franceschi 2007, 2018. In Africa, Staiti, Bruni 2020; Negash 2016. In Asia and Oceania, Kian-Woon, Waterson 2016; Smith L. in Battiste 2000. See also Battiste 2000; Smith L. 2017; Adichie 2009.

²⁶ Today, more than ever, Sami people claim to need to talk about themselves and their traditions without or with truly aware and committed Western academic mediations. This is especially evident in the most recent film and documentary production of the International Sámi Film Institute, which shows a «growing willingness to narrate in first person» (Elle Márjá Eira, cover letter introductory to the Sami short films for the exhibition “Una finestra sul Nord - IX”, Firenze, 1/12/2019).

Within indigenous sociocultural contexts, over the time self-life narratives have become mirrors of experiences and feelings shared by most of the individuals involved in the same suffered historical process. The understanding of the aforementioned Sami life-narratives allows a more attentive reflection on the reasons why the narration of one's personal experience, both inner and social, is being included more and more within the lyrics of the joiks, as well as this growing number of life stories in Sami music may bring up to the need of a new definition of the self-joik repertoire boundaries. If this musical (and narrative) practice arises partly in contrast to what the community defines as the *traditional way* of expressing personal joiks, a self-joik does not break one of the main rules, if not the first one, shared across the Sápmi: to better know the joiked subject in order to better present it through music.

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